lSUSTAINABLE MOVEMENTS NEED SUSTAINED MENTORING: HOW FEMINIST MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS MAINTAIN SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS THROUGH AN ETHICS OF CARE

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINABLE MOVEMENTS NEED SUSTAINED MENTORING: HOW FEMINIST MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS MAINTAIN SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS THROUGH AN ETHICS OF CARE

KEARA HUDLER

Activists in social justice movements experience many challenges in their work--from extremist opposition to internal conflicts with other activists--that can lead to burnout. In this thesis, I argue that social justice movements need to make care ethics foundational to their culture and adopt practices that could help reproduce activists. I advocate for feminist mentorship as a strategic practice of care and reproduction that could sustain activists' participation in social justice movements. Through interviews with nine activists in Arizona, I discern what specific practices of care and reproductive labor are most helpful to activists in need of support and guidance in today's world. I illuminate how these practices constitute the feminist mentorship model, arguing for more care-oriented relationships among activists.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Motivation

In August 2014, police officer Darren Wilson murdered a young Black man named Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Communities in Ferguson were rightfully outraged, and through grief and anger protested the police force, state-sanctioned violence, and the maintenance of a white supremacist regime in the United States. A new iteration of the movement for racial justice emerged from the response to Michael Brown's murder and to the history of violence against Black people by government-operated military forces. It was in this same month that I arrived on a college campus in Georgetown, Texas, a small town in the most conservative county of the state, just north of Austin, Texas's hub of liberalism. I am a white girl from the border of Texas and Mexico, someone who thought myself aware of how my identity protected me. But the Black Lives Matter movement revealed to me all the systems of oppression and violence of which I had no idea. And on the grounds of my tiny liberal arts college, I received my education in what it means to be a true ally, an engaged community member that throws themselves into the fight for a just world.

The students and professors that I met at my university changed the course of my life. That same August in 2014, I joined Students for Environmental Activism and Knowledge (SEAK), an organization whose history included convincing university administrators to transition the campus energy grid to 100% renewable energy. At the time I joined, the students in SEAK were reconsidering what it means to be an environmentalist in a world where race, class, gender, and religion can all impact people's experiences of life in the same environment. During that year, SEAK shifted its mission towards environmental justice and joined our school's Coalition for Diversity and Social Justice, an umbrella organization that connected all the student

groups working on issues of equity and justice on our campus. Over the next four years, I organized with SEAK and other student groups on issues of sexual assault, protections for undocumented students, environmental justice, and antiracism during the 2016 presidential election. We coordinated protests and marches, crafted policy proposals, facilitated meetings with university administrators–including our unsympathetic president–and built solidarity across student organizations and academic departments.

Sometimes we succeeded in our efforts, pushing the university to release statements of support, adopt new policies, or respond to instances of hate and discrimination with appropriate actions. At other times, we were met with disdain and condescension, most often from our president himself. I personally received numerous emails from our president with messages he wanted me to distribute to other student leaders or asking me to come to his office alone to discuss certain efforts. As we organized against sexism, we experienced it. As we organized against racism, the students of color in the movement experienced it. As we advocated for an adoption of a Zero-Tolerance Policy for sexual assault, assaults continued to occur and go uninvestigated. Our university was under federal investigation by the Department of Justice for mishandling three separate incidents of sexual violence. And still, we organized.

As a young white girl confronted for the first time with my privilege in such visceral ways, I responded by feeling guilty. As a way of coping, I internalized the urgency of completely eradicating discrimination and marginalization in my community despite the clear implausibility of solving such immense issues within a time span as short as four years. I believed in the fights we were waging, and I also personally wanted to solve every problem. It was a naive, self-absorbed, and unsustainable outlook. During those four years, I burned out from organizing many times. The beauty–and downfall–of student organizing is that the summer and winter

breaks often halt all action. For me, these were necessary reprieves from the work when I became so mentally exhausted that I was barely staying afloat in my day-to-day activities. While the culture of support among my peers served as a life raft through these early years of work, it was through one-on-one relationships with older students and professors on campus that I was able to feel the most validated in my experiences of burning out, and to re-energize myself to carry on my role in the movement work each year. Through hearing their own histories in movement work, both on campus and in other settings, I was able to reorient my understanding of my role in the movement. I shifted away from feeling that I needed to carry the weight of movement success on my shoulders and towards an understanding of myself as one activist in an extensive movement story, carrying out work that began before me and would continue after.

In the years after graduating from college, I became involved in more movements, working most directly on political campaigns. Again, it was hard to stay afloat in these environments. Paid organizers like me were expected to work without days off, for more than thirteen hours a day, interacting with the public and receiving both positive and negative feedback. Demeaning relationships with other staff and volunteers took a toll on me while I worked to maintain an optimistic outlook and enough energy to keep completing my daily tasks. And again, it was my one-on-one relationships with other people in these movements that provided me with the care, support, and guidance I needed to sustain myself.

My reflections upon these experiences, of the care that I gave and received, and my attempts to process the harm done to and by me, have helped me to understand why some relationships with other activists were so crucial to my own growth and continued involvement. It was not simply that I had friends in the movement with whom I could commiserate, it was that I received care-oriented mentorship from more experienced activists. These activist elders taught

me skills, offered me new perspectives, and maintained a consistent investment in my wellbeing throughout our movement work and beyond. My mentors helped me learn how to be an effective activist leader and how to prioritize my own health enough to not burn out. They changed my life, and they made this research possible.

Problem Statement + Significance

The moment we are living in is characterized by an interconnected series of deadly crises: climate change, racial and wealth inequality, misogyny, police brutality, and an ongoing pandemic to name a few. In the face of these compounding crises, working in social justice movement spaces can be exhausting, frustrating, and overwhelming. Activists struggle to solve issues that directly affect them while experiencing opposition that can be detrimental to their livelihoods. *Activist burnout*—when the stressors of activist work become debilitating—is a real concern for communities who are engaged in long-term struggles against forms of social or ecological injustice (Erakat & Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019). Social justice movements are often operating in a state of tension, trying to continue their work to achieve the movement's set goals while helping members maintain a level of wellbeing that allows them to continue this work. In order to address the former, it is necessary that movement communities identify and prioritize strategies that help sustain their members' personal capacity for work.

