

- Phelan, Peggy. 2003. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Sandahl, Carrie, and Phillip Auslander. 2009. *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

### SUGGESTED MULTIMEDIA AND ONLINE RESOURCES

- The Penelope Project: [www.vimeo.com/21302830](http://www.vimeo.com/21302830)
- GeriActors and Friends: [www.vimeo.com/geriactors](http://www.vimeo.com/geriactors)
- Cracked: New Light on Dementia: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-hS2CnCMjs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-hS2CnCMjs)
- Project Re•Vision: [www.projectrevision.ca/videos/](http://www.projectrevision.ca/videos/)
- RECAA Flash Mob: [www.recaa.ca/recaa-flash-mob/](http://www.recaa.ca/recaa-flash-mob/)
- Cheryl Marie Wade, poetry performances:
- "Here": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-lsnkhTtLo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-lsnkhTtLo)
  - "Culture Rap": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYA0nd-\\_D\\_o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYA0nd-_D_o)
- Ruth Steinberg, *What the Body Remembers*: [www.ruthsteinbergphotographs.com/what-the-body-remembers-photos#0](http://www.ruthsteinbergphotographs.com/what-the-body-remembers-photos#0)
- Maureen Murphy, *(In)Visible*: [www.maureenmurphy.ca/PROJECTS/INVISIBLE/](http://www.maureenmurphy.ca/PROJECTS/INVISIBLE/)

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## CHAPTER 5

### Strengthening Our Activisms by Creating Intersectional Spaces for the Personal, the Professional, Disability, and Aging<sup>1</sup>

Nadine Changfoot, Mary Anne Ansley, and Andrea Dodswoth

While there are emerging areas of scholarship bringing to light activisms around both aging and disability, these continue within largely separate spheres, with work on aging activisms focussing primarily on older women, and disability activisms on younger or middle-age adults. Analyses of the Raging Grannies have gained attention (Roy 2007, 2004; D. Sawchuk 2009; see also Chapters 4 and 6), as have the activisms of highly organized seniors' interest groups with socioeconomic resources (Holladay and Coombs 2004)—what is sometimes termed "chequebook activism" (Williamson 1998). Yet, older women are activists in many other ways too, as this volume shows. They occupy diverse and multiple positions that include, intersect, and extend beyond the "grandmother role," and they include women on the cusp of being labelled as old. Older women's activisms that are on a more modest scale with smaller audiences (i.e., activisms that reach audiences in ways other than through participation in organizations, protests, rallies, and marches) are less recognized, perhaps being understood as (too) ordinary and thus "justifiably" glossed over. These diverse ways of working for change remain at the edges of activist scholarship.

Similarly, disability scholarship has tended to focus on the broad approaches of disability activism that involve making rights- and socially-based demands of the state (Prince 2012). Scholars have considered disability activisms organizing through non-profits (Hutchison et al. 2007), making claims based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Peters 2003), and engaging in consultations to create the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (Kitchin and Wilton 2003). Christine Kelly and Michael Orsini's (2016) edited collection also brings to light important disability activism at the intersection of disability arts and culture. Still, disability activisms tend to tacitly assume younger disability-identified

activists, reflecting that disability studies have yet to address aging fully. This implies that disability is independent of aging even though people with disabilities *age*, and people *age into* disability.

While there are emerging accounts of activism at the intersection of aging and disability (e.g., Bartlett 2014), more are needed, particularly with attention to understanding the nuances of this work, or what are sometimes called the “backstage” components. Backstage components are the often-invisible physical and emotional dimensions of activism, the components that sometimes require a slower tempo than the typically hectic pace of organizing and participating in public actions, protests, and rallies (Bartlett 2014) and other ways of acting (Butler 2014). By not providing multiple and diverse accounts of activism at the intersection of aging and disability, existing scholarship leaves largely intact several limiting narratives. First, youth-centred disability narratives produce and reinforce understandings of disability as beginning in childhood and ending at middle age, or as having been overcome, cured, or eliminated (Rice et al. 2015; Changfoot and Rice, forthcoming). Second, such accounts preserve depictions of aging as grim downward decline, or as change that can and should be successfully navigated (Rowe and Kahn, 2015), in keeping with the ableist norms that inform “successful aging” discourses (Martinson and Berridge, 2015), as discussed in the book’s introductory chapter. Third, these narratives propel the framing of activism as primarily public acts and performances, with the risk of portraying these as rather effortless.

