The Centrality of the Collective:
Sustaining Activism through Community, Integrity, and Nurture and Care

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Abstract

Activist burnout, a state of emotional exhaustion that causes previously committed individuals to disengage from social action, should be a central concern for those interested in sustaining healthy activism over time. My study of social movement theory, ethnographic research at the Casa de los Amigos, and examination of Quaker social witness as a highly effective model of sustainable activism has produced a model that attempts to address the problem of activist burnout. An effective model of sustainable activism will center around the utilization of the activists’ community as key in providing the accountability, social ties, and structures of emotional, spiritual, and practical support necessary to ensure a positive exchange relationship between the individual and the work of activism. If activist communities can capitalize on the strengths that groups naturally accrue, and make further intentional efforts to offer support to its members, they will more effectively maintain individual commitment and healthy involvement in social action.
Introduction

A useful theory of sustainable activism will integrate the elements brought by both the individual and the community that are crucial to supporting action over time. My research into social movement theory, Quaker writings on social witness, and the case study of the Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City, has indicated several major areas that individuals and communities jointly can focus on in order to produce the most sustainable activism. Individuals who bring a commitment to integrity and self-care, as well as openness to collaboration with their community of activists, will more likely find their work rewarding and effective. The communities in which these individuals embed themselves can play an essential part in sustaining activism not only by virtue of the natural affirmation of group identity through shared values and goals, but by practicing collective decision-making, providing accountability that continually encourages individuals to live out their beliefs, and creating communal structures that intentional provide emotional, spiritual, and practical support for activists.¹

Methodology

These categories arose primarily from my fieldwork at the Casa de los Amigos, a Quaker center for peace and international understanding in Mexico City (discussed below). My research also includes numerous primary documents both

¹ Unless otherwise noted, in this piece I will use the terms “religion” and “spirituality” as my subjects used them. Generally, they will use the term “religion” to refer to organized, communal activities pertaining to the divine, while they use “spirituality” to refer to a more personal, internal experience of a transcendental power. They will describe a variety of religious experiences, which refer to everything from a collective Durkheimian understanding of religious experience to a more individualized experience of the divine through prayer, for example.
from the Casa’s historical archives and from the Special Collections Library at Haverford College. Though an all-encompassing review of Quaker literature is not within the scope of this thesis, I do refer to a variety texts by Quaker authors writing primarily about Quaker faith in action. Prominent among these is a book “organized and introduced” by Geoffrey Durham, a British Quaker who has compiled a vast selection of primary sources written by Quakers themselves.²

After completing an internship at the Casa during the summer of 2011, I decided that an academic study of the organization would be useful to those interested in understanding sustainable activism. The Casa has been functional for over 50 years, and it struck me as a highly effective activist community. I returned for two weeks in January 2012 to conduct further field research to determine what forces and structures were at work in the Casa. I conducted interviews with 12 current and former Casa staff members, including the current Director, the Volunteer Coordinator, the Peace Programs Coordinator, a former co-director, one former volunteer, two part-time volunteers, and four full-time volunteers. My interviewees come from variety of countries and backgrounds, including one German woman, one British woman, two Mexican men, two American men, and five American women. Half the group identifies as Quaker (though not all were raised in Quaker households), while the other half dozen bring a variety of religious life histories including agnosticism, Jewish-atheism, Catholicism, Southern Baptism, and Christianity.

In processing my findings, it became clear that most useful contribution I could make to academic conversation about activism must grow out of a focus on activists themselves. My fieldwork suggested that two main factors were at work in sustaining the activism of the Casa. First, the coupling of personal and collective commitment to integrity functions to hold individuals accountable to acting upon their beliefs. Second, the role of community is absolutely central to facilitating the support of its members’ sustained activism.

I sought to further contextualize this case study in comparison to the highly successful model of sustained activism demonstrated by the larger tradition of Quaker social justice efforts throughout the centuries since the tradition’s inception. The example of Quakerism is useful to a theory of sustainable activism precisely because Quakers have a long history of social justice action. Knowing that Quakers had engaged in social witness throughout the centuries, I sought to understand the mechanisms that made this possible. Quakerism also proved an important contextualization for the Casa de los Amigos, as the organization itself grew out of Quaker social action in Mexico and still identifies as a Quaker institution today. Putting these case studies into conversation has indeed been productive in highlighting lessons that can be learned from each.

**History**

In order to understand more deeply why these two case studies are useful, one needs more historical context both for Quaker social witness and for the Casa itself. The Casa itself grew out of a certain type of Quaker social witness taking place in Mexico and Latin America since the early 20th century. The theological differences
that exist among various factions of the Quaker traditions are too complicated to discuss at length here. However, several divisions are important to understanding different types of Quaker social action, and therefore to accessing the Quaker model that inspired the Casa de los Amigos and serves as the central example in this paper.

Some branches of Quakerism conceptualize “social witness” differently. As described by Thomas Hamm, an important contemporary scholar of Quakerism, the main division lies between pastoral Friends and unprogrammed Friends. Pastoral Quakers practice programmed meetings for worship (including sermons, hymns, and other elements of a mainstream Protestant religious service), and some identify as evangelical. For these Friends, social action to “improve the world” means “proclaiming the gospel, winning souls for Christ.” Pastoral Friends have established missions all over the world, and began work in Mexico as early as 1871.

In contrast, unprogrammed Friends practice an unprogrammed Meeting for Worship. Rooted in the belief that every person has access to the divine, these services do not require specified clergy to facilitate worship. Rather, each person is seen as a minister. During an unprogrammed Meeting, Quakers settle into a centered silence, seeking to create space that invites the divine in, waiting to receive a message to share with the group. Such Friends generally understand social action in terms of direct service to the under resourced and disempowered. As Hamm

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4 Dorothy Heironimus, Friends in Mexico (Richmond, IN: American Friends Board of Missions, 1943)
5 This is the type of work that I will refer to in the following project as “Quaker social witness.” I am examining activism as direct service, not as the evangelization carried out by some pastoral Friends.
writes, “Generally, unprogrammed Friends do not accept the necessity of linking service to a specifically Christian message. For them, doing good is an end in itself, because it makes the world a better place and thus helps work God’s will” (160). While pastoral Friends chose to evangelize throughout much of Latin America, unprogrammed Friends focused their efforts on consciousness-raising in the United States to educate Americans about the conditions faced by the inhabitants of various Latin American countries as the region suffered a series of wars and human rights abuses throughout the century. The unprogrammed Quaker presence in Mexico appeared about half a century after pastoral missions were established in the country, in the form of work camps initiated by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).

Beginning in the 1930s, the AFSC orchestrated a series of work camps that took place throughout Mexico (and other Latin American countries). These camps brought together young people from the United States and abroad for a summer of service structured to respond directly to the expressed needs of the communities that volunteers entered. Rather than seeking to civilize or condescend to Mexicans, the AFSC intended for “each unit [to] respond to its situation with creativity and flexibility, [developing each project] from the initiative and skills of the participants and the needs of the community.” Further, “Project life follows the patterns of rural village life, and volunteers must fit into and respect local social customs and organization.”

6 American and Mexican Quakers soon decided to establish a Mexican

Friends Service Committee (MFSC), and the two organizations collaborated to facilitate the work camps for the ensuing years.

By the early 1950s, the lead organizers of these projects began to see the need for a physical space in Mexico City to serve as a central hub to facilitate the movement of volunteers through Mexico. In 1956, the Quaker community in Mexico officially established the Casa as a Mexican non-profit organization. They envisioned the space as a meeting point for volunteers and like-minded people moving through Mexico, and a community center that would work towards peace and international understanding. The Casa has evolved over the years, picking up social witness projects when necessary and laying them down when other issues required attention. For much of the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s it served as a headquarters for the AFSC work camps, the home of the Mexico City Monthly Meeting, and a community center that hosted events and programming organized by young Mexican Friends. In the 1980s, the institution created a Migration program to respond to the flood of refugees coming to Mexico to flee civil war in Central America. The Casa hosted many of the refugees and migrants free of charge, offering them safe space and a warm bed as they coped with trauma and sought to rebuild their lives in Mexico.

**Observational Findings at the Casa**

The Casa has continued to evolve in its work, sustaining a notable commitment to activism over the years even as it has shifted its focus between various types of service. This makes it a particularly intriguing case study of sustainable activism. Today offers a variety of services, and “through its programs, community space, and social and cultural activities, the Casa promotes peace with
justice, fosters understanding between groups and individuals, and supports the human dignity of every person.” The Casa’s space serves multiple functions. It is the headquarters for the nonprofit work that the Casa does through its peace programs, a community center that hosts a range of cultural events and classes, the site of the Mexico City Monthly Meeting of Friends, a home for the volunteers who run it and a guesthouse for an international variety of service groups, professors, and refugees.

A group of between five and fifteen keep the Casa running, in addition to a small hospitality staff, an accountant, and the Peace Programs Coordinator, the Volunteer Coordinator, and the Director. The organization, in combination with the Mexico City Monthly Meeting, has cultivated an “international, social justice oriented community of peace, fellowship, fun, reflection, and action” that includes “volunteers, activists and interns, Quakers and people of many faiths, refugees and migrants, non-profit delegations, international solidarity workers, human rights observers, children and elders, students and researchers, university groups, seekers, artists and travelers from around the world.”

Working at the Casa may not be as trying as other kinds of activism, such as community organizing in an impoverished area or enduring physical abuse during direct nonviolent action. However, my fieldwork there suggests that each member of staff must employ some strategies to sustain the energy to live and work in the Casa for months on end. Though volunteers generally seem to find their work rewarding, it can also be exhausting. Volunteers serve on at least one Peace Program

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7 Casa de los Amigos, 20 Mar. 2012
<http://www.casadelosamigos.org/en/hospitality/>

<http://www.casadelosamigos.org/en/hospitality/>
committee, which encompasses everything from committee meetings to organizing and facilitating public events. For many staffers, this includes work for the Migration Committee, a central component of the Casa’s peace work. The Migration program engages in education and awareness-raising about the human rights abuses suffered by thousands of people every year, and coordinates with other Mexican non-profits to bring “refugees, those seeking asylum, migrants, and victims of human trafficking” to the safety of the Casa. Finally, the Casa’s Hospitality program runs the guest house element of the organization, working reception, cooking breakfasts for the house and communal meals for the staff, and coordinating the many programs and conferences that the Casa hosts for its guests. Volunteers are responsible for ensuring that the Casa can provide all of these services smoothly.