In their research on an ethics of care being intentionally woven into the culture of human rights work, Hernández Cárdenas and Tello Méndez (2017) argue that, as a piece of a larger community ethic of support, collective care "undoubtedly ensures the sustainability of the social movements we belong to" (p. 174). Chaudhary and Dutt (2021) similarly examined the role of an ethics of care in activist work by women of color in the U.S., writing that building a culture of attention to and responsibility for each other "likely sustains local activism" (p. 328). Sustaining

our movements is necessary to successfully transition into a more just world, and the ways that activists practice care can play a vital role in the longevity of social justice movements. Activists need to work within their movements to develop strategies of care–foundational practices that help members maintain their wellbeing, work through hard feelings and experiences, and lean on each other for energy and support. Activist-scholars can aid in this work by identifying and naming the effective strategies of care that have been employed by movements before and that could be adopted by movements going forward.

This positionality of activist-scholar is the role that I am adopting in writing this thesis. As an activist with almost nine years of experience, I can identify and name what practices have helped me feel most cared for and sustained in my work. For me, mentoring relationships have been vital to my activism and thus are the focus of this research. Specifically, this research focuses on feminist mentoring relationships, which are grounded in care ethics and tend more holistically to mentors and mentees, focusing not just on professional development but on personal wellbeing, too. I analyze in this thesis how feminist mentoring relationships can serve activists in the context of sustaining social justice movements—or in other words, supporting a movement's continuity. I build on the definition of social movements offered by Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (2015), who define them as "conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means" (p. 3). I specify social *justice* movements as spaces in which these efforts by ordinary people go towards creating a *more just world*.

As the members of social justice communities work to achieve social changes, they experience challenges and failures, move through intense emotions related to the work and their personal connection to it, and evolve their strategies based on the histories they are learning and

creating. It is critical that these lived histories, personal and collective, are adequately shared with new movement members so that mistakes are not repeated, and so that the ongoing work continues toward its goals rather than having to start anew with each upcoming generation. It is relatedly important that the mental and emotional wellbeing of activists is supported through relationships with other movement members so that burnout does not prevent activists from continuing their work.

Feminist mentoring relationships can serve as one means through which knowledge is transferred between activists, and they can also offer explicit relationships through which movement members can be witnessed and supported in the emotional aspects of their work. In this thesis, I research mentoring relationships through a feminist lens, focusing specifically on how these relationships constitute a *strategy of care*. With this phrasing I suggest that feminist mentoring relationships can be one of many foundational and strategic practices that social justice movements employ to take care of members in the name of sustaining the overall movement. Through a review of existing literature and interviews with activists, I examine how communities within social justice movements are already carrying each other through their work, and more specifically, how establishing feminist mentoring relationships can help to sustain the capacity of movement communities to continue doing their work.

Research Questions

Through this thesis, I answer the following questions: *How do feminist mentoring relationships help sustain social justice movement communities and enable them to achieve social change? What care practices do activists find effective in their efforts to mitigate activist burnout?* The process of identifying the effective strategies of care that social movements have employed and can employ going forward is critical for the potential of movements to succeed in

their ongoing work. As a strategy, feminist mentorship shifts traditional hierarchical models of mentorship towards relationships that emphasize care, reciprocity, and collaborative learning, qualities that I see as connected to each other and to the production of sustainable—enduring—environments within movements.

Through the framing of these research questions, I examine how the specific values of the feminist mentorship model can be applied to relationships within social justice movement communities in order to help create the conditions for the movements' and their members' continuity. In other words, if feminist mentorship is intentionally woven into the relationships within a movement, especially between novice organizers and more seasoned ones, how might the conditions that lead to activist burnout be mitigated or avoided? And what characteristics of feminist mentoring relationships are most helpful?

Answering my research question required me to review existing research on organizing, burnout, and mentorship, and collect new stories from activists about their engagement in mentoring relationships and their experiences with activist burnout. This thesis opens with my own story of activism, burnout, and mentorship because stories are "the primary way we express what we know and who we are," (Kim, 2016, p. 9) and can allow activists like me to effectively express the complex emotional aspects of their work and relationships within social justice movements. They are therefore an important kind of knowledge to share and analyze in my attempt to learn about the experiences and relationships that shape activists' organizing journeys. The collection of stories in this thesis, in conversation with the research into existing literature, paints a full picture of the qualities of feminist mentoring relationships that are most important in social justice movement contexts, shapes my understanding of how to intentionally create space

for these relationships within movements, and provides evidence of the benefits of these relationships to activists and their movements.

Organizing and Movement Visions

In the twenty-first century, organizing leaders and social movement visionaries have shared their ideas about how social justice movements should organize themselves on a large scale. They ask what kind of work activists should be focusing on, what kind of future we should be working towards, and what goals movements should proclaim to the public. While this thesis is not primarily focused on crafting a vision for social justice movements to organize themselves around, it is situated within the conversation of best practices for movements in the twenty-first century. Edward T. Chambers (2003) and Grace Lee Boggs (2012)–two renowned organizing leaders and visionaries–specifically provide context for the kind of social movement vision in which I put forth my argument for adopting strategic practices of care. They are also key players in the legacy of organizing on which I build this thesis.

In his book *Roots for Radicals*, longtime organizer Edward T. Chambers (2003) writes of the lessons he and his fellow organizers learned from decades of work with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). One of the main arguments made by Chambers is that more people need to become involved in public life, engaging in work that is focused on changing societal structures and conditions, and on bringing more justice into the world. Of particular value to this thesis is Chambers' discussion of the relational meeting as a foundational strategy for recruiting people into the work of public life and identifying potential leaders for organizing work. The relational meeting is a strategy for connecting organizers, building partnerships and coalitions, and developing community members as engaged public leaders. Chambers writes that people "must

let go of the illusion of rugged individualism and embrace a relational construct" (p. 142 - 43) to successfully organize for change.

However, Chambers (2003) also argues throughout his book that while there are many personal, emotional connections that people bring to their public work, there should be a distinction between those personal connections to the work and the aspects of people's at-home lives that are not connected to their organizing. The relational work between organizers and volunteers in the IAF model focuses on building public relationships that involve deeply connecting over people's stories and internal selves, but there is a limit to this emphasis on personal connection. Organizers and volunteers might discuss their stories of struggle in the labor force, their immigration journey, or their experiences with police violence, all of which involve deeply felt emotions, personal and generational trauma, and impacts on mental health. But there might not be as much focus on a person's day-to-day feelings about their domestic relationship or their anxiety about a project at work that isn't tied to their organizing efforts. While this model of relationship-building can and certainly has worked for organizers throughout history, it is not the model in which I situate feminist mentorship as a useful strategy for the reproduction of movements. I argue that feminist mentorship in the social justice movement context should incorporate a holistic response to personal wellbeing in relationships. In my experience of movement work, people bring their entire selves to their work, including the effects of minute friendship drama and stress about homework. I see the influence of all of these personal factors on movement work as necessary to address.