In this chapter, we bring to light our own processes of disability activism. In particular, we bring forward the behind-the-scenes (or the backstage) of our activism, which have engaged with and been shaped by many dimensions of our contexts, including but not limited to our aging embodiments (as three women in our 40s and 50s). Nadine is an associate professor at Trent University. She is a person of Chinese-Canadian background living in the predominantly white, homogenous city of Peterborough/Nogojiwanong,<sup>2</sup> and she has the experience of caring for two parents with disabilities; her work involves partnering with people with disabilities, members of First Nations, older-adult identified women, and queer and trans individuals to create and screen their digital stories to wide audiences, generating knowledge for social change at the edges of the academy. Mary Anne is a Peterborough resident and Ojibwa woman who has lived with a disability—spina bifida—from birth. She is a single mother of two boys who live with disabilities; she lives on a government disability pension and is an activist and advocate for survivors of abuse, as well as for her boys. Andrea has lived with a wheelchair since she was 12 years old. She also lives on a government disability

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pension, while she works tirelessly in the City of Peterborough to make the community more accessible for people living with disabilities.

From our backstage process, we have learned the importance of what we refer to as “affirmatively becoming-with” one another as disability activists, something we see as vital for both our continued work and our community together. We understand becoming-with as a relating-together, where we needed to become much more attuned to considerations of disability and aging without separating these experiences. For us, this has meant understanding the personal needs associated with disability, aging, and each of our personal and professional contexts. It has meant working toward safer spaces and a slower tempo, which was needed at certain times, not only because of our different needs (e.g., advocacy schedules for Mary Anne and Andrea, university schedule for Nadine, and physical needs related to disability) but also because it takes time to develop a deeper understanding of our becoming-with together and our *affective* needs as they are informed by our bodily vulnerabilities (Butler 2014).

Our activism, which we increasingly understand to be at the intersection of disability and aging, even while we do not explicitly name it as such, emerge from a collaborative academic-community research initiative called Project Re•Vision, and specifically from a sub-project within this called “Mobilizing New Meanings of Disability and Difference,” which sought to shift perceptions of disability in health care.<sup>3</sup> As part of this project, we worked together in a five-day multimedia workshop to create two to three minute videos, which pair audio recordings of personal narratives with visuals (photographs, videos, artwork, and more). Nadine co-coordinated the workshop with a team of Re•Vision facilitators; Mary Anne and Andrea made their digital stories (videos).<sup>4</sup> After the workshop ended, we decided to continue meeting together to advocate for accessibility by screening Mary Anne’s and Andrea’s videos; we refer to our group as Women Building Inclusion.

While disability was initially centred in our activism, we came to realize that we needed to consider aging, as part of what Bartlett (2014) refers to as “backstage preparations,” in order to continue our activism with a different tempo and messaging. Our disability activism has morphed into disability-with-and-into-aging activism in subtle ways. Below, we introduce how we met and the different roles we have played in our work together. We note the productive tensions we have experienced, the importance of attending to both aging and disability in order for us to keep going, the steps we have taken, and our further involvement together in disability, aging, activism, and research. There are also dimensions of our lived experience not brought into discussion here but that are of intersectional relevance. Specifically, racialization and Indigeneity have taken a backseat to disability and

aging, in large part because the initial purpose for which we met emphasized disability without full consideration of these complex and multiply-experienced positionalities. We have become increasingly aware of how our centring of disability can subsume our experiences of Indigeneity and racialization, and perhaps even recreate certain racial hierarchies and impairments (Gorman 2016). While we do not entirely address this systemic pattern in this chapter, by recognizing here the need to address it in a fuller way, we are taking an incremental step to reckon with this power dynamic.