This may not sound particularly rigorous, but my fieldwork can help to fill in the gaps. One must consider the emotional energy of investing in the issues on which the Casa’s work focuses. For example, serving on the Migration Committee does not simply entail attending meetings and organizing film screenings to raise awareness. It means interacting daily with people who have been stripped of their political rights, are often socioeconomically disempowered, and have potentially suffered violent human rights abuses. As a volunteer at the Casa, you may suddenly find that the majority of your friends have recently been released from migration holding centers (essentially jails which commit a range of human rights abuses), and who come from countries so torn by violence and economic hardship that your own challenges at home are thrown into stark relief.
To work at the Casa means a constant psychological engagement with issues of social injustice that often feel too huge and too oppressive to be countered by a small community house in the center of a sprawling Latin American metropolis. My observations correlate with that of other volunteers I have spoken with over the past year: unless one intentionally strives to practice self-case, a volunteer can become consumed by this work. This can lead to activist burnout, a phenomenon that has not been closely examined by many scholars. My work at the Casa piqued my interest in conducting further research into what sustains these people in particular in their work, and from this case study deriving a model for sustainable activism that can be used by activists of all kinds.

**Theoretical Framework**

Because my research at the Casa led me to a question about sustainable activism, I turned to the field of social movement theory in order to create a accessible framework for the discussion of my specific case studies. Putting the examples of the Casa de los Amigos and Quaker social witness into conversation with social movement theory revealed a gap in the field around the individual experience of activism, and the steps that both activists and their communities can take in order to more effectively utilize sustainable mechanisms exemplified by the Casa and by the Quaker tradition of witness.

In seeking to understand and prevent activist burnout, individuals and their communities need a theory of sustainable activism that can effectively support social movement participants in continuously effective, healthy, rewarding action over time. Social movement theory has attempted to explain what movements must
do to recruit participants, what kinds of individuals are more prone to participation, and what movements themselves can do to maintain momentum. However, my studies have not yielded a theory that successfully brings all of these elements together from a perspective that adequately acknowledges the very human emotions and needs that individuals experience through movement participation.

Scholars have generally neglected to study social movements from the perspective of the people who participate in them. Social movement theorists have investigated the rise and fall of movements themselves, strategies that movements can use to encourage participation and maintain momentum, and the factors that make people more likely to become participants and continue participation. My study of social movement theory has indicated several general patterns. The field offers several major theories to explain the rise of movements. It seems that a combination of all three are most likely to produce a social movement, meaning that movements arise when people capitalize upon the necessary facilitating circumstances, including societal strain and legitimate grievances,9 substantial resources and organizational structures,10 and adequate political opportunity.11

Movements must then utilize a variety of strategies to amass popular support as well as direct participation. The field has offered arguments that rational self-interest, social networks, grievances, and effective framing strategies play the most

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important role in movement recruitment. Scholars have also studied the causes of overall movement decline, but very few have focused on individual disengagement. Yet very little research exists on the question of sustaining movement participation, and I have not encountered a concerted effort to develop a theory of sustainable activism from the human perspective of the activist. Rather, the field focuses on the movement and the individual as separate entities.

I will argue that, in order to arrive at an understanding of what it takes to sustain activism, one must consider the individual as embedded in community, and marry an analysis of both the community’s and the individual’s role in supporting ongoing, healthy, effective social action. In this paper, “community” indicates the group that an activist is surrounded by, specifically, other participants and leaders of the social action in which they are collectively engaged. The term “individual” or “activist” will refer to a single person involved in social action, which may be in the context of a broader social movement, an organization such as a nonprofit, or another type of organized effort to create social change.

Putting the Casa’s rich history both of sustained, effective social action into conversation with an analysis of Quakerism as a highly functional model of sustainable action highlights the most useful mechanisms in supporting healthy activism over time. Based on my findings, I will argue that groups that coalesce around a shared interest in social action naturally create dynamics that support such action. These include the fostering of mutually rewarding social ties, the creation of a collective identity that reinforces common values and goals, and the facilitation of empowering shared experiences. Additionally, participation in a group
that visibly values integrity holds individuals accountable to living out their values through social action. Activist communities can further promote ongoing commitment by utilizing a variety of structures and group processes intentionally designed to support activists. Looking to highly effective example set by the Quaker model, communities are encouraged to adapt the tools of collective decision-making and emotional, spiritual, and practical support in their efforts to maintain individual participation.
Chapter I: The Collective as Central to Sustainable Activism

Activism cannot gain momentum in a vacuum. Further, “activist retention is not only a reflection of activist tenacity,” but influenced significantly by the individual's relationship with their community.\footnote{12} Not only must individuals come together in order to create a movement, but the phenomena that often occur when a group coalesces around a given cause are crucial to sustaining the energy of that group. Activists who engage in community benefit from a range of functions that only a large group can perform. The most useful model of sustainable activism will both acknowledge the importance of the group dynamics that often occur naturally in community and offer suggestions for more intentional steps that groups can take to utilize the power of numbers in supporting activists. In this chapter, I will examine several mechanisms that both require the interaction of an individual with a group and foster activism in ways without which activists may be more likely to disengage or burn out.

Community

For the purposes of this paper, I have defined “community” a group of fellow activists that has gathered with a common purpose born of shared goals and values. Such communities naturally support activism in several ways: they allow for the formation of collective identity, foster rewarding social ties, and create the necessary circumstances for powerful shared experiences. Each of these phenomena support individuals in their activism, help supply the necessary energy to continue their efforts, and help to avoid activist burnout.

My fieldwork at the Casa de los Amigos made clear the value that many staffers place upon their personal relationships with other members of the Casa community. This group includes their fellow staff members, international guests, migrants, and refugees who stay at the Casa, members and affiliates of Mexico City Monthly Meeting, and local residents of Mexico City who utilize the Casa’s space and services as a community center. Bert Klandermans, Professor of Applied Social Psychology the Free University of Amsterdam and a prominent scholar in the field of social movement theory, has noted that activists benefit from supportive social ties.¹³ I argue that this idea is crucial: activists who feel connected to their communities, who feel recognized, appreciated, and supported, are more likely to continue their involvement.

In this respect, the Casa de los Amigos offers a highly functional method for sustaining activism. The organization articulates its commitment to fostering community in several ways. Its overall aim is to work for peace and international understanding, and it seeks to do this in several ways, as explained above. One central tactic towards this effort is the fostering of interpersonal relationships between individual community members. Though the Casa does not make an explicit effort to integrate new volunteers through community building exercises or similar strategies, the collective value of community is expressed through Casa events such as Sunday evening potlucks, post-Meeting for Worship fellowship time, and communal staff meals.

The perspective of one volunteer in particular expresses how important this sense of community has been not only in bringing her to the Casa, but in inspiring her ongoing involvement there. Paulina is a young British woman who has been involved with the Casa community since the fall of 2010. She came first as a guest, then became an external volunteer the following spring, and has been a full-time volunteer since July 2011. Paulina’s very presence at the Casa is, apparently, due in large part to the value she places upon her relationships with others, and the deeply positive nature of the community she encountered at the Casa.

I just enjoyed being around the people that were here. That was my main thing. I started to make friends with a lot of people. And it was just very comforting to have this kind of backdrop. In a big city like this you can feel really isolated... Just being here was more important to me than anything. I would come even if they didn’t have any work for me, I would just come and hang out.14

This sense of community, therefore, arguably drew Paulina to her activism with the Casa in the first place. She noted in a later e-mail communication that, indeed, her relationships with people at the Casa keep her going through the most stressful moments in her work. Her testimony affirms that the Casa has succeeded in creating a space where people can connect with one another and thereby experience recognition and appreciation. Paulina shares further a perspective that affirms the importance of social ties in sustaining activists:

I wouldn’t say that belief in a spiritual thing is what motivates me on a daily basis. I’d say what motivates me more is my relationships with people. I’d say that definitely motivates a lot of my behavior, and a lot of that kind of stuff. And a lot of my principles are grounded in the principles that people I really respect have. And I regard my friendships as the most important things, really, in my life. If I’m

really stripping things bare, that’s probably the thing that motivates me more.\textsuperscript{15}

This insight confirms that activists need strong social relationships to provide the ongoing recognition and support necessary to maintain healthy long-term social action. These connections can best be fostered by communities. Klandermans agrees, adding that, “From social psychology we know that social support plays a vital role in people’s efforts to cope with stress. Our research among union activists also suggests that the extent to which stress results in loss of motivation (burnout) also depends on the amount of social support activists experience to receive from their unions” (104, 105). It follows that individuals seek genuine connection with others and a sense of belonging to a group. This makes community a fundamental human need as well as a key factor in sustaining activism.

Further, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, a professor of Sociology and the Director of Religious Studies at the University of New Mexico, argues that living in community is highly effective in sustaining activism commitment. She explains that, “if members are not strongly integrated into activist groups, the intensity of their convictions may dissipate.”\textsuperscript{16} Activist communities “bring like-minded individuals together on a regular basis,” which sustains activist commitment by “rejuvenating the emotional bonds and relational ties that strengthen affective commitment and keep people integrated into activist networks” (58). If social ties and support are crucial to keeping individuals involved in social action, certainly fostering a sense of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
community among a group of activists can prove effective in maintaining their commitment.