Chambers, who served as the executive director of the Industrial Area Foundation for over three decades, explicitly states that IAF does not fall within a social movement model, but is rather focused on organizing on a community scale. In Chambers' view, "you can't sustain

[movements],” and this is an idea that many organizations working towards justice adhere to, following Chambers' assessment that organizers should help communities achieve incremental change over long periods of time. I do not disagree with this last point, but in the current contexts in which activists are seeking to make change, with the urgency of so many overlapping crises, social movements are necessary to more rapidly shift the public consciousness and introduce new visions for a more just future. This is a foundational piece of the context for my research.

Despite the difference in stance from which Chambers writes, what Chambers describes in the relational work of IAF can be viewed as a form of reproductive labor in which relational meetings–one-on-one meetings between leaders of various organizing experiences and backgrounds–serve the purpose of developing reciprocal relationships that allow stronger coalitions to form for the purpose of meeting certain goals. Mutual empowerment also occurs through these meetings, as each participant is better able to understand their position and role within an organizing effort. Thus the strategies he advocates for remain useful within social movements.

Grace Lee Boggs’ (2012) book *The Next American Revolution* more fully addresses the vision of social justice movements in which I am situating this research. Boggs organized for decades in Detroit as part of the worker’s movement and Black liberation movement, working with unions, communities, youth, and educators. In her book, Boggs recounts the decades of organizing work that she’s done, honors the theorists and movement leaders that inspired her, and discusses the lessons she learned from her experiences that she wants to share with a broader audience. One of the main goals of the book, as articulated in her writing, is to pass on the movement histories she has been a part of so that modern movements can learn from them, adapting and evolving their own strategies for the world in which we are currently living. Boggs

writes that the way stories are told about the past "has a lot to do with whether we cut short or advance our evolution as human beings" (p. 79). For "sustainable transformation" (p. 131) to be achieved, Boggs argues that we–movement organizers and leaders–need to receive and internalize knowledge and histories of "many cultures, movements, and traditions" (p. 131). This transference of knowledge, lived experiences, and wisdom is one of the tenets of mentorship, so while Boggs doesn't discuss this relationship model specifically, it is one way in which movement members today can embody her advice and truly learn from their predecessors and each other.

Grace Lee Boggs (2012) is primarily advocating for a vision of movements in which "growing our souls" (p. 133-34) is recognized as vital to creating the just world in which we want to live. She advocates for a stronger incorporation of both love and care into movement cultures and the communities in which movement work takes place. Boggs draws heavily from Martin Luther King Jr.'s concept of the "beloved community" (p. 46), writing that caring for each other outside of our most personal, intimate relationships is a necessity for the precarious world of the twenty-first century. This argument comes from her reflection on the failures of the top-down approaches to revolution that were taken throughout the twentieth century, in which power was taken from one political group by another but was never transferred to the public at large.

As Boggs (2012) says, knowing, honoring, and growing from our histories is an important part of social movement creation and maintenance, and in referring to her writing here–and that of Chambers (2003)–I seek to do that work. The work done by the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Black Panthers, and early iterations of feminist and environmental movements all made it possible for activists today to be able to envision and work towards even greater

levels of justice and equity, and to rebuild institutions based in care rather than exploitation. It is because of the successes and failures, wisdom and insights, stories, and advice of generations of social leaders that I am able to write today about how care might be practiced internally and externally by social movements. It is because of their work that we know today "that there is enough attention, care, resource, and connection for all of us to access belonging, to be in our dignity, and to be safe in community" (brown, 2019, p. 407*).*

Thesis Outline

The remaining chapters of this thesis are organized so that the knowledge and analysis in each chapter builds upon that in the previous chapters. Chapter 2 contains a review of the existing literature relevant to my research questions. This includes literature on models of mentorship, activist burnout, and care within social justice movements. In Chapter 3, I discuss the two theoretical frameworks I use to inform my data collection, care ethics and reproductive labor theory. Each framework is described, and I share how they are utilized in this thesis. Chapter 4 covers my methodology–narrative inquiry–and the methods I used to collect data from participants. I describe my interview process, how I chose my participants, and explore further why stories are important for this thesis. In Chapter 5, I share the results of my interviews and discuss participants' stories in conversation with each other and the literature from Chapters 2 and 3. For clarity, my results are divided into themes of mentoring and caring practices, with the recognition that these practices are deeply intertwined. In the final chapter, I conclude this thesis with a summary, and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my approach to data collection and analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To develop an understanding of the academic context in which my research was carried out, I reviewed the empirical research literature on topics similar to my own. I researched literature on traditional models of mentorship and the evolution of alternative models, activist burnout and techniques to mitigate its effects, the application of care ethics and reproductive labor theory in social justice work, and visions for organizing and social movements. In the following sections, I examine the literature in each of these categories, analyzing the work of prominent scholars in each subject as well as recent complimentary work. I discuss how the scholarship in each section informs my research, as well as what perspectives are missing from these fields that my research will provide. My review of the literature on each of these topics contextualizes my research questions and illuminates how my research compliments and builds upon that which exists.

Alternative Mentorship Models – Feminist Mentorship & Co-mentorship

> "Feminist mentorship lets us know that we are not just imagining the oppressive conditions we witness and experience. It reminds us to value ourselves, our thoughts, our intuitions, and our work in those dark moments when we might ask, 'why even bother?'" (Singh and Mathews, 2019, p. 1717).

To help understand how feminist mentorship might be incorporated into social justice movements, I first looked at the literature on how mentorship can be practiced as a form of care. Through this angle of inquiry, I found articles focusing on models of mentoring relationships that emphasized reciprocity, care, relationship-development, and meeting each participant's needs (Bain et al., 2017; Benishek et al., 2000; Bona et al., 1995; Fahs & Swank, 2020; Godbee & Novotny, 2013; Moss et al., 1999). Bona et al. explain how these values stand in contrast to those of traditional mentoring relationships, or in other words, those which more closely follow a model derived from ancient Greek history and the relationship between Mentor and Odysseus.