## MEETING THROUGH PROJECT RE•VISION AND BUILDING OUR METHOD

In fall 2012, we met through a Project Re•Vision digital storytelling workshop held at the local YWCA in Peterborough/Nogojwanong. Since making our videos, we have screened Mary Anne and Andrea's videos in presentations to health care students, faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and health care professionals, as well as elected provincial and federal representatives. In these presentations, Mary Anne and Andrea speak to their own videos, telling audiences of their experiences of living with disabilities and on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program); Nadine provides the Re•Vision research framework and recounts the process by which the videos were made. In preparation for the presentations, Nadine offers questions to Mary Anne and Andrea to consider; ultimately, Mary Anne and Andrea decide what to share. In our meetings, Nadine transcribes each person's thoughts verbatim and repeats aloud what she has written, often leading to further rounds of discussion and providing a larger context from scholarship in disability, gender and women's studies, aging, and political economy. Mary Anne—who identifies as a survivor of domestic abuse, as the leader of Survivors Network of Peterborough, and as someone who lives with spina bifida—contributes reflections and knowledge of domestic abuse and of the experiences of survivors. Andrea offers reflections and experiences as an accessibility advocate in city policy and planning, as a board member of the Peterborough Council of Persons with Disabilities, and as adviser to the Peterborough Downtown Business Improvement Association.

We would like to share and note three productive tensions that emerged in and continue to inform our discussions: 1) maintaining respect for each person's knowledge and experience, 2) translating our knowledge and lived experience into a scholarly context, and 3) working together while responding to and managing our differences and different tempos. The first tension that we have managed in the writing of this chapter is making sure we are all on the same page in terms of how

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each of our knowledges is presented. "I don't want to be a specimen," Mary Anne asserts firmly. She understandably does not want the experience of being the object of able-bodied stares and put-downs repeated in our work together. Nadine provides clarification on the principle that each of our knowledges are being brought to the chapter according to a disability-justice framework (Rice, Chandler, and Changfoot 2016). For us, working together, this means that we recognize differential abilities and needs in a respectful way that does not belittle or diminish abilities and needs but instead ensures that each person's contributions and experiences are *fully* represented. The second tension involves building trust among the three of us, as very diverse women. Mary Anne and Andrea placed a high degree of trust in Nadine, the academic among us, to translate our lived experiences into a scholarly context in order to make clearer the knowledge we created by working together. Nadine prefers to undertake this form of writing together rather than writing *on* or *about* Mary Anne and Andrea.<sup>5</sup> By collaborating in this way, we disrupt the hierarchy between university researcher and non-researcher in a way that also resonates with the overarching epistemological aims of the book and is echoed in Chapter 8. A third tension relates to the different tempos and cultures of university and non-university contexts brought into the space of our meetings. We have each found the translation of academic, survivor, and city activist practices important to address so that our activisms and *becoming-with* one another could develop our processes, our language of communication, and the presentations we give together.

In the next section, we each encapsulate our activisms briefly through first-person accounts. These provide context, attending both to our differential abilities as we continue to work together and to our decisions to open a deeper understanding of our circumstances and contexts, find a slower tempo when needed, and create a safer space to discuss our changing embodiments.