**Collective Identity**

Communities also function to create a collective identity that grounds the individual in a framework that encourages ongoing involvement. Born of “common interests, experiences, and solidarity”\(^\text{17}\) and reinforced by a shared purpose, collective identity unites individuals engaging in social action. In this paper, I will use the term “collective identity” as defined by Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier. Though their work does not make explicit the ways in which a shared identity sustains activism, I argue that each component they discuss does just that.

Foremost, the demarcation of boundaries by which a group defines itself allows for the creation of space in which shared values predominate. Common goals can be defined as morally right, and the group can structure itself around the pursuit of those goals when it clearly defines itself from the dominant society. Essentially, group boundaries allow for the formation of collective consciousness and the development of strategies and symbols that groups use to negotiate oppressive social systems.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{18}\) Taylor and Whittier define boundaries as “social, psychological, and physical structures that establish differences between a challenging group and dominant groups.” They describe consciousness as “the interpretive frameworks that emerge out of a challenging group’s struggle to define and realize its interests,” and explain that negotiation is “the symbols and everyday actions [they] use to resist and restructure existing systems of domination” (175-176).
Both the Casa de los Amigos and Quakerism offer examples of this element of collective identity formation that has effectively supported their activism over the course of many years. In many ways, Casa volunteers benefit from the physical boundaries created between them and the mainstream culture by the fact that they both live and work in the same space. This is not always an advantage, as my findings also indicate that staffers need to take space for themselves outside of the Casa on a regular basis to feel healthy and balanced. Even so, the fact that the Casa knowingly separates itself from the dominant society both forwards their goals creates a supportive community of people who identify with the moral frameworks that motivate the work of the Casa.

The rise of Quakerism as a new faith community in England parallels many of the dynamics that Taylor and Whittier discuss. The tradition grew out of the political and religious turmoil of 17th century England. From the beginning, the Religious Society of Friends experienced persecution by the state. Their theology and peculiar form of worship opposed the accepted religious practice and societal norms of the day, and for this the early Friends suffered capital punishment, imprisonment, and harassment.19 This required them to define themselves as clearly distinct and different from the larger society, drawing the group boundaries and developing the collective consciousness that Taylor and Whittier identify as crucial to sustaining activism within a movement.

In a very practical sense, continued collective identity informs the actions of modern Quakers and thereby contributes significantly to the ongoing tradition of

Quaker social witness. Writing in 2009, a Quaker author named Ben Pink Dandelion reflects, “The well-known stories of Quaker action in the world, of reaction to the unforeseen, of resolve against the odds, of response to the dangerous and hostile, give me tools to mould and shape my own responses.” Modern Quakers, then, still seem to understand themselves as part of a larger Quaker community, extending through time and space. Many find inspiration in the spiritual practice of early Friends, and as Dandelion writes, take heed of the lessons learned in the early stages of the movement about how to take and sustain action. A collective identity of sorts has been maintained and continues to fuel Quaker social witness.

**Shared Experience**

When collective identity is further strengthened by shared experiences of activism, individuals build bonds that serve as resources in sustaining their collective activism. Emile Durkheim's discussion of collective effervescence through shared experience creates a helpful access point to this discussion. Durkheim claims that religion is the symbolic expression of a collective’s experience in society. The symbols that humans create to express our experiences are then fundamentally rooted in reality, designed to process very real events that communities experience in the material world. Furthermore, when people gather to worship together, they experience a connection to something greater than themselves. That feeling, Durkheim argues, is very real. He describes this collective effervescence as such:

“Religious force is the feeling the collectivity inspires in its members, but projected

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outside and objectified by the minds that feel it.” Believers tend to assign this feeling to the divine. For Durkheim, the divine may or may not be involved, but he defends this feeling of connection to something external to and active upon oneself as undeniably real (Wright). In this way, no religion can be false, because each is based in the shared experience of the community within material reality. For Durkheim, systems of belief and symbols that we now call religion grew up out of collective experiences. In seeking a way to process and express collective effervescence, shared struggle, or the search for meaning, humans developed systems of belief and symbols to frame, record, and legitimize their experiences. Essentially, one could have a religious experience at a rock concert, or at a protest, or at a Catholic mass, and all for the same reason. When people have religious experiences, it’s because they feel like they’re connecting to something larger than themselves – a communal energy that people create when they gather as a collective body.

Durkheim’s theory is directly applicable to the question of sustainable activism, as demonstrated Paulina’s story discussed below. She spoke to the importance of moments of what Durkheim terms “collective effervescence” in grounding in a comforting connection with fellow human beings. Though activists may not interpret collective effervescence as a religious experience, they undoubtedly experience this connection to a larger whole as grounding and restorative.

Paulina’s personal history as an activist offers a compelling example of the effectiveness of shared experience in inspiring ongoing commitment. The following story arose in response to my inquiry of whether she had ever had a spiritual experience. She explained that she participated in a “climate camp” in England after university where “people would come to do workshops and stuff so we’d all come to be educated on environmental concerns... and just to generally feel empowered by each other, using each other’s knowledge.”

It is significant to note that action and community were equally important aspects of this project. The structure of the camp affirms that activists need each other – both for the practical cause of exchanging knowledge and for the purpose of emotional support. By living and working together, individuals sought to empower each other, drawing on one another’s strengths and skills for the motivation to persist in their work. The moment that Paulina named as a kind of spiritual experience occurred on a day when the police had encircled the activists’ camp. Paulina recounted feeling frightened, but following the group leaders’ instructions to sit down and resist the police nonviolently by simply refusing to move. She remembers:

... being sat down and getting this feeling of security. Just being surrounded by all these people that I didn't know, and them just making me feel really secure... So it's kind of like spiritual thing, but it came from humans. It gave me this feeling I couldn't really explain. It almost made me want to cry because I felt like, “This is so nice” kind of thing.

She reflected later in our conversation:


24 Ibid.
In a way, me feeling like a very small part of something big made me feel really good. The moments when I feel less important are usually the moments I feel less [connected]. I guess that’s kind of the idea of community. You’re not seeing yourself as an individual anymore, but you’re allowing yourself to become part of something bigger... I think maybe that’s what I liked about that moment... That’s one of the points in my life that I just can’t explain, I can’t put it in a box and be like, “That’s why I felt like that.” I find it hard to be cynical about that, and that’s the hope that keeps me going and keeps me happy. Those little tiny moments that you have every now and again... At a time, I would go to protests in order to get that feeling. Sometimes it wasn’t just about the cause, but more about getting that feeling of being in a protest and everyone coming from the same point of view and the same place. [That] was just such a nice feeling no matter what the cause was.25

Clearly Paulina’s sense of connection to other human beings, and in particular those who share her values and convictions, plays a vital role in sustaining her activism. She seems to need that sense of relationship and community in order to make meaning out of her actions, in order to live out her values in a way that feels rewarding and can be sustained over time. Her experience articulates this key connection between Durkheim’s definition of religion as a fundamentally communal experience, and the role that communities (religious and nonreligious) play in sustaining individual activism. By helping activists feel connected to some sense of the divine and/or simply to a larger group of sympathetic others, community feeds individual commitment to social action by offering a sense of spiritual and emotional support, as well as framing a larger sense of meaning and purpose.

According to my interviews at the Casa, and in line with much political theory on the subject, activists need to maintain a sense of connection and community in order to feel supported in their work. They need the practical and emotional

25 Ibid.
support of others in order to sustain their activity. Further, Durkheim’s approach to
the sociology of religion offers a profound explanation of Quakerism’s consistent
emphasis on social action throughout the centuries. The tradition’s focus on the
relationship between individual and community as a matter of faith offers profound
support for social action. Therefore, community plays a key role in effective
sustainable activism. This chapter has examined some of the keys ways in which
group dynamics can naturally fuel the continued commitment of members. The
following chapters investigate proactive measures that communities can take to
sustain individual activism.
Chapter II: The Role of Integrity

Once a relationship between the individual and his or her community is established, both contribute crucial elements of a functional model of sustainable activism. My fieldwork at the Casa, and subsequent investigation into the broader history of Quaker social witness, reveals that the value of integrity is fundamental in translating belief into action and therefore in continually inspiring individuals to activism. Maintaining such integrity most successfully requires the involvement of both the activist and the larger group.

Personal Commitment

Foremost, individuals who themselves harbor a deep internal sense of integrity are more likely to engage in activism. “Integrity” here means a personal commitment to living according to one’s moral convictions, translating internally held beliefs into external action. The use of this term by one volunteer in particular enabled me to see a pattern throughout the rest of my interviews that indicated the importance of this factor in sustaining activism. In the process of talking with Paulina about her past experiences that led to her current involvement in social action, I learned that she first became an activist in college. She explained:

I got really into [studying] philosophy [at university], and I’d always had this idea of putting your beliefs into practice. This idea of integrity was kind of important to me from being quite young. I was like, ‘There’s no point in studying all this stuff and dedicating so much time to it if I’m not actually going to put it into action.’ I started to get strong feelings about different stuff, [like] human rights [and] the connection between humans and their environment.26

If Paulina had not made this connection between her “strong feelings” about issues of social justice and a sense of responsibility to act upon those feelings, her interaction with things like human rights and environmentalism could have remained purely theoretical. Paulina’s own value of integrity played a crucial role in pushing her towards taking a step past academic engagement with social issues and provided the necessary impetus to action. Had she been content to simply “talk the talk” without “walking the walk,” it is less likely that she would have taken action even around issues she claimed to care about.

Certainly the value that Paulina places upon integrity was key in motivating her to action initially. As she continues to be quite self-aware about how important this value is to her, it is continually functional in reinforcing her commitment to activism. The story of the Casa’s Volunteer Coordinator, who I will refer to as Hannah, suggests that the contextualization of the value of integrity within a larger moral narrative offers the activist further potential resources to continually replenish their energies for action.