The authors describe how this traditional model creates a hierarchy among participants in which "one leads, the other follows" (p. 118), and designates a clear distinction between who is the mentor—knowledge holder—and who is the mentee—student. While these alternative models have long been practiced (though not widely recognized) in the past few decades, scholars have begun to focus on these alternatives in an attempt to break down the hierarchical tradition and explore instead how mentorship can be mutually empowering.

In one of the earliest articles on feminist mentoring, Moss et al. (1999) drew inspiration from their experiences of the masculine and patriarchal culture within the field of geography. This field, according to the authors, has excluded women and others of non-white, non-male identities, and prevented them from progressing through the field with the same ease as white men. The authors argue for a cultivation of feminist mentorship to build "a sense of community cooperation and caring" (p. 421) and expand the inclusivity of the field. In this way, Moss et al. see mentorship as a strategy for working against the homogeneity of their field of geography, helping people of marginalized identities transition successfully into an exclusionary environment.

Moss et al. (1999) suggest strategies for incorporating feminist praxis into mentorship within geography departments, including the suggestion for both mentors and mentees to practice mentorship as a "dialogue" (p. 419) and for mentors to always be aware of "power dynamics" (p. 420) so as not to overexert their relatively higher amount of power as faculty and staff. In other words, mentors and mentees should work against a unidirectional flow of knowledge and resources, instead practicing a dynamic form of mentorship that allows both participants to assert their needs, develop new skills, and obtain resources. Moss et al. do not explicitly discuss care ethics in their alternative model of mentorship, instead discussing feminist

praxis in terms of resisting hegemony within the authors' field. However, the authors do broaden the goal of mentoring relationships to extend beyond teaching novices to model themselves after experienced knowers, incorporating practices that tend more holistically to mentors and mentees lived experiences.

Bona et al. (1995) also wrote an early article on an alternative model of mentorship that draws on feminist values, though the authors write more overtly about involving care in their practice. In their article, Bona et al. explore the emergence of co-mentoring relationships within a course co-facilitated by three instructors. Like Moss et al. (1999), the authors emphasize in their model that knowledge is held by all participants in co-mentoring relationships, pushing against the traditional idea of a hierarchical flow of knowledge between mentor and mentee. In co-mentorship there is no distinction between mentors and mentees–everyone has the opportunity to teach and to learn. Significantly, Bona et al. push back against the idea that mentorship is an impersonal relationship, a hegemonic idea they argue has caused mentoring relationships that are founded in care to go unrecognized by institutions of higher education as mentorship. Based on their experience in a collaborative classroom, the authors craft a model of collective mentorship within a group context that incorporates the feminist values of care and reciprocity and tending to each participant's whole self.

Using a similar co-mentorship model, Bain et al. (2017) draw on the theoretical work of Moss et al. (1999) in their article on feminist mentorship within the neoliberal university. These authors, ranging from undergraduates to graduate students to faculty, use their own university experiences and feminist mentoring praxis to inform their writing, arguing that neoliberal educational institutions are hierarchical and exclusionary towards non-male scholars. Bain et al. push for an incorporation of feminist mentoring and its values of care ethics to help make space

for “and sustain intellectual communities” (p. 593). One of the suggestions offered by the authors on how to form feminist mentoring relationships is to approach them as a “political project of co-learning and reciprocal vulnerability” (p. 605), again shifting away from transactional one-on-one relationships to collective ones. This model is again used by Fahs and Swank (2020), who detail their experience of creating such a space of feminist mentoring within a university in their article “Redefining the Work of Feminist Praxis.” Their feminist research group involved peer mentorship and mentorship across positions in the academy. The experience of helping facilitate this group led Fahs and Swank to conclude that it helped students “build solidarity, enhance their understandings of each other, and develop a support system that [furthered] student resiliency and agency” (p. 254).

Finally, Taveeshi Singh and Tayler Mathews, in their 2019 article about “queer of color feminist co-mentorship” (p. 1702), created a model that expands upon the work of early authors to explicitly address how queer students, students of color, and queer students of color can all significantly be served by feminist mentoring relationships with people who have similar identities and lived experiences. The authors write about their co-mentoring relationship and the mentorship they found through the online feminist archive “Feminist Freedom Warriors” in which other queer people of color have shared stories, experiences, wisdom, and love for readers to receive. Despite this mentorship occurring across technology and often solely through writing, Singh and Mathews clearly articulate its benefits, writing that these are “life-affirming relationships in which we are encouraged to articulate and embody, without fear, multifaceted queer positionalities” (p. 1703) within exclusionary and oppressive institutions.

Throughout the literature on feminist mentorship and co-mentorship, researchers pay special attention to values of reciprocity and mutuality. Diving deeper into these concepts,

several articles offer ways each might be practiced. For example, Bain et al. (2017) suggest practicing reciprocity through "shared trust and self-disclosure" (p. 594), with mentors and mentees being similarly vulnerable, sharing their personal experiences and feelings, and both committing to equal levels of confidentiality and nonjudgement. Through this practice, power can be more equitably shared; no one participant is asked to reveal themselves more than another. Mutuality is explored by Benishek et al. (2000) as mentors and mentees each providing the other with care, empathy, and opportunities for growth. Empowerment is the goal for all parties involved, meaning that both mentors and mentees are able to recognize their own inherent expertise, knowledge and authority. Each participant is aided in understanding how they can use their expertise to further their own goals and meet their own needs. This shifts mentorship away from unidirectional learning, with mentors also recognized as needing room to learn.

In each of these articles, the authors focus on the values woven into the mentoring relationships they discuss, highlighting how co-mentorship and feminist mentorship help break down the traditionally hierarchical, practical-knowledge oriented, exclusionary model of mentorship employed by practitioners. Much of the literature I reviewed focused on mentorship within a group, rather than through one-on-one relationships. However, the values discussed above of reciprocity, shared expertise, mutual transformation, and relationship-development are applicable to one-on-one relationships as well. Further, while the literature on mentoring models is almost universally limited to case studies within universities, the theoretical foundations laid in these studies are detailed and specific enough to be translated across and applied to different contexts. There is a clear gap in the literature of feminist mentoring within social justice movements, which my research will help fill.