### Andrea Dodsworth: Accessibility Activist since Age 12, 44 at Time of Writing

I have been an activist since I was 12 years old, and I became more aware that I had already been an activist when I met Rick Hansen.<sup>6</sup> I was experiencing a low point in my life because I was coming to terms with the knowledge that a wheelchair was always going to be part of my life, having been told this fact after surgery. I wasn't really prepared to accept my new piece of equipment into my life, just yet, but I learned and now ... it's almost like I'm married to it. Still, even before the age of 12, I *knew* I was an activist at heart. I had to fight against being removed from the "regular" classroom because my wheelchair did not fit

"properly" under the desks. I was forced to undergo testing to prove that my disability did not affect my intellect. I won this battle. At the same time, "activist" was not how I thought of myself even though I knew deep down inside that I was: *I think I knew*. Meeting Rick Hansen, and his encouragement to me that I was and would continue to be an activist, created a *click*. He told me that I could [do it] ... I think I knew. Because I had won my fight to stay in the "regular" classroom, I knew that I had a right to be in the world. I knew that life wasn't always going to be easy, but I would make it so that I could get around ... I would make it so that it would be easier and I would leave my mark on the world someday. Because I have learned that every person has something to teach—I even found that on a poster one day and brought it home.

Even while I knew I was an activist, being recognized, encouraged, and affirmed by someone like Rick Hansen supported my self-understanding as a person living with a disability. I have known that I want to make accessibility increasingly a reality throughout my lifetime. I have learned that, no matter how long it takes me and how long I have had my disability, I can make it different in my life and other people's lives and it doesn't matter whether they have a disability or not. They're still going to be able to take something from what I have done or something that I left behind; there's always going to be my mark left behind. I may not see it now but other people might see it later because I have had other people tell me that I'm special in my own way even though I don't see it.

### Mary Anne's Activism, 57 at Time of Writing

I have been a lifelong activist for myself and my family, addressing disability discrimination; I consider my current activism to have started in 2011 when I was asked to join the group Survivors Advisory Committee (SAC) of the Peterborough Domestic Abuse Network (PDAN). PDAN wanted a subcommittee composed of women who have experienced abuse to advise professionals working with survivors of abuse about what works and what does not work in terms of support. SAC did projects that included presenting information at tables at events. Initially, there were about 15–18 women. In the first year, the group nearly disintegrated because of internal difficulties. At one point, I was the lone member of the group along with the YWCA support person and the PDAN representative. I persevered to *regrow* the group because I believed in the vision of SAC and what it was doing. After the first year, I carried out interviews with women who wanted to join SAC to make sure they were a good fit to do the work of public education. Eventually, I left SAC to form Survivors Network Peterborough so that men could also join such a group.<sup>7</sup>

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After presentations I gave of my experience of domestic abuse, men would approach me, expressing that they wanted to create awareness of surviving domestic abuse from a man's perspective. I decided with some members of SAC to create a new group where men would be welcomed. Similar to SAC, both women and men are interviewed to make sure there is a good fit for the work of raising public awareness. PDAN helped start Survivors Network Peterborough financially. I am currently chair of Survivors Network Peterborough. My activism also includes knowledge dissemination of my experience living with disability into aging, specifically spina bifida. Inseparable from my activism is my spirituality; it motivates me. I have a passion and a heart for those who have to struggle in life—be it physically, financially, emotionally. I feel I want to share my experience of mercy and grace because they helped me let go of a destructive anger that abuse can often leave behind. I also see the injustices in the world. I want to be able to help those who have been on the negative side of that, to try to make their lives easier in whatever I have to give. I know that I can't erase those injustices, but I can do my part.

### Nadine's Activism, 52 at Time of Writing

I see myself as having been born into my late mother's desired flow of social change; Lily (my mother) wanted to make a difference for herself, her family, her community, and her new home of Canada into which she was both welcomed and not welcomed, arriving in Toronto in 1964, having left apartheid South Africa. In my own becoming, I see the influence of my mother's visions of a racially harmonious society and the elimination of poverty, especially for Indigenous peoples. I also saw and felt my mother's disheartenment, bitterness, anger, and disappointments from her own experiences of discrimination. She and my late father (Jack) lived with chronic illness; I lived inside and outside disability as carer and advocate starting in childhood.