In Hannah’s case, that narrative is Christian in nature. Hannah understands her activism to be directly inspired by her Christian faith, creating a framework that has proved highly effective in providing constant motivation towards and spiritual resources to support her activism. Specifically, Hannah’s understanding of Christianity includes the explicit expectation that believers should strive to follow the example of Jesus in caring for others and living humbly. She explains:

[Being a Christian] is not just something where you go and are in a gymnasium and go and proclaim something. It’s more of a way of life... I consider myself to be a Christian. To me that really means trying to shape your life using Jesus as an influence. And to me that’s not
something you just state once, but something you have to practice. It’s a serious practice in which you’re constantly going against... society and the way that our world is shaped now. My perspective on the Bible and Jesus’ teachings would say that he lived a life that was radically different from the way we live now, and a lot of our problems today stem from the fact that we’ve gotten so far away from them... One of the reasons that I think Christianity is seen so negatively and the reason that a lot of Christian churches are really struggling is because they’ve gotten away from that. It has become a lot of show and a lot of proclaiming and not very much doing.27

This testimony implies that Hannah’s commitment to social justice activism and her commitment to her faith are nearly one and the same. To Hannah, being a good Christian requires some kind of action, requires the believer to do something in the world. Her moral philosophy lays out a roadmap towards living a good life that explicitly names the importance of social action. A simple statement of one’s faith in God or Jesus is not enough to truly live faithfully. Rather, one’s actions should be informed by this belief and the lessons taught by the sacred texts of the tradition. This means that, in her efforts to lead a good life, Hannah will not feel satisfied with her action simply by going to church or praying before a meal. She must act on her convictions – her concern for God’s creation, for her fellow human beings – in order to fully practice her faith. Because action is a fundamental part of her understanding of her faith, action becomes a necessity in living out her religious convictions.

This narrative is clearly important in feeding Hannah’s commitment to her activism as it enables her to understand her work not only as an occupation, but as an expression of her love for and faith in God. The Christian narrative that informs her work gives her access to spiritual and emotional resources that offer renewed

energy. History demonstrates the power of such a narrative as religious convictions have driven people to tremendous acts of love and incomprehensible acts of violence for centuries. It is not difficult, then, to imagine that religious convictions can play an important role in driving activism as well. In moments when Hannah finds her work challenging or frustrating, she can draw on deeper energy reserves of a transcendental nature. When social justice work is an act of faith, a matter of religiosity, it takes on a new centrality for the individual, and he or she can access more resources in pursuing that vision of being a “good” keeper of the faith.

The Christian narrative works for Hannah. It roots her in a framework that describes a “good” life as one of social action, thereby offering continuous inspiration to activism and all the energy that individuals have historically derived from religious conviction. Such a narrative is not exclusive to Christianity, of course, or even to religion. Though I have mentioned that religion has historically offered powerful motivation to action, my fieldwork at the Casa made clear that a variety of moral frameworks can offer similar motivation. A moral framework need not be religious in nature to function as a mechanism to ensures integrity. Another Casa volunteer, who I will call Sarah, identifies as Jewish-atheist. She therefore brings a narrative that utilizes different symbols and vocabulary, but is equally effective in creating an internal mechanism by which she holds herself accountable to acting upon the things she values. Sarah explained that her family has always been vocal about their commitment to what she terms “social justice values,” and that frequent discussions about these moral commitments served as “a big impetus for my views
on life and what I want to do in the world.” It appears that she grew up in a family culture that presented social action as a given – it was assumed that in leading a morally “good” life Sarah would express her values through action to serve others.

The testimony of all three of these women demonstrates the mechanism of personal commitment to acting upon one’s belief and its importance in pushing individuals to act upon their convictions. Clearly, in order to become involved in social action, individuals must not only hold beliefs about the state of the world and the ways in which they feel it must improve. There must be a mechanism that empowers them to act on those beliefs. When individuals understand the relationship between belief and action to be inherent, this motivates people to sacrifice their time, energy, and resources for a cause that they believe in. Without a sense that they have a responsibility to make decisions that are directly informed by their beliefs, individuals who may be sympathetic to a particular cause or social problem may remain stationary.

**Collective Accountability**

Even in the examples of internal integrity discussed above, the role of community in instilling and reinforcing this value was evident. In the discussion of Sarah’s Jewish-atheist upbringing we saw that she certainly harbor an internal drive to put action to her moral convictions. But it was also clear that her family played a central role in raising her with those values, as well as continuing conversations that continually affirm Sarah’s understanding that she should be engaging in social action. I would argue that collective accountability, in addition to

28 Sarah Sanders, Personal interview, 12 Jan. 2012.
personal commitment to integrity, is necessary in sustaining activism over time. Dual pressure from both internal and external sources will be the most effective in holding people accountable to translate their stated moral convictions into action that expresses those values. Both the Quaker tradition and the example of the Casa demonstrate the importance of a collective emphasis on action in a sustainable model of activism.

My findings at the Casa demonstrate several ways that this mechanism of collective accountability can manifest. Foremost, the organization has cultivated an identity as a place that attracts those who wish to take action upon their convictions. It became clear in my conversations with staffers that the Casa community as a whole places value on living out one’s internally held convictions in a tangible way. Not only do Casa staffers generally bring the internal sense of integrity necessary to successfully sustain activism, but they, in turn, participate in the perpetuation of a community that successfully executes the mechanism of collective accountability that further strengthens activism. “Collective accountability” refers to a group’s ability to cultivate an environment that articulates the shared value of integrity. When a community develops an identity based, at least in part, upon the understanding that its members gather specifically with the intention of living out their values, this establishes integrity between word and action as a collective goal. Community members can then hold each other accountable to following through on the internal sense of integrity brought by each individual.
The community’s emphasis on living with integrity is so prevalent that the vast majority of my interviewees mentioned this aspect of Casa life specifically. Judy, a former volunteer and co-director at the Casa, explained,

It has been a space that different generations of Quakers have been able to come and put into practice their values and beliefs and testimonies as understood in that local context and moment... Individual Quakers, both Mexican and international, have been able to come here and really respond out of, I think, deep commitments to values and to their callings or leadings... Maybe because I got the chance to work here as a director, that was always really present to me. I really felt like I was part of a succession of human beings that are trying to do this in this place, and that was really... special.29

By cultivating this culture of a commitment to social action, the Casa is able to continually draw like-minded people to participate in its activities. Further, it seems that the people who work there are aware of this – they self-identify as individuals who care about expressing their values through their work. This identity seems to have given rise to something of a common vocabulary among the staff of the Casa. Though my findings do not indicate that the community engages in many explicit conversations about this identity, it is relevant that the vast majority of my interviewees individually mentioned this aspect of the Casa. Though they do not seem to talk with each other explicitly about their personal commitments to living out their values, they do seem to share an understanding that many of them have come to the Casa for that reason. Like Judy, a volunteer who I will refer to as Timothy also perceives the Casa as a place that draws people who are interested in living out their values. He told me that, though he does not hear many explicit conversations among staff members about motivations behind their work, he

believes that many are there to put their beliefs into action. He also notices that, “there are a lot of people in the community who care about that Casa and really connect their faith with what they do here or what the Casa should be doing.”

This indicates that, though the Casa could perhaps ensure stronger collective accountability through more frequent, structured discussions around this topic, the sheer existence of this community in and of itself acts as a measure of accountability. If individuals come to work at the Casa out of a commitment to integrity, and they select the Casa specifically because they perceive it as a place where people with such intentions gather in social action, then the mechanism of collective accountability has functioned successfully.

My interview with Hannah revealed a highly functional model of collective accountability in which the community not only naturally encourages activism by bringing together individuals who share a commitment to integrity, but also creates support systems to intentionally encourage its members to action. As discussed above, Hannah harbors her own understanding that action is an inherent part of Christian faith. Yet this alone does not sustain her activism. She benefits from the support of her faith communities in the United States and at the Casa who share her value of integrity. She explained that her church at home is “dedicated to what that they call the inner and outward journeys.” She continued:

The idea is that... being a Christian means really dedicating yourself to it, you can’t just go to church on Sunday and have that be it. So you have to be on an inner journey, which is daily spiritual practice, spiritual discipline is what they call it, where you’re consciously dealing with your faith... And then the outward part is that everyone

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30 Timothy Knowles, Personal interview, 5 Jan. 2012
is part of a mission group. The idea is that it’s important to act on behalf of your faith.\textsuperscript{31}

This presents a powerful example of very intentional, self-conscious accountability that only a community can offer to an individual. Hannah’s church clearly provides structures that support individuals in living out their faith, serving as a constant reminder that they collectively value social action as part of a morally good life. I argue that it would be much more difficult for Hannah, and other activists, to hold themselves accountable even to a powerful internal motivation to live with integrity without the support offered by a community with similar values. Indeed, Hannah noted that she struggles to engage with her own inward journey without the accountability offered by the spiritual director she worked with at her church. She explains that “a balance [between the inward and outward journey] is important,” but it seems clear that a balance is hard to maintain without community structures that support both and constantly reinforce the importance of the relationship between the two.\textsuperscript{32} As balance is crucial for activists attempting to lead healthy lives, collective accountability and support also becomes key in supporting their ongoing commitment to their work.

This example opens the question of whether the Casa could be still more effective in sustaining its volunteers’ energy for action through community structures that explicitly ask them to reflect upon the relationship between their moral convictions and their work at the Casa. Though, as discussed above, such conversations are present in the Casa at least casually, I found evidence in

\textsuperscript{31} Hannah Hornberg, Personal interview, 11 Jan. 2012.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
interviews with multiple volunteers that they would benefit from more consistently visible discussions around topics like self-care, spiritual engagement, and the relationship between their moral convictions and their work at the Casa.

**The Quaker Testimony of Integrity**

The Quaker tradition offers an example of a community that often engages in just such conversations about the values that inspire its action. An examination of the manner in which Quakers have reflected upon the relationship between faith and practice, and the foundational testimony of integrity that emphasizes the importance of the relationship, suggests the importance of this collective understanding in sustaining Quaker activism.