Perhaps most importantly, the research detailed above reveals that there is an inherent focus within the feminist mentoring and co-mentoring models on an ethics of care (Bain et al., 2017; Fahs & Swank, 2020; Moss et al., 1999). The benefits of pairing an ethics of care with mentorship are also clearly communicated in the stories relayed in these articles. Bona et al. (1995) discuss the process of empowerment that occurs through co-mentorship, and its emphasis on co-learning and each individual's contributions of knowledge for the benefit of the collective. Moss et al. argue that the creation of spaces for feminist mentorship can help support students of marginalized identities as they attempt to work within a space defined by the identity of a dominant group. Both examples show how feminist mentorship is oriented around care. This consistent foundation of values makes it easy to translate the feminist model of mentorship to a social justice movement context.

Teaching with Care

In this section, I explore how scholars of pedagogy have discussed bringing love and care into the classroom. While this scholarship does not discuss mentorship per se, these authors advocate for similar practices to those in the previous section on alternative mentoring relationships, such as making space for a person's whole self in classroom settings and shifting power dynamics between teachers and students. This section seeks to illuminate how scholars in multiple spaces of knowledge-sharing and learning are thinking about changing traditional hierarchical teaching practices to ones that are more equitable and care-oriented.

Many scholars of pedagogy and teaching have written about bringing an ethos of love into the classroom and the importance of teaching in a way that does not reinforce social domination. While teaching differs from mentoring in many ways–structure and place within an institution, for example–there is overlap in their goals, especially when each is approached with

an emphasis on mutuality, interpersonal transformation, and building relationships. In *The Courage to Teach,* Parker Palmer (1998) reflects on his own decades of teaching experience and his time teaching educators how to improve their teaching practices. Palmer advocates for teaching as a discipline to transition away from placing the teacher at the center of the classroom and seeing them as holding all knowledge and needing to transfer their knowledge to the students. Acknowledging the harm done by how hierarchy has been built into the classroom, Palmer writes with the desire for a shift in accepted pedagogies, arguing that there are more effective ways to transfer and build knowledge in the classroom than those relying on an assumption that teachers alone hold power in academia and that there is no place for emotions, selfhood, or community. Parker argues that students should instead be encouraged to form connections between class curriculum and their personal lives, bringing their understandings and experiences into class discussions.

bell hooks also draws from her years teaching in various universities and colleges to write about the necessity of love and care in the classroom and other educational settings (hooks, 1994; hooks, 2003). In *Teaching to Transgress,* hooks (1994) makes the case for a pedagogy that values the fullness of the identities that students and teachers bring to the classroom, a theory of teaching that is reciprocal and based in a desire for justice. Drawing on Paulo Freire's work on liberatory education, hooks writes about what a truly feminist classroom might look like and what practices would be required to make this possible. This pedagogy, just like the love ethic she writes of in other work, is based in mutuality, respect, and care, and a willingness to both accept the power imbalance of a student-teacher relationship while also empowering students to be engaged in the making and success of the class itself.

hooks' vision mirrors one of Palmer's (1998) central themes in *The Courage to Teach,* which is learning to view the classroom as a "community of truth" (p. 90). In both a community of truth and a feminist classroom, no single person holds all power. Instead, each person's knowledge and learning are embraced, and there is space held for the messiness of collaboration and mutual growth. Critical to the creation of a community of truth is teachers' acceptance of their own subjectivities and the emotional selves they bring into the classroom. This acceptance must also extend to the students, who themselves are influenced by lived experiences and subjectivities, and bring these into spaces of learning. Students would be respected by teachers for having lived experiences that bring new interpretations to class material, and respect would be practiced among students so that each member of the classroom community could feel able to share their own understandings, ask honest questions, and make counter arguments in a productive manner.

In her preface to *Teaching Community,* hooks (2003) describes her vision of a classroom that is "life-sustaining and mindexpanding," where the relationship between student and teacher is not based in power but in "partnership" and "liberating mutuality" (p. xv). In this kind of classroom, students and teachers would both accept responsibility for the learning process and would each actively shape the classroom environment and curriculum. This would result in both students and teachers having more freedom to bring emotions and personality into the classroom, seeing these as additive rather than subtractive to learning. Using this ideal as a foundation for the classroom can help make the space equitable and accessible to all students. Through the application of a love ethic, hooks also describes how we can remove domination from the classroom. Education has long been a setting for reinforcing societal systems of power, but

hooks argues that when love is present, domination will not be. Thus, when love is a foundational practice in the classroom, the liberating mutuality that hooks seeks can be found.

While each of these books is about the classroom and the teacher-student relationship, there are clear parallels to the feminist mentoring relationships described by other authors in this literature review. The teacher-student relationship, like traditional mentorship, has long been centered around the transference of knowledge, but in hooks' (1994; 2003) and Palmer's (1998) visions, this is a reciprocal transfer, though not perfectly equal. There is still an inherent power imbalance between teachers and students; teachers are adults who typically receive years of formal education in their subject areas, while most students are not adults, are early in the process of receiving education, and are not the only decision makers in their lives. However, this imbalance doesn't negate the potential for mutual empowerment. In hooks' view, there is plenty of room for students to have more power–in their lessons and activities, in their community-building, in the timeline of classes–while teachers maintain an ultimate birds-eye view of the class goals.

The presence of love, care, and respect are also foundational to both feminist mentorship and the ideal that hooks (1994; 2003) describes in which education can be a truly empowering process that tends to people's emotional as well as mental selves. Palmer (1998) makes a similar case in his writing, arguing for a recognition and acceptance of the whole selves that teachers and students bring to the classroom, as well as for the removal of the harsh divide between the two. The breakdown of hierarchy and the process of empowerment are essential to feminist mentorship, too. In hierarchical mentoring relationships, knowledge transference is key, with mentors passing on knowledge gained through their experiences to mentees. In a reciprocal

version of this, mentors are also empowered by what they can learn from mentees' lived experiences, and none of this knowledge is disconnected from each person's emotional self.

Social Justice Movements – Care, Community, and Burnout

The two sections above on feminist mentorship and teaching with care are largely situated within an academic context, focusing on relationships within classrooms and university departments. However, the same values of care and community have been discussed in literature on social justice movements, especially that on activist burnout and the emotional labor of activism (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Jasper, 1998; Porter, 2017; Rodgers, 2010; Syedullah & Leiner, 2021). I begin this section by discussing research on the emotional work of movements and the phenomena of activist burnout. I then review the research on how activists can and do practice care in their social movements. As a whole, this body of literature concludes that the emotional work that activists do is necessary to the growth and success of movements but is not tended to enough by activists. In other words, movements need to dedicate more time and energy to activists' emotional needs in order to both help their movements grow and help sustain individual members.