While I supported my mom's activism as a child as part of daily life, I became aware I was an activist when I was in my 20s. I have participated in protests and marches, been on strike, volunteered and served on boards of anti-poverty and race relations community organizations, and participated in anarchist endeavours that focus on quality-of-life needs, such as food security. I used to feel pressure over how activism should be done. I felt policed and judged for what counts as activism and also, regrettably, participated in that, something I no longer want to do. Now, I believe in, am increasingly open to, and am learning of the endless possibilities of activism as diverse and unique as each individual and their experiences. My activism comprises many parts, including education within and outside of the university classroom. Building relationships comes increasingly into focus as part of this work:

relationship- and trust-building takes time and requires attuning to each person's differential needs and abilities. Since 2012, I have viewed my activism as increasingly intertwined with research, especially through Project Re•Vision and another project, Community First, which is studying how the university can maximize community outcomes for social change through community/campus partnerships.

## DISCOVERING THE NEED TO ATTEND TO OUR DIFFERENTIAL ABILITIES

While presentations of our Project Re•Vision videos have been taking place each year since 2013, it became clear in late 2013 and early 2014 that the initial desire and intention to concentrate on screening the videos was not working. When it came to scheduling our "next" meeting, we discerned a palpable hesitancy through affective expressions of longer-than-usual pauses and silences, halting "hmm's" and "ha's" over each person's availability, and the lowering or shifting gazes away from eye contact.

It was "that time," as Judith Butler notes, when "we ha[d] to ask what it is that holds [us] together, what demand is being shared, or what felt sense of injustice and unlovability, what intimation of the possibility of change heightens the collective sense of things" (2014, 106). In "Bodily Vulnerability," Butler brings to light the importance of assembly in venues such as prisons or "slut walks," which are not yet recognized as activist spaces. She points out that bodily vulnerability influences the time and space for the conditions and character of assembly. She refers to smaller assemblies in which principles get elaborated that "can nevertheless produce—or renew—ideals of equality and interdependency that may well be transposed onto larger national and global contexts" (*ibid.*, 107).

Here, we include in this idea of assembly our monthly meet-ups, which took place in accessible, publicly funded spaces and cafés during summer months, and most often in Andrea's home during winter months. Winter months posed challenges around mobility, especially with inconsistent or unreliable snow removal. We also developed greater awareness of bodily needs related to extreme cold and mobility supports, which meant afternoons were better meeting times. These gatherings may be seen (from an able-bodied positionality) to be significantly more modest than organized demonstrations or walks. Yet, they are a necessary condition for the work we do together because they become spaces for our intersectional explorations—the backstage of our activism. Even so, we realized we were each stretched with our daily/weekly/monthly commitments, experiencing more volume and complexity in each our own lives, as a result of professional, advocacy,

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and personal commitments, and identifying that we each needed to take care of ourselves relative to individual aging-disability-bodily needs; we came to realize that further conditions needed attention for us to continue.

### DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF ONE ANOTHER'S CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONTEXTS

Taking stock of each person's activities and commitments brought to light a deeper understanding of the challenges we were each facing. Over the course of our meet-ups, Andrea was a member of the City of Peterborough's Accessibility Advisory Committee, a member of the City's Accessible Transit Advisory Sub-committee, the chair for the City's Built Environment Sub-committee, and was serving on the Peterborough Council for Persons with Disabilities. Andrea gives her time voluntarily to these committees, each of which meets at least monthly. Mary Anne was working through some intense organizational-building of the Survivors Network Peterborough, which involved ongoing discussions over difficult issues and working through how to resolve her role with the Peterborough Domestic Abuse Network. Nadine took on the role of acting chair of her department in winter 2014, became chair that summer, was co-leading two research projects, and, overall, was on a steep learning curve. Additionally, each of us also had significant time commitments regarding our respective families and/or individual well-being.

### NEED FOR SLOWER TEMPO

In light of our loads, we questioned whether our monthly meetings, with the additional work, time, and effort they required, were perhaps better left aside. Yet, we enjoyed meeting, learning, and working together; we acknowledged a desire to keep meeting. The benefits of our presentations were tangible for each of us and meaningful for the difference we discerned from audience feedback. We recognized we needed different ways of *becoming-with* and being together at a slower tempo, especially during the winter.