In naming true Christian practice as an ongoing “way of life” rather than a single “proclamation,” Hannah articulated something that has sustained Quaker action for centuries. This collective commitment to action springs from a deep foundation in the testimony of integrity. Writing in 1982, a Quaker named Janet Scott names that commitment in the following way: “The first principle of Quakerism is integrity – integrity of word, worship, and action. Worship is at the heart of our faith. If our worship is right, words will spring from it and reflect truth; action will spring from it and reflect love” (Durham 79). Quakerism therefore cultivates a collective expectation that internally held religious belief will manifest in tangible, external action. Though of course Quakerism does not claim a monopoly on putting faith into practice, I argue that this factor has been foundational in sustaining Quaker social witness over the course of so many years.
Much like Hannah’s understanding of right Christian practice, many Quakers understand faith and practice as inseparable. In 1983, a Quaker named Michael Rutter offered this reflection:

There can be no division between the secular and the sacred. Quaker beliefs exist only in terms of Quaker practice... Quakerism is not a ‘Sunday religion.’ Rather, there is an onus on all of us to show sincerity in all that we do, with our beliefs put into practice in all aspects of our lives – private and public...There is an assumption of the universality of the spiritual element so that no aspect of life can be accepted as outside the responsibility of religious beliefs (Durham 73-74).

A. Barratt Brown noted a similar sentiment nearly 50 years prior to Rutter: “It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward: that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable ‘means of grace’ by which God is revealed and communicated... through a thousand things that may become the ‘outward and visible sign’ of an ‘inward and spiritual grace’” (Durham 75). These passages clearly demonstrate a collective emphasis on the importance of living out one’s values in tangible, concrete actions within the Quaker tradition. For example, a proclamation that one desires peace holds virtually no weight. Rather, taking action that seeks to bring about peace is the true proclamation of one’s value. Quakers emphasize the importance of a living testament to Quaker beliefs. Action, rather than word, is the true demonstration of one’s faith. This collective understanding has functioned to hold so many Quakers accountable to the integrity they claim to value, thereby playing a crucial role in sustaining centuries of Quaker social witness.

Additionally, sociologists Lisa Ann Smith and Lori G. Beaman theorize that Quaker beliefs uniquely encourage public demonstrations of faith based on its assertion that, as the Quaker saying goes, “there is that of God in everyone.” Because
Quakers hold this to be true, Smith and Beaman argue, this means that “spiritual practice involves developing the spirit of interconnectedness with other individual,” which inherently requires some type of external action. Further, they claim that because Quakerism places emphasis on “the individual and the experiential nature of God… Quaker expressions of spirituality are not manifested in strictly religious [or exclusively private] spaces.” This means that Quaker belief encourages believers to outwardly express their religious commitment through action that endeavors to protect and nurture other people.

Scott also suggests that Quaker social action efforts have also benefitted from the central Quaker value of equality. Continuing her reflections on integrity quoted above, she writes, “If we believe in the priesthood of all believers then we are all, as Quakers, involved in and responsible for our religion. Quakerism is not a spectator sport – it is a vocation. Faith is not what we assert, but what we are prepared to act upon” (Durham 79). If every person has access to the divine then, as Scott writes, practitioners cannot depend on intermediaries to live out their religion for them. Great responsibility comes with the recognition of that of God within each person – responsibility to worship, to reflect, and to act according to the discerned will of God. This collective understanding serves as a measure of accountability for individual Quakers, and has sustained the expectation that practitioners will live out their faith as a true “vocation.”

34 Ibid. 507.
This is a powerful example of collective accountability that runs deep in the culture of Quaker social witness, encouraging ongoing action on the part of community members. First, this collective expectation of action gives the individual a road map for good living, outlining clearly what living faithfully should look like. Second, it provides pressure for the individual to follow through on this expectation. Finally, because Quakers have a long history of understanding good practice as described by the writers mentioned above, they have consequently developed intricate networks and community structures to support individuals in meeting collective expectations (discussed at length in Chapter 3).

Indeed, Paulina recognized the principle of integrity at work not only in her own activism, but in the Quaker activism she has witnessed at the Casa. When asked how she would explain Quakerism to someone unfamiliar with the faith, she replied:

> It’s about not just reading the Bible and worship... The way that I think a lot of Quakers worship is by putting their values into action. I think they do see that as a form of worship, as a way of respecting God. I think that is something I hold true, as well... It is like a spiritual practice for me to do something that I value and have other people around me with the same values doing that thing. It’s a spiritual practice in a sense. And I think that’s what a lot of Quakers do, because there aren’t many people who come to these Meetings [for Worship] who don’t do something on a daily basis, and who aren’t involved in other things in the Casa.  

This observation from a non-Quaker volunteer not only offers insight about the Quaker tradition, but suggests that this element of Quaker culture is present in activists’ experience of the Casa. As such, the Quaker expectation may be understood as the foundation of the identity that the Casa has cultivated as a community committed to acting upon its values.

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In conclusion, this discussion affirms that people must experience a combination of pressure and support both from internal conviction and externally imposed standards in order to maintain their commitment to the taxing work of activism. Individual and community emphasis on a relationship of integrity between word and action serve as the necessary accountability to translate belief into activism. When individuals who are committed to living their lives with integrity gather with the intention of translating values into action, they create an interconnected community that holds its members accountable to this goal. In this way, both community and individual have a crucial role in establishing and enforcing an expectation to live according to one’s values, and thereby creating an ongoing mechanism that motivates individuals to action.
Chapter III: Nurture and Care

Integrity is the first of the two primary arenas in which the individual and the community must collaborate to most effectively foster sustainable activism. My fieldwork at the Casa not only affirmed the central role that integrity plays in sustaining action, but also revealed that activists must intentionally practice self-care consistently over time to prevent burnout. Coupled with these findings, my research into the Quaker tradition of social witness suggests that in a functional model of sustainable activism the community will play an active role in providing such case. Communities can aid activists in discerning individual gifts and needs, nurturing those gifts, and providing scaffolding to help meet those needs. These functions can be accomplished by distinct structures created by the community with the intention of offering its members emotional, spiritual, and practical support in carrying out social action.

Activist Self-Care of Personal Needs

Individuals can nurture their own activism by engaging in self-reflection and becoming self-aware about their own needs for living a balanced life. Once personal needs are identified, individuals then have the capacity to become proactive about identifying practices of self-care which can support healthier and happier living. This, in turn, creates strategies by which individuals can cope with the stress so often endued by long-term activism.

Casa volunteers named a variety of self-care practices that help them recharge during long months of service. This is an important mechanism in sustainable activism that social movement theory neglects. Even Quakers
themselves do not appear to have written quite as widely on the importance of the concrete practices of self-care that Casa staffers report. Yet my fieldwork indicated that volunteers’ needs can include everything from spiritual engagement to getting “some sleep and a good meal,” going for a run, experiencing contact with nature, taking a nap, or reconnecting to fellow community members.  

My study of social movement theory has revealed that scholars seem to be more concerned about larger forces of exchange between a movement and its participants than they are about understanding the daily stressors and stress releases that were so prevalent in my fieldwork at the Casa. Yet my fieldwork at the Casa made clear that tangible practices of self-care are invaluable to those activists’ attempt to lead healthy and balanced lives in the context of ongoing social action. For example, Paulina explained her need to escape from the pressures of her daily work to the soothing experience of being in a more “leafy” place. She explained, “Since being young, me and my mom on the weekends have always gone for walks. It’s always been my thing. You know, I’m stressed, I’ll go for a walk... For some reason or another I’ve always felt this need to be out in nature.” Paulina’s testimony indicates that communities interested in finding ways to support activists in their work must consider daily needs like those presented here. All too often political theory and religious writings can become too abstract, and Paulina’s reflections remind us to root ourselves in reality, in the daily lived experience of those individuals who commit themselves to this kind of lifestyle.

36 Paulina Smith, e-mail to author, 15 Feb. 2012.
Sarah offers us another demonstration of the importance of self-care. She mentions doing yoga, not as an “other-worldly,” religious experience, but as a practice that is “more about getting in touch with yourself and being aware of yourself and what’s going on in general, to be able to connect with people on a human level... I think for me it’s all about peace more than religious spirituality.”\(^{38}\) When I asked her to elaborate, she continued, “Peace in a personal sense is daily calmness and being happy with what you have, who you are, where you’re at. And being able to accept and enjoy those around you. Patience, tranquility, all of that good stuff. And then having that extend to a larger scale.”\(^{39}\) Not only does this practice help Sarah re-center in her daily life, but it also helps her remain connected to a larger framework to contextualize her social justice work. In essence, this is the mechanism at work in the more spiritual or religious forms of self-care that other Casa volunteers and Quakers engage in. Activists need some tangible way to reconnect with the larger moral (secular or religious) framework that inspires their activism, which is really at the root of the spiritual health discussed below.

In addition to more tangible methods of self-care, several Casa staffers articulated the importance of spiritual nurturing in helping them deal with stress and more generally maintain a sense of balance in their busy lives. Timothy named spiritual engagement as an important strategy in dealing with all kinds of challenging situations:

Whenever I’m in particular times of need or personal strife, that’s where I tend to try to connect with God and connect with what is the right thing to do in God’s eyes in that time... Having that regular

\(^{38}\) Sarah Sanders, Personal interview, 12 Jan. 2012.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
connection or meditation with God I think helps you weather the harder times better, for me. So that’s something that I’m constantly trying to do.⁴⁰

This passage also notes that the most effective practices of self-care will be ongoing. If an individual neglects his or her needs for an extended period of time, s/he may discover that work has become overwhelming and stress and frustration has built up. This state of being is a primary factor that leads to activist burnout,⁴¹ and therefore indicates the importance of regular self-care in sustaining activist engagement. Communities that are aware of these needs can intentional respond to them, more effectively supporting their members in sustaining energy for activism.