Emotions in Activism

James M. Jasper's (1998) article, "The Emotions of Protest," is often cited in literature on navigating the emotional aspects of activism, as it is one of the earliest academic articles written on how emotions can both motivate and drain activists. Emotions, according to Jasper, are inextricably tied to the initial motivations of activists to join or create social movements. Acknowledging and understanding the role that emotions play in social movements is an important step in understanding why people both commit to and desert activist work. Emotions can also help activists create ties to both the movement's work and community, helping them

maintain their involvement. Jasper writes that emotions are what push us into taking action, what bond us to those with whom we take action, and can be what overwhelm and prevent us from continuing to take action. Learning how to wield emotions as a means of growing a movement is important, but so is learning how to process those emotions so that they don't lead to burnout.

Activist burnout is a debilitating condition caused by both the high-stakes, high-stress conditions of activist work (in which organizers are generally working against some sort of injustice) and by the lack of recognition within movements of each other's emotional deterioration (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Erakat & Gorski, 2019; Rodgers, 2010). Chen and Gorski write extensively about the emotional toll that activists take in their work and how an absence of care within a difficult organizing environment can lead to "activist burnout" (p. 366). For their article "Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists," Chen and Gorski interviewed 22 activists working on social justice and human rights issues, asking questions about the activists' experiences of burnout and their perceptions of the causes and symptoms of this condition. Through these interviews Chen and Gorski were able to identify the effects of activist burnout on the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of activists, as well as some of the main causes of the condition within movements. Of the symptoms experienced, many of the participants discussed exhaustion, insomnia, and the development of illnesses, as well as an onset of anxiety and depression. The causes of activist burnout identified by the authors were interpersonal relationship issues, personal emotional sensitivities, and most notably, "a lack of attention to burnout and self-care in their activist communities" (p. 377). The results of their interviews led Chen and Gorski to recommend that social justice organizations develop more awareness of members' risk of burnout and need for self-care.

Kathleen Rodgers' (2010) work mirrors that of Chen and Gorski (2015), providing further support for the argument that organizations and movements need to tend more intentionally to member's emotional selves. Rodgers conducted a similar study on the emotional toll of social justice and human rights work, focusing specifically on the experiences of paid organizers for Amnesty International. Through her research, Rodgers identified how a culture of selflessness and a disregard for the emotionality of the work contributed to a high turnover rate within the organization. In the context of her study, it was not culturally accepted to display the difficult feelings associated with the work being conducted by activists. There was thus no space within the organization for employees to help support each other through their difficult emotional experiences. Most notably, Rodgers dissects the ways that the organization's culture and the modeling of certain behaviors by managers contributed to an unsustainable expectation that employees place the needs of victims and Amnesty's members above their own needs, leading employees to bury their negative emotions rather than work through them.

Community and Self-Care in Movements

Other research on the emotional work of activists in social movements focuses on how members help sustain each other's involvement in their movement's work. The authors of this literature write about the importance of developing healthy relationships among activists; conducting internal emotional work as a way to care for oneself; and drawing on emotions as a way to motivate and encourage activists' participation. Each of these strategies, and the ways that they are beneficial to activists, is discussed in the review below.

Forming healthy, open, and lasting relationships among activists is one of the key ways that the authors in this section discuss practicing care. In her article on the lingering commitment of radical feminists to the feminist movement, Nancy Whittier (2015) writes about how the

relationships formed between women during their early involvement in feminist activism are what have helped women "sustain commitment to feminist politics and collective identity" (p. 124). These relationships, continuing decades after their formation, have allowed feminists to maintain a sense of support for their beliefs and actions. Whittier describes these relationships as "an important source of strength" (p. 124) for the feminists to pull from in their ongoing work.

Based on their experiences navigating burnout, Syedullah and Leiner (2021) argue for the centering of interconnectedness and interdependence within movement communities as a means of carrying each other through difficult feelings and experiences. Syedullah and Leiner advise activists to "fuse" (p. 27) themselves together, forming "right relationships" (p. 36) with each other. In these relationships, activists can be aided in recognizing their own internalized harmful practices, their own needs, and their own connections to others around the goals of their work.

Sydellulah and Leiner (2021) reflect in their article on their anti-racist organizing efforts during the coronavirus pandemic, and on the immense emotional toll that the combination of crises took on their mental and physical health. As isolation continued to be recommended as a best practice, the authors navigated the concurrent tension of needing to be connected to others in times of crisis, especially as protests and other activist activities began taking place during an upsurgence in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Leiner specifically writes about their experience with burnout from their activist work, in which they worked long, full days, and unconsciously reproduced white supremacist patterns of overwork and self-centering. Focusing on interdependence, rather than centering oneself, would mean recognizing that no single activist is carrying the movement or its work. Instead, it is the interconnectedness of activists–fusing their skills, worldviews, knowledge, and desires–that movements need. When this interconnectedness, or fusion, is recognized and valued, no single activist needs to hold the

weight of the movement on their shoulders; each person can step back and take time to recharge because a web of activists remains to continue working.

While Syedullah and Leiner (2021) don't use the phrase "ethics of care" in their discussion, they do advocate for "mutually reinforced practices of resilience," (p. 26), such as helping each other move through feelings of despair and fear in order to get to the core motivations we each have for engaging in activism in the first place. This concept mirrors the practices of emotional labor discussed by other authors. Nina Porter (2017) and Felipe Santos (2020) both discuss the critical importance of care work in sustaining social justice movements, work that tends to the emotionality and wellbeing of movement members and the communities they work with. In his article, Santos analyzes the strategies of The Platform of Those Affected by Mortgages (PAH), an organization in Spain that formed in response to the 2009 housing bubble. Santos specifically draws attention to how care work helps create internal solidarity among members of the organization and external solidarity with members of the public for and with whom the work is conducted. Santos identified three forms of "care work" (p. 126)—emotional, identity, and participatory—that aided in building solidarity.