In spring 2014, we decided to focus on our own specific needs rather than only giving presentations. In discussion, the kinds of responsibilities we held became clearer; we wanted to develop greater awareness of these and feel safer to speak openly. Nadine was concerned that an exclusive focus on advocacy and presentations would cause our desire to continue meeting to plummet, in light of the responsibilities and life challenges we each held. One of us proposed that the space become a place where each could check-in, in more full and whole ways than our

previous focus had allowed. After consideration and input from each person, we found a consensus to reorient our meetings as a space of revitalization, a space for supporting one another in each our own responsibilities and activism, and a space to allow advocacy opportunities to emerge more organically through our networks.

## SAFER SPACES TO DISCUSS STEREOTYPES AND CHANGING EMBODIMENT

We also learned that we needed to create a safer space for sharing the experiences whereby we each sometimes feel challenged, shredded, frustrated, and anxious. We came to agree that our inner resources were becoming depleted from daily responsibilities and that our meet-ups would support building our inner selves to feel stronger in our roles. We continued to check-in at the beginning of our meetings and, slowly, we began to share more candidly what was on our minds and what was felt in our bodies and hearts.

We engaged in discussions around our bodily vulnerabilities and the challenges of our work with a deeper level of specificity and description. We began to understand the entrenched dimensions of disability and aging stereotypes and to talk them over in ways that allowed us to position our agency differently and more effectively. We thought through options, and supported one another in ways we did not feel were available in other spaces of our lives. Changes in embodiment related to aging with disability also became lively subjects of discussion. During our meetings, health topics would come up. We spoke of difficulties encountered when discussing bodily changes, including those related to (peri)menopause, with health care providers and family: our symptoms not being believed or being trivialized; our sense that certain options were neither made available nor facilitated; and an absence of compassion or counsel to adapt, which we took tacitly to mean, "tough it out." Sharing our stories, we would laugh and sigh over our changing embodiments and the responses to them.

## SHARING TO STRENGTHEN CONVICTIONS, BE UNDERSTOOD, AND KEEP REACHING OUTWARD

In light of the changes we made to our meet-up goals, we each feel better. We feel more incentive and motivation. Sharing increases our comfort level and self-acceptance. Andrea notes: "It makes me feel good that I can share things.... [It] makes me feel like I'm doing good when I hear Mary Anne's and Nadine's input to what I've done and experienced." When we hear negative comments about the

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work we are doing, it helps to discuss the possible ableism, ageism, sexism, and racism underlying these comments. This allows us to better understand the power relations involved and to think of possible responses for the next time. As one of us noted, "I can stand up for myself," and another, "I feel stronger moving forward."

Having a space to share the affective and emotional dimensions of our experiences is important. Our own professional interactions for advocacy and resistance do not allow the time and space for sharing difficult experiences. Words do not come easily to describe challenging experiences, with their newness and shock, and time is needed to process and give words to the emotional impact. Sharing these kinds of experiences—experiences that are difficult to render into language—strengthens our capacities in the work we do. Mary Anne notes:

We can understand one another on a level that you don't get professionally. When you're with people that have experienced being an outsider [and] not belonging, you know people understand you. You spend a lot of time and energy convincing people [as an advocate and educator]. I'd been going four to five years to monthly meetings of an advocacy organization for survivors and I felt they didn't really know me until I did the presentation where I shared the video I made.

Nadine notes that, because we have shared experiences of disability with one another since 2014 and we continue to do so, we feel confident in ourselves and in our togetherness. Discussing our differences and the affective and emotional dimensions of our advocacy and professional lives, and hearing acceptance and feeling compassion from one another, allows us to feel even stronger *to be ourselves*. This sharing is *itself* important knowledge creation, the behind-the-scenes to our presentations.

## GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF DISABILITY EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

For Re•Vision-specific presentations, Mary Anne and Andrea receive honourariums. When Nadine learned they are also invited to give presentations of their lived experiences several times per year, she asked whether they received honoraria; they said, "We receive a thank you," and they physically motioned receiving a pat on the back. While important to their audiences, the value of the knowledge that Mary Anne and Andrea hold remains largely unacknowledged, beyond its symbolic value. The realities of living on ODSP and below the poverty line are largely kept invisible from

discussions of accessibility or survivorship. The Ontario government claws back any earned income above the allowable \$200 per month. The system of ODSP maintains, indeed deepens, poverty and debility in neoliberal times<sup>8</sup> by denying quality of life, and access to employment and a decent living. As a result of our increasingly intimate knowledges of each other's lives, Nadine began to regularly advocate for honoraria for Andrea and Mary Anne, leveraging her own position as an academic and researcher to impress on others in similar positions to herself the importance of valuing these women not only symbolically but also monetarily.

Following our presentations, we have witnessed and been part of productive discussions, reaching for possibilities that suspend stable binaries of disabled and abled and the meanings associated with each. Nadine's capacity has become enlarged to envision scholarly partnership with Mary Anne and Andrea, to contend with access at a historically inaccessible campus, and to advocate for recognition of disability expertise and experience through negotiating honoraria from within the university.

Our collaboration has regularly brought Mary Anne and Andrea into spaces within the university, and particularly into communities of scholars who value their time, their lived experiences with disability, and their advocacy—including some communities that also see the importance of justly paying people for their time and expertise. For example, our collaboration has connected us with May Chazan's Aging Activisms project and brought us to co-authoring this chapter.<sup>9</sup> These experiences are creating new spaces of agency for Mary Anne and Andrea as engaged participants, while extending our *becoming-with* one another that increasingly includes in-depth conversations around the experience of aging with and into disability. In these conversations, we find ourselves more willing to open up and share with one another, and better understanding the relationship among aging, disability, and poverty. We increasingly understand and are able to discuss how social and economic systems erase aging, disabled, low-income, and poor women through barriers (e.g., the decreased reliability of prompt snow removal and mobility through the city during winter months, and the absence of roles for people with disabilities—employment—in the current economy). These intersectional experiences are made visible, explored, taken seriously, and heard by Nadine, who supports Mary Anne and Andrea in their advocacy and activism, as well as in their personal lives.

## CONCLUSION

Our relationship started professionally, through research, and we wanted to continue to meet for advocacy purposes. In the first two years, our meetings were more

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## CONCLUSION

Our relationship started professionally, through research, and we wanted to continue to meet for advocacy purposes. In the first two years, our meetings were more

formal in tone; in subsequent years, we have become closer activist-collaborators and friends. We have created a space that did not exist prior in our lives, a space for sharing experiences in an exploratory way, mindful of disability, and increasingly with attention to aging, as well as intersections of class, race, and Indigeneity. In our monthly meetings, we aim to centre our differences candidly, sometimes affectively, not always having the words to describe sensations and inchoate thoughts, but accept how important it is to bring the experiences that have been buried or hidden into sound and words. This has taken time and trust. We especially desire to create a meaningful sense of belonging for those parts of ourselves that remain excluded, hidden, or marginalized in communities in which we participate. We want to make a difference in our respective communities for our own and others' belonging. When we began to meet, we trusted that each of our respective activisms focused on making a difference even if, as Andrea says, the concrete or tangible differences might only be experienced and/or enjoyed in the future; not by ourselves, but by others.

We took part in the Re•Vision digital storytelling workshops each for our own reasons, yet a common connector was that we wanted our stories to be told in the pursuit of positive change. We did not know each other prior to the research, nor did we conceive that we would continue our relationship as collaborators, advocates, and friends, and that these would become entangled in productive ways and with productive tensions. We have seen ripple-out effects in our presentations to students, faculty, and health care professionals. Mary Anne and Andrea are increasingly recognized and affirmed for their respective differences by individual faculty, students, and staff in the university. They are becoming seen as more capacious and having more capacity, disrupting dominant stereotypes of disability and difference as pitiable or as "sites of no future" (Kafer 2013), and instead demonstrating a lifelong and continued history of agency and activisms. At the same time, we find ourselves increasingly considering aging in our meet-ups and in the other activities and projects we do together.