Judy also expressed the importance of prayer to her sense of health, indicating that she begins to feel off-balance when she neglects her spiritual life:

As a young adult... I really didn't pray for several years. And I think I really missed it. I think I’m kind of a very spiritual person, like my brain and heart and soul, whatever, is just like – I need that connection in order to feel okay, in order to feel really balanced... I realized, ‘[Judy], when you let prayer go, you start to kind of spin out. You need to just be really aware of that – you need prayer in your life to keep things in perspective and feel grounded as a person.’⁴²

When Judy became a co-director of the Casa, she had just had her first child and was also working to complete her dissertation. Five years later, she believes she is still catching up from all the sleep she lost during that time. Suffice it to say that Judy’s is an example of a life with multiple sources of stress, including the intensive work of co-directing the complex organization that is the Casa. Her spiritual practice, in addition to the deeply important relationships she maintained with her fellow

community members, was central in helping her sustain her work as long as she did.

**Community-Supported Scaffolding to Address Individual Needs**

These examples from Casa staffs demonstrate that individuals can hold an important degree of responsibility in identifying and caring for their own emotional and spiritual needs. Yet personal self-care is not enough. I argue can individuals better practice self-care within the context of a thoughtful community, as demonstrated below by the Quaker process of gift discernment and nurture. Further, groups alone have the resources necessary to offer the kind of deep and focused support that individuals need to sustain their activism in a healthy manner over an extended period of time. I argue that the most effective activist communities will offer scaffolding to respond to the practical, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals.

A Quaker named Daniel Snyder offers one example of this in his 2008 piece, *Quaker Witness as Sacrament*. He outlines an intensive regiment of “inward activism” and “outward prayer” that will provide individuals the renewed energy and spiritual resources necessary in sustaining them in their work.43 I argue that these intensive processes will be most effective if contextualized by a thoughtful and supportive community. Indeed, Snyder himself arrived at these claims through his experience teaching a class at Pendle Hill, a Quaker center for study and retreat near Philadelphia, PA. Snyder facilitated a series of three courses entitled “Nonviolence in Personal and Political Life,” “Prayer and Peacemaking,” and “Forgiveness and Reconciliation.” The second course in particular brought together different kinds of

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people, whom Snyder names “activists” and “spiritualists” or “contemplatives,” to engage with the intersection of faith and action. From these discussions, Snyder draws several conclusions about the most effective way to sustain activism.

First, he claims that neither an inward call to a life of spiritual contemplation nor an outward call to engage with global problems of injustice can be fully responded to if an individual neglects the other. Second, an integration of internal spirituality and external action must take place for activists who hope to sustain their intensive efforts over time, and for spiritualists who hope to avoid the risk of neglecting the needs of the outside world.

Echoing some Casa staffers’ need for spiritual engagement, Snyder warns that leading an active life devoid of prayer will more likely lead to activist burnout. “Spirituality,” he argues, is a necessary component of the activist life, because, “in opening us up to God, it gives us vision, energy, and hope for work that could not be sustained any other way” (29). For this reason, Snyder and his classes emphasized the importance of integrating the inward and the outward life in seeking “a practice that integrated the best of [spirituality and activism] while guarding against the worst [of both]” (23). Snyder suggests that the individuals who commit themselves to the intentional integration of their internal spiritual lives and their external actions through the practices of inward activism and outward prayer will become the most effective activists and the most well-rounded spiritualists.

I argue that community can and should play pivotal role in supporting the kind of individual spiritual formation the Snyder claims is necessary to sustaining activism. It is true that not all Casa staffers shared a desire for more structured
spiritual support, and indeed one volunteer who identifies as Jewish-atheist expressed appreciation that the Casa does not impose such conversations on upon the staff. However, the vast majority of individuals voiced spiritual needs, and many of those noted that those needs were not being met currently. While communities should by no means impose such practices upon activists who do not feel comfortable with a personal religion or spirituality, my findings at the Casa suggest that making spiritual support available would be able to respond to the spiritual needs of many activists.

Many Quakers utilize an ongoing relationship with the divine and their faith communities as an important tool in sustaining the will and the ability to pursue social activism. As a result, the Quakers have developed incredibly effective examples of such structures. These could certainly be utilized by other communities – both religious and secular – who may choose to adapt the vocabulary or narrative of such structures to better meld with the group’s identity.

*Gift Discernment and Encouragement*

There exists among many Quakers the understanding that the community has very specific responsibilities in the identification and development of individuals’ spiritual gifts. I argue that this collective goal is a useful mechanism to sustain individual activism. Offering scaffolded opportunities for spiritual exploration and formation supports individuals in several ways. Foremost, it demonstrates to that the community values the individual and his or her well-being. Further, it offers an opportunity for the kind of spiritual engagement that Daniel Snyder argues is crucial to accessing the energy necessary for ongoing action. Finally, such opportunities
demonstrate to the individual that the community understands the risks in taking social action, and is willing to be present and offer whatever support possible.

A contemporary Friend named Lloyd Lee Wilson explains a Quaker perspective on the interdependent relationship between the individual and community. He argues that both are responsible for carrying out the work of God, and that they must work together to do so:

We are given into a faith community, in part, because our gifts and ministries are needed in that community to enable it to carry out the work of God; our faith community is given to us, in part, to help us develop and exercise our gifts, and to take on the risks of ministry. This work of eldering one another in ministry, nurturing and encouraging each other to take on the risks of being faithful, is vital to our spiritual health as individuals and as a faith community.44

This emphasis on mutual accountability between the individual and her/his community is a key reason for the ongoing success of social justice work by Quakers over the centuries. Communities that understand themselves as responsible for the nurture and care of their members are more likely to give attention to the needs of those taking on the risks of ministry. These can include the risks associated with Quaker social witness or activism, including the sacrifice of time, energy, and resources, the risk of arrest, and the emotional and psychological stress of intense ongoing social action. Communities can scaffold the taking on of those risks by “naming the giftedness of its members” and “providing guidance” in the development and exercise of the individual’s gifts.45 Quaker meetings have organized workshops, retreats, one-on-one spiritual nurturing partnerships, and


45 Ibid. 91-114.
other kinds of programming to scaffold the naming and developing spiritual gifts. The goal of these processes is to help an individual discern what s/he naturally has to offer the world, and to discern where the world’s needs intersect with an individual's gifts. At this intersection, it is said by some that Friends may find their calling. Gift discernment exercises, then, can help an individual see most clearly what type of action they might take in carrying out the will of God or working for the good of humanity.

These concrete examples of mechanisms that many Quaker groups have in place to care for their members means that Friends who engage in social action have immediate access to an intricate network designed specifically to support them in their activism. This fact both helps to explain why Quakers have been able to maintain their witness over so many centuries, and demonstrates to other groups how they can best support individual activism. Though, for many Quakers, gift discernment is a spiritual practice, other groups can certainly adapt this structure to other types of religious or secular narratives.

Were the Casa to offer a gift discernment workshop, interested community members could find an avenue towards enriching spiritual engagement, while others would not be adversely affected. The plausibility of implementing this at the Casa is complicated, as the organization identifies itself as a nonprofit organization dedicated to direct service and does not claim to be a center for spiritual support. However, I still argue that offering such structures would indeed aid the social justice efforts at the Casa in two primary ways. First, those activists who desire deeper spiritual engagement would receive support in meeting that need. Second,
the purpose of gift discernment is to clarify what natural abilities and tendencies individuals bring, knowledge of which allows them to specifically seek out opportunities for them to share that gift so as to benefit the greater good. Gift discernment ultimately can connect individuals with specific social actions that they are naturally able to do well, find rewarding, and will ultimately serve the causes of justice. Therefore, such an exercise within the Casa community could both meet some expressed spiritual needs and aid the organization by identifying which individuals may be particularly gifted at completing certain aspects of the nonprofit's work. This would help ensure that individuals feel accomplished in their efforts and that the various types of work at the Casa are most effectively done by those best suited to them.

*Structures of Emotional, Spiritual, and Practical Support*

In addition to employing a mechanism that specifically encourages gift identification and development, activist communities can offer individuals more general emotional, spiritual, and practical support. Once again, the Quaker tradition offers several highly successful examples that can be adapted by other groups to fit their specific needs, moral framework, and vocabulary.

Quakers emphasize the importance of spiritual discernment in pursuing activism that can be sustained spiritually. Similar to the gift discernment process discussed above, the contemporary Quaker practice of spiritual discernment often seeks clarity about a particular type of action being considered by an individual or a group. Because Quakers believe that every person has the capacity to connect with the divine, experience a call to action, and live into the will of God, the tradition has
developed various tools with which the community can play a vital role in structuring such discernment.

One such tool is the community-based structure of clearness committees. In her Pendle Hill publication, *Spiritual Discernment: the Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*, Patricia Loring offers a useful discussion of the history and function of Quaker practice. She explains that Quakers seeking clarity about whether a particular action truly follows the will of God, and whether they are genuinely experiencing a call to carry out that action, generally engage in a process of discernment before making a decision or taking action. The community undoubtedly plays a crucial role in supporting this way of life:

To assist one another in the on-going discernment, we function in ways traditionally associated with the deepest work of spiritual communities. We can cultivate an environment among us which will foster one another’s spiritual growth by directing and redirection intention and attention to God; by discouraging what draws us away; by loving support for each other in the vicissitudes of our utterly human lives; by respecting and cherishing the uniqueness of each life.46

More specifically, Quakers have developed the structure of Clearness Committees to aid individuals in discerning whether a perceived call really does come from the divine, or whether it is merely the individual’s own personal desire. Though they have evolved over the years, and now look very different from the early structures of the 17th and 18th centuries, Quakers today still use Clearness Committees in a variety of situations and for many different reasons. Loring explains:

While there are secular uses and forms for the clearness committee, I will deal with it as an instrument for spiritual discernment... I’ll speak of using the clearness committee particularly for the discernment of leadings into ministry... In ministry I include our deeds of love in the arenas of justice, mercy, and peace in the wider world as well. Although the use of the clearness committee is by no means confined to discernment of leadings, the centrality of acting under divine guidance in Quaker spirituality makes that a most likely use for the clearness committee.47

This description of Clearness Committees, just one form of spiritual nurture and care available to Quakers engaging in social action, exemplifies the central role that community has played in sustaining Quaker activism.