In Santos' (2020) research, emotional work involved members igniting and processing emotions among themselves for the sake of maintaining motivation and building trust. This work takes place through collective check-ins and discussions about organization activities, such as activists in PAH discussing the housing crisis in Spain and thus coming to recognize their personal and collective empathy towards those affected. Identity work focused on building members' self-efficacy and confidence so that the possibility of achieving goals could feel real. Showing gratitude and sharing affirmations with each other is one way this occurred in PAH. And finally, participatory care work centered around making participation in activities as

accessible as possible. This work ranged from facilitating transportation options to conducting group training sessions. Santos argues that each of these forms of care work is critical to building a successful social movement.

For their thesis, Porter (2017) similarly researched the forms of emotional work that help sustain and reproduce social movements, conducting interviews with activists to foster a general understanding of the role of emotional work rather than focusing on a single organization or movement. From these interviews and their reflections on their own experiences as an activist, Porter was able to identify categories of the internal and external emotional work that activists do to sustain their own and others' engagement. External emotional work is that which fosters relationships between activists, including the practices of "creating and holding emotional space" (p. 62) and "seeing people as whole and tending to that wholeness" (p. 62). Internal emotional work is focused on the self, including practicing "persistence and resilience" (p. 57) and "reflection and accountability" (p. 59). Notably, each of these practices align with the values, practices, and goals of feminist mentoring relationships which encourage growth and transformation on both personal and relational levels.

Activist and writer adrienne maree brown (2019) brings together all of the ways that emotions and care-related needs play into activists' work and lives in her book, *Pleasure Activism*. In this book, brown zooms out to the larger hegemonic ideas in the West that inform how care is and isn't practiced in movements. Western, capitalist society, she writes, teaches people that our personhood, "our health…our safety…our lives don't matter" (p. 59), and thus to care for ourselves is not an important practice. brown–referring to the political care work of Audre Lorde–encourages activists instead to see community and self-care "as political resistance" (p. 59). In other words, brown argues, activism should feel good, should bring us joy,

and should help us build community. Mirroring the advice of Syedullah and Leiner (2021), brown writes that we should form "liberated relationships" (p. 407) which are based on an understanding that there are enough resources to share with everyone, including emotional resources. Activists should form these relationships with each other, within movements, as a means of nourishing themselves and modeling the kind of society they are working to create.

Overall, the discussions of emotions and burnout found in the research literature on social justice movements make the case for attention to be paid to the role of strategies of care in sustaining movements. In other words, it matters how care is practiced externally between movement members and communities, and internally with our own selves. While the literature above does not necessarily directly reference mentorship as a strategy for mitigating burnout or tending to emotions, articles such as Chen and Gorski's (2015) and Rodger's (2010) point to the harm done to movements and individual activists when there are not dedicated spaces for collective emotional processing or mutual support within a movement. Additionally, the research of Syedullah and Leiner (2021), Porter (2017), and Santos (2020) convey the benefits experienced by movements and individual activists when strategies of care are intentionally woven into the foundations of a movement's work.

Concluding Thoughts

The literature reviewed above connects the various contexts of my research. Authors who write about non-traditional mentoring relationships argue for embedding care values into mentorship, exploring how these relationships can be nourishing within academia (Bain et al., 2017; Benishek et al., 2000; Bona et al., 1995; Fahs & Swank, 2020; Godbee & Novotny, 2013; Moss et al., 1999). Parker Palmer (1998) and bell hooks (1994; 2003) use their own teaching experiences to envision new ways of organizing the classroom to reduce the power imbalance

between teacher and students, and to make more room for love, emotionality, and personhood in education. Social movement scholars have explored how emotions can both help and hinder activists, advocating for more attention to be paid to the wellbeing of activists and their emotional needs (brown, 2019; Chen & Gorski, 2015; Jasper, 1998; Porter, 2017; Rodgers, 2010; Syedullah & Leiner, 2021). Across all of this scholarship is a call for more care.

In conversation, the research in these sections provides a full context for my argument for the incorporation of feminist mentorship practices into social justice movements. My research additionally bridges the gap between the literature on feminist mentorship and the literature on burnout and care in social movements, explicitly placing feminist mentoring relationships within the context of social justice movements and arguing for their use as a means of sustaining these movements and their members. The mentorship and education literature has shown how care-oriented relationships help sustain people's wellbeing and have advocated for new ways of sharing knowledge. Bringing this literature into the realm of social movements will open the conversation of how mentorship might serve as a means of practicing care among activists. adrienne maree brown (2019) tells us that all movements, across history, have been composed of relationships. Movements are possible because people come together with similar visions, desires, and beliefs. As activists, we need to think about the relationships that are forming our movements. How can they be sustainable? How can we serve each other?

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frame

For my theoretical frame I am using feminist theory with a primary focus on an ethics of care. I will also draw on reproductive labor theory. Feminism as a movement is described by bell hooks (2000) as working to "to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). The feminist movement, and the theory work that accompanies it, is not simply about creating equality between an imagined binary of men and women. Rather, feminism is a deeper, broader movement that aims to end all oppression on the basis of sex, which intersects with race, class, gender, and more.

Feminist theory emerged from the feminist social movement as a way of organizing feminist ethics, understanding the historical contexts that make feminism necessary, and transforming the production and dissemination of knowledge. Care ethics is a feminist theory that is central to this thesis, as my research is on how feminist mentorship can serve as a strategy of care. I will also utilize the feminist theory of reproductive labor to discuss the significance of the knowledge transference that happens in mentoring relationships and the value of emotional labor in activist work. Both care ethics and reproductive labor are employed by feminists to explain the value of labor traditionally performed by women, women's socialization and development, and the oppressive devaluing of women's contributions to society (Federici, 2012; Gilligan, 1982; Merchant, 2005; Noddings, [1984] 2013).

Ethics of Care

Care ethics was borne from feminist theory in part as a response to the ways in which care and care work have long been undervalued and overlooked as the domain of women, with feminists seeking instead to argue for their critical importance in societal functioning (Gilligan, 1982; Lawson, 2007; Noddings, [1984] 2013; Tronto, 1993). Additionally, early theorists wrote

about an ethics of care as a way to push back against the hegemonic view in the West that ethics were based in rational judgment, and that moral superiority was a developmental stage only accessible to some (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, [1984] 2013). Feminist theorists instead argue that there is value in an ethic that centers around the development and maintenance of relationships.