Our diverse experiences of the personal, professional, disability, difference, and aging connect us in our meetings and the activisms we share. New narratives arise and bring to light what cannot be said in each of our personal and professional contexts; sharing with one another creates an intersectional space that is safer, energizing, and, thus far, sustaining as we continue to navigate tensions noted above. From this safer space rises knowledge, self-understanding, and an activist pride, affirmation, and validation. This supports, emboldens, and re-energizes us for the work ahead, together and independently.

The backstage, or the behind-the-scenes, of our own individual activisms and our activisms together has required and continues to require relationship-building,

ever-deepening understandings of each other's circumstances and contexts, a slower tempo, and safer spaces in which to share experiences of changing embodiments alongside stereotypes of disability and aging. Importantly, it is in this intentionally created space that intersectional exploration of disability, aging, domestic abuse, the personal, the professional, race, and Indigeneity has been possible and proudly sustained. We believe it is our intersectional exploration that enables more fully our *becoming-with* together and also sustains our continued activism together. These intimate conversations about difference are rarely part of our presentations, perhaps speaking to the norms that denounce speaking of vulnerability in university spaces. However, these discussions strengthen our activism both individually and together. In other words, they are *foundational*. We create this intersectional space to bring into words our multiple differences and positionalities, as differently abled, aging, racialized, and intergenerational women. Finding a way to incorporate race and Indigeneity more explicitly in our disability-aging activism remains a challenge. Yet, this chapter's focus on the backstage brings us a step closer to this possibility.

## NOTES

1. This work was supported by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research Grant #106597 and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Grant #895-2016-1024.
2. The city of Peterborough (Nogojlwanong—the place at the end of the rapids—traditional territory of the Michi Saagig Anishinaabe) has a surrounding population of about 124,000 and is 125 km northeast of Toronto, Ontario. Trent University is located in Peterborough.
3. The mandate of “Mobilizing New Meanings of Disability and Difference” (CIHR funded, and led by Dr. Carla Rice, University of Guelph) was to produce multimedia digital stories (videos) directed by storytellers living with disability and difference, very broadly defined. Storytellers brought experiences of living with disability and difference into view on their own terms and in resistance to dominant disability stereotypes. Experiences of disability, difference, and affective and emotional dimensions of alienated labour are unwelcome in the public sphere. See Clare 1999; Changfoot 2016; Garland-Thomson 2009; and Rice et al. 2015.
4. Mary Anne, Nadine, and Andrea's videos can be viewed here: [www.vimeo.com/album/4589042](http://www.vimeo.com/album/4589042). Password: unsettlingactivisms. These videos are not intended for circulation.
5. Feminist scholars can reinforce privilege and marginalization when representing women, especially those not in the academy. See Brown 1997.
6. Rick Hansen set out from Vancouver, BC on his two-year Man in Motion World Tour (1985–1987) to raise awareness of the potential of people living with disabilities. He is a celebrated Paralympic athlete and tireless advocate for accessibility and inclusivity: [www.rickhansen.com/](http://www.rickhansen.com/)

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7. PDAN did not allow men to join SAC at that time.
8. Drawing upon Margrit Shildrick's (2015) phrase of "living on, not getting better," it can be argued that disabled persons "pay for the progress" of greater awareness and education of disability through debilitating barriers such as the \$200 additional maximum.
9. To date, Nadine and Andrea have made Aging Activism media capsules that can be viewed here: [www.agingactivisms.org/nadine-media-cap](http://www.agingactivisms.org/nadine-media-cap) and [www.agingactivisms.org/andrea-media-cap-nogo](http://www.agingactivisms.org/andrea-media-cap-nogo)

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