Such a tool is useful in sustaining activism for multiple reasons. These visible structures call attention the assumption that Quakers will continually be called to live out their values through their actions, and thereby hold individuals responsible to follow through on their leadings to social witness (as discussed in Chapter 2). Clearness Committees also hold the community accountable to providing whatever support possible by calling the attention to the spiritual needs of the activist. Additionally, Clearness Committees are one mechanism that scaffolds the discernment of gifts discussed above, thereby functioning to more effectively direct practitioners to work that they are called to do. Further, individuals who go through a Clearness Committee emerge from the process with the understanding that whatever conclusion arrived at was guided by the divine. This lends extra weight to the decision, encouraging the activist to have faith that s/he is both capable of the work they have been called to do, and find peace in the belief that they will carry out the will of God by engaging in that action. Even if an activist community chooses to

47 Ibid. 21-22.
use a secularized version of this tool, the individual can still be encouraged by the
fact the community supports the decision s/he makes as a result of the process.

Structures like Clearness Committees are crucial to understanding the
ongoing commitment to social witness that Quakerism has maintained for centuries.
They are key to assisting individuals in translating belief into action. Notably, I
found little evidence that the community of the Casa functions in this particular way
to support its volunteers. While some volunteers certainly would not want such
blatantly religious support from their work environment, based on at least one very
clear articulation of an atheist worldview, others might benefit from this kind of
focused communal support. As I examine below, the Casa makes valiant efforts to
include some functions of community that are necessary to sustaining activism, such
as collective decision-making and group identity. However, the institution does not
offer structured nurture and care for its volunteers. This is by no means a failure on
the part of the Casa – again, the spiritual nurture of the volunteers is not a stated
part of their mission. However, my findings do show that a significant portion of the
Casa’s current staff are interested in more and structured opportunities for spiritual
engagement.

Such engagement can manifest in a variety of ways. In addition to the
formalized structures discussed above, activists may also benefit from spiritual
support in the form of more general worshipful gatherings. Such events serve the
dual purpose of providing opportunities for spiritual engagement and for a
potentially powerful shared experience to support community building and
collective identity formation (as discussed in Chapter 1). Several Casa volunteers
named this specifically as an important self-care practice, while others identify as atheist or questioning, and do not feel that they benefit from religious services. Therefore communities can arrange a variety of gatherings with the intent of offering spiritual and emotional support to individuals. For religiously centered groups, regular worship services may be highly effective in building community and offering individuals an opportunity to renew their spiritual energies.

Meeting for Worship has provided such nurture to Quaker activists for centuries, continuously rooting the individual in a supportive community, renewing the individual’s relationship with the divine, and affirming the values that have inspired so many Quakers to social witness. I would argue, therefore, that these religious services have played a role in effectively sustaining Quaker social action over the course of multiple centuries. When I asked Timothy about his experience in Quaker Meeting for Worship as a non-Quaker volunteer, he said:

[At] the beginning it was like, ‘This is novel. I want to see every part of the Casa, I want to do this, I want to be here every week.’ Then it got easier and easier... and I was really, really enjoying it. And then I stopped. I don’t know why. It’s been several weeks since I’ve gone. I think it was ambitions – like, oh I can use this time to do other things maybe, or I can sleep in. But actually I feel like when you go to Quaker meeting, like when you have an hour of silent reflection, it’s like getting three hours of sleep. So you wake up an hour early but then you get more in return. It’s really calming. It’s really centering. It’s better than three cups of coffee, for sure. It just feels good.48

Though unprogrammed Meeting for Worship will not meet everyone’s spiritual needs, I did find it notable that so many non-Quaker Casa volunteers choose to attend and seem to find the experience rewarding. This may be for several reasons. Foremost, the unstructured nature of an unprogrammed Meeting allows individuals

to use the time however they wish – they are not forced to engage in the same type of spiritual activity that Quakers strive for during Meeting. In the context of highly scheduled and busy lives, it is not surprising that many find “an hour of silent reflection” to be soothing. In this way, perhaps unprogrammed Meeting for Worship can be a useful structure to encourage self-care for non-Quaker activists and their communities as well.

In the case of the Casa, participation in Meeting for Worship may be useful even for non-spiritual purposes. The Casa’s director, who I will refer to as Nate, does encourage all staff members to attend Meeting for Worship at least once during their time there, if only to share an experience with the community and see what Quakers are “all about.” My findings show that even volunteers who do not identify as Quaker, or even religious or spiritual, do understand Quakerism to be an important part of the Casa’s identity. Attending a Meeting for Worship therefore becomes an opportunity for staffers to better understand the spiritual practice out of which the Casa was born and which sustained many important contributors to its founding and evolution.

Further, as Nate’s position implies, simply participating in the shared experience of Meeting for Worship can help the volunteers feel more rooted in the community of the Casa, and thereby gain more support in their work there. Finally, if a volunteer does choose to engage with the service in a spiritual capacity, they may also benefit from the energy created by collective effervescence as discussed in Chapter 1. Renewed connection with the community and with “something larger”
can certainly play an important role in grounding individuals in the power of numbers and offering them a larger perspective on their work.

Non-religious groups or organizations who want to tread lightly in order to avoid alienation on the basis of religion can facilitate other types of gatherings that can produce rejuvenation similar to that which some gain from a religious service. Multiple social movement theorists note the effectiveness of consciousness-raising sessions in bonding an activist community together and in energizing individuals through dynamic engagement with the group. Vivian Gornick discusses the importance of consciousness-raising the women’s movement of the 1960s, detailing the insights that women gained through sharing their experiences with the group. Her piece describes the sense of empowerment and readiness for action with which many women departed such events, which undoubtedly played an important role in sustaining their commitment to feminist activism.49

Similarly, Eric Hirsch, an important contributor to the field of social movement theory, argues that group rap sessions played a key role in maintaining individual commitment in his case study of the 1985 student-led divestment campaign at Columbia University.50 These conversations both helped participants feel connected and listened to by the larger group, and served as an opportunity for the students to continuously engage in discussion of the issues that had motivated them to action in the first place. Clearly such gatherings, whether religious or not,

can be powerful tools to strengthen ties within the activist community. Further, they provide individuals with renewed energy to continue in their work either by encouraging self-care through spiritual practice or enabling activists to reconnect with the reasons they have become involved in the first place.

In addition to offering emotional and spiritual support in the variety of ways outlined above, communities can promote sustainable activism by offering logistical support in many forms. Systems of tangible offerings of support enabled the fledgling Quaker community to survive decades of persecution in 17th century England. Members took care of one another’s families while individuals were in jail, gathered money to free imprisoned individuals, and otherwise lent practical support to one another.51 In more recent times, Quakers have established a network of funding opportunities to support Quaker action through monthly and yearly Meetings. Many Quaker organizations also offer internships to encourage Young Adult Friends’ involvement in social action, and Meetings generally offer First Day school and other programs that promote community, personal growth, and leadership development among young Friends.

The Casa attends to the practical needs of its volunteers in several ways that could certainly be utilized by other groups. Full-time volunteers receive housing within the Casa, as well as a communal stipend for basic food staples. Further, the Volunteer Coordinator herself strives to communicate with the staff about their needs. This is not a formal structure supported by the Casa as an organization, but rather a practice that is dependent upon the individual initiative that Hannah has

brought to her position as Coordinator. She has intentionally decided to meet with each volunteer every week to discuss the individual’s well-being. At the end of each conversation, Hannah asks the volunteer if s/he needs anything. She leaves the question open, allowing the volunteer to respond about anything from practical concerns about work, to emotional concerns about community membership or group dynamics, to an unmet spiritual need. Hannah then continues the conversation to strategize with the volunteer about ways s/he can individually or in collaboration with the rest of the Casa team work to see those needs met. This initiative on the part of the Volunteer Coordinator is the most formalized structure that I found with the express purpose of nurture and care for individuals.

**Group Processes**

The support structures described above play a vital role in sustaining activism within Quakerism, affirming Bert Klandermans’ observation that positive exchange relationship between movement and participant can help prevent disengagement. However, the structures exemplified by the Quaker model may not be within the capacity of all groups. If an activist community does not have the time or resources available to provide such scaffolding in meeting its members’ needs, the group can still collaborate in important ways to sustain individual activism. Even understaffed organizations can employ specific group practices to best support their activists and maintain collective momentum.

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52 Ibid. 97.
Collective Decision-Making

Multiple studies have shown the importance of involved individuals in group discussions of important issues such as an organization’s stance on a particular issue, a specific plan of action, and other important decision-making. As discussed above, consciousness-raising sessions play an important role in maintaining social ties between community members as well as individual emotional commitment to the cause. Such conversations do not necessarily require extensive time or resources, but can be initiated by any thoughtful participant or group leader throughout a campaign.

In addition to these more general conversations about the issues that activists are working on, groups can intentionally utilize collective decision-making processes rather than top-down policies. Eric Hirsch is one of many social movement scholars who has observed the importance of collective decision making in maintaining commitment on the part of movement participants. In his case study mentioned above, he writes that the students participating in the 1985 Columbia University divestment campaign “would be more likely to continue the protest if they participated in a collective decision to do so.”53 I argue that activists are more likely to feel ownership of campaigns in which they participate in the decision-making process, and will therefore bring more energy and commitment to action that has been collectively decided upon. Further, individual will more likely “feel bound by group decisions” that result from discussions in which they have been included, ensuring more reliable follow-through. If each individual feels s/he has

53 Ibid. 102.
been heard, and their perspective has been taken into account as a valuable contribution to the decision-making process, this affirmation may make them more likely to continue participation in the group that included them so meaningfully.

The Casa strives to engage in this type of collective decision-making, working to make sure that all staff members feel included in the process. This effort is maintained primarily through weekly staff meetings that include all volunteers (part- and full-time as well as external volunteers), the three paid staff members (the Peace Programs Coordinator, the Volunteer Coordinator, and the Director) as well as other highly involved community members on occasion. However, one volunteer noted that some decisions are made by the paid staff only (the Director and the two Coordinators).54 Multiple volunteers also mentioned that they do not always feel truly comfortable participating in staff meetings, though the structure is non-hierarchical and there is, at least in theory, space for everyone to contribute. Therefore, looking to another model of collective decision-making may offer further insight into the most effective way to ensure that this inclusive process promotes sustainable activism.

Quakerism has historically employed a worshipful process in order to make logistical decisions. Quakers use a specific process in their Meetings for Business, during which they gather in a worshipful space to attend to the practical concerns of the Meeting. I argue that Quaker Meeting for Business is a highly effective example of collective decision-making that has played a key role in supporting Quaker

54 Abby Yard, Personal interview, 8 Jan. 2012.
witness. Groups who employ similar decision-making process will see prolonged commitment to action from more individuals than groups who do not.

Quaker Meeting for Business employs the fundamental principle of collective decision-making that Hirsch describes, but roots it in theological ground that gives the process added weight. The religious framework of the Meeting for Business ensures that all participants are included at a spiritual and practical level. George Gorman, a Quaker writing in 1973, describes Quaker process as such:

Business meetings open with a period of quiet waiting in which a corporate journey can be made the to still centre from where alone true decisions can be made... Quakers seek to reach their decisions without voting, for Quaker business meetings are theocratic rather than democratic, and they seek to achieve this by giving the freedom for all present to express their view if they feel drawn to do so. The way in which they do this will be similar to the way in which ministry arises in an ordinary meeting for worship (Durham 188).

Even while some meetings for business must focus primarily on logistical concerns, “There will be [decisions, such as those of engaging in a significant action,] of such importance that that they call for a most searching exploration in the depths of being” (189). Quaker process therefore encourages two things that support activists.

First, the collective will hear every individual voice before reaching a decision. A Quaker body will not settle on a decision if even one person is not at peace with it, placing equal value on every individual’s truth. The Quaker decision-making process is therefore rooted in the ministry that individuals share from a direct experience of God. Within this frame, the contributions of all group members become profoundly important as they represent a “truth” revealed to them by the divine. This means that the collective body will strive to welcome the voice of each individual, and genuinely listen to all contributions. Then, as in Hirsch’s case study
at Columbia, individuals will feel greater ownership of a decision that results from a process in which they feel they participated equally and in which their voices were truly heard.

Second, the worshipful nature of the proceedings serves to connect the individual to the community and the collective decision at an even deeper level. Durkheim would suggest that the students that Hirsch studied might have experienced collective effervescence in the course of their meetings, and thereby felt significantly embedded in the process and deeply connected to the rest of the group. However, I argue that because individuals who participate in Quaker process actively frame this experience as religious, transcendental, and in communion with the divine, this results in ties to the corporate body and its communal decision even stronger than those examined in Hirsch’s article. The fact that this process evolves out of the understanding that each individual brings their connection to the divine to the process lends that much more gravity to these collectively-made decisions.

Therefore, collective decision-making within Quakerism provides powerful sustenance for continued activism because the entire process is rooted in the direct experience of God, and includes all individuals equally. Participants understand every decision to engage in social action as divinely guided, inspired by a corporate understanding of a “truth” revealed through collective seeking for the right path. The corporate body creates the sense not only that each individual participated in the process, but that the collective decision is truly Spirit-led. Each member of the group can rest assured that they are acting with integrity and that they have discerned the will of God to the extent possible.
Arguably, the religious grounding of Quaker process is key in ensuring that individuals feel included, thereby producing maximum effect in sustaining their commitment. However, this should primarily serve to explain how Quakers themselves have sustained a collective commitment to social action for so many years. It should not necessary imply that other groups must root their decision-making in religiosity, for such a process would not be as effective outside of the context of a cultural acceptance of the plausibility of such religious grounding.

*Outlining Achievable Goals*

In addition to committing itself to a collective rather than a hierarchical decision-making policy, an activist community can encourage ongoing commitment by working to outline achievable goals by which individuals can measure some degree of success in their work. As Klandermans so succinctly puts it, “activism can be taxing” (104). He notes that, “burnout is typically observed among idealistically motivated volunteers, who start their job with unrealistically high expectations” (104). Indeed, I argue that all activists are susceptible to burnout, as many social action initiatives are confronting social problems so large that their participants can become overwhelmed, developing feelings of defeat, powerlessness, or hopelessness. Snyder observes that the activists he works with are certainly vulnerable to burnout when they see no evidence that their efforts can truly address huge social injustices such as poverty or war.

In order to preempt such feelings and consequent disengagement, activist communities can proactively structure their efforts to include goals that can be successfully completed. In an e-mail communication, Paulina shared that she does
sometimes feel burned out in her work at the Casa. Yet she also offered a solution
which I argue is applicable to all activist communities “I’m a pretty hard worker and
I tend to push myself to extremes which has left me at times to feel disillusioned
with the work I’m doing... Often I find what I need is... to not try to achieve too
much.” While groups striving to bring about fundamental social change may not
find it useful to “not try and achieve too much,” the essence of Paulina’s sentiment
still holds. If activists never get to experience a “win,” the constant stresses of their
work are more likely to cause burnout and eventual disengagement from social
action. Therefore it is crucial that groups work together to break down their
overarching goals into concrete, achievable tasks. Communities can play a central
role in attempting to shape the activist experience to be healthy in this way.

In this vein, recognizing when an organization should invest its energy
elsewhere can be an important tactic in maintaining moral and motivation. Quakers
again demonstrate one successful example of such a mechanism, as they maintain a
practice of ongoing reflection about actions taken by the group. Just as Quakers will
engage in discernment about the “picking up” of a project or the support of an
individual’s path to social action, so too do they deliberately “lay down” an initiative
when the group discerns that it has served its purpose.

Though the Casa does utilize many effective mechanisms to include
individual activists in group processes that create a sense of belonging that helps
sustain commitment, it does not offer the type of support systems successfully
exemplified by the wider Quaker tradition. The Casa does not publically claim to be

55 Paulina Smith, e-mail to author, 15 Feb. 2012.
a center for spiritual exploration and development on the part of its volunteers. That is not a part of its mission statement, and therefore one could argue that the point is moot. The Casa is by no means failing to uphold an articulated claim to activist support. In many ways, the staff members that I talked to appeared to feel rewarded by the work they are doing. However, my fieldwork did indicate that more community-based structural support would benefit the volunteers.

This discussion has demonstrated the absolute centrality of the collective in an effective model of sustainable activism. Individuals embedded in a community that scaffolds spiritual, emotional, and practical support of social witness, creates opportunities for collective decision-making, and intentionally outlines achievable goals will more likely sustain their commitment to activism over time. Activists with access to these kinds of groups will be able to sustain their social witness in a more healthy and rewarding manner and over a longer period of time without experiencing activist burnout. Therefore, groups interested in maintaining the involvement of their members should capitalize upon their strength as a corporate body by proactively scaffolding community-supported responses to individual needs.
Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the importance of community in sustaining individual activism. Foremost, group participation benefits activists through the naturally occurring phenomena of supportive social ties, collective identity formation, and empowering shared experiences. The testimony of Casa staffers, in addition to the observations of multiple academics and Quaker writers, confirms the energizing power of the social connections that come with community itself. These relationships are strengthened through shared experiences, which can produce the collective effervescence described by Durkheim, thereby grounding activists in a sense of connectedness to their fellow human beings and offering the feeling of comfort and optimism described by Paulina. Shared experience can also feed a collective identity, uniting activists with shared goals and values, and empowering them through the strength that comes with such a union.

Though these processes naturally make the group important in cultivating activism, communities who seek to promote healthy long-term engagement on the part of their individual members will not rely solely on group dynamics. Rather, communities should capitalize on their collective resources by proactively employing tools that make individuals feel recognized, appreciated, and supported. Some of these strategies require no external resources, but merely an intentional decision by group leaders to employ various methods of dialogue. For example, communities should cultivate the mechanism of collective accountability inherent in a group that has gathered around a common purpose, and can do this simply by initiating conversations among group members around the issues upon which they
have decided to act. Drawing on the personal commitment to integrity that individuals must bring to translate belief into action in the first place, groups can foster a culture of activism through informal and formal dialogue.

In addition to holding activists accountable to an individual commitment to integrity, the most effective communities will focus specifically on making participants feel supported in their work. The Quaker model offers many examples of structures that offer the kind of emotional, spiritual, and practical support that activists need in order to sustain their energy for, commitment to, and positive feeling towards their work. Foremost, Quaker process in Meeting for Business exemplifies truly inclusive collective decision-making, which makes participant individuals more likely to follow through on collectively agreed-upon action. Though the spiritual grounding of this process is the mechanism that ensures genuine listening to and incorporation of all points of view, secular groups can still utilize this process to maintain activist commitment. Quakerism also models multiple community structures designed explicitly to offer activist support. Again, the contextualization of these tools within the religious framework of Quakerism does play a role in their effectiveness. However, other activist communities can adapt the essence of these support systems to fit their own culture and vocabulary, while still benefitting from the core purpose of activist support structures.

I have argued that such support is crucial in sustaining individual activism. The testimony of Casa staffers, the writings of many Quakers, and multiple scholars of social movement theory confirm that individuals need some manifestation of positive feedback in order to simultaneously maintain health, happiness, and a
strong commitment to their work. My investigation has made clear that the corporate body of the activist’s community must take some degree of responsibility in providing all possible support to individual activists in the effort to sustain individual activism. In this way, communities can ensure a positive exchange relationship with their members, encouraging their continued involvement, and thereby furthering the goals of their social action more broadly.
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