Carol Gilligan (1982) is cited as one of the earliest proponents of an ethics of care, with research exploring how this ethic may be developed in women in response to their socialization as nurturers and their experiences of oppression in hierarchical, patriarchal relationships. Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice,* was written in part as a response to the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, a psychologist who conducted research with boys in the Chicago school system. Kohlberg theorized that morality is developed in stages, and that the influencing factor in choosing to be moral is a sense of justice, or right versus wrong (Gilligan, 1982). In response to his findings, Gilligan conducted research with school-aged girls, mostly white, using her research to argue that there is more than one path towards a moral disposition and that her female participants' ethics were based on a desire to strengthen and sustain relationships, rather than achieve justice. For Gilligan, this ethics of care runs parallel to, rather than replaces, Kohlberg's ethic of justice. She writes that an ethic of care values interpersonal dynamics and envisions "the ideals of human relationship" (p. 63) as inclusion, equality, and responsiveness. Gilligan elaborates that an orientation towards care can shift people's focus away from a basic moral imperative to not do harm and toward an intention "to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection" (p. 149).

Nel Noddings ([1984] 2013), another early theorist of care ethics, argues in her book, *Caring,* that the ethic described by Carol Gilligan (1982) is formed out of a natural inclination towards care that some people have (specifically women who are mothers). This instinct to care

is the basis from which the ethical model she describes can emerge, in which people can choose to be moral based on their "fundamental and natural desire to be and to remain related" (p. 83). In choosing to care for another, one practices an ethic based in empathy for other people and a belief in a "vision of best self" (p. 80). This "best self" is informed by each person's memories of "caring and being cared-for" (p. 94), creating the desire to provide such experiences for the person with whom they are in relationship. For Noddings, the "one-caring" (p. 4) takes on this role because of their ability to connect to how the person who is "cared-for" (p. 4) feels, to collaboratively discern what the cared-for needs, and to act upon that information in order to treat the cared-for with the same tenderness with which they, the one-caring, would want to be treated. This process of attentiveness, empathizing, and acting brings the one-caring and the cared-for into more intimate relationships.

While Noddings ([1984] 2013) usefully builds upon Gilligan's (1982) original research on care as an ethical model, she does so from an essentialist position that women–who she views as a category of cisgender people both biologically capable of motherhood and interested in this role–are more naturally able to care for others because of their innate inclination to care for their children. Men, on the other hand, must learn from women's natural caring how to be ethically caring. While Noddings does make a few attempts to assert that she is not arguing that men are incapable of care, or that woman is a universal concept, she undermines these claims throughout the book by continuing to purport that we should understand natural care through the mother-child relationship, which she sees as always more emotional and relational than that of the father and child. With few exceptions, Noddings assigns she/her pronouns to the one-caring and he/him pronouns to the cared-for, reinforcing the idea that women are the gender naturally able to care.

Later on in the 1990s, Carol Gilligan, Jill Mclean Taylor, and Amy M. Sullivan (1997) would expand upon Gilligan's (1982) original work to focus on working-class girls and the effects of their experiences with race and class on their development of relationships. Recognizing the limited positionality of Gilligan's initial work, the authors sought to build a body of research on development that was more inclusive of the different intersecting identities of young girls. Other feminist theorists also problematized the early positions that both Gilligan and Noddings ([1984] 2013) held on care ethics, noting their limited positionality as white academic women and that of their white research participants (Tronto, 1993). Joan C. Tronto, writing before Gilligan expanded her own work, critiques Gilligan for responding to Lawrence Kohlberg's research on boys by exclusively researching girls, reinforcing a binary between these two genders. Tronto also draws attention to Gilligan's initial focus on mostly middle-class, white girls in her research, which detrimentally overlooks the idea that care ethics may be developed in other minoritized groups. However, this does not negate the importance of care ethics, or the descriptions of care that Noddings and Gilligan provide. Tronto's response to these original limitations is to analyze care ethics as a political strategy. Tronto's definition of care similarly involves relationships between the self and others and requires that action is taken for care to truly exist. However, she rejects the idea that care is naturally inherent in women and can be used to raise their position in society simply by calling attention to its value. Instead, care ethics are put forth by Tronto as a necessary political foundation for the creation of truly representative democracies in which policies are created and implemented with a primary focus on the well-being of the populace. This use of care is important to later research on care as a strategy for survival and collective power (Ahmed, 2017; Chaudhary and Dutt, 2021).

bell hooks, a prominent Black feminist scholar and author, approaches a relational ethic from a different angle, writing prodigiously about an ethic of love that prioritizes care, compassion, and empathy in our relationships and work (hooks, 1994; hooks, 2000; hooks, 2003). In her book *All About Love*, hooks (2000) comments on the absence of love in Western culture and its replacement with addiction, domination, and cynicism in patriarchal societies. hooks' argument for a return to a love ethic is not quite the same as the argument for care ethics made by other feminist authors in this framework, but many similar qualities are present, such as the need for our relationships to be founded in compassion, radical honesty, mutuality, and investment in one another's growth. Care is not synonymous with love in this ethic, but it is necessarily present for a love ethic to exist.

With a similar political view to Tronto's (1993), hooks (2000) writes that the history of social movements has shown us what communities can look like when oriented towards love (and by extension, towards care, respect, and mutuality). By pushing for policies that would give shelter and life-affirming work to all people, and those that would improve the education and healthcare systems, social movements have helped people envision a world rooted in love. When love is present, argues hooks, domination cannot be. Grounding our work and relationships in a love ethic, then, helps us prevent domination from informing and ruling our lives.

Literature on care ethics in the 2000s tended to follow the paths of Joan C. Tronto (1993) and bell hooks (2000) more than that of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings ([1984] 2013), focusing more on care as a strategic ethical foundation for building an equitable society rather than as a unique path that women take in their psychological and moral development (Chaudhary and Dutt, 2021; Lawson, 2007). In her research on care ethics in the field of geography, Victoria Lawson writes that an ethics of care is based in a "social ontology of connection" (p. 3), which

emphasizes building trusting relationships. It is important to foreground this ethic in teaching and academic work, Lawson argues, because governments in the U.S. have been routinely chipping away at social support systems, leaving communities to organize care for themselves. The required response from disciplines such as geography is to identify how this removal of structural care has forced people to reorganize their environment and place. Lawson writes that care ethics is not meant to be an abstract concept, but should rather be constantly practiced and grounded in lived experience. Employing an ethics of care requires being situationally grounded so that we may understand what kind of care is needed and why in a given context. In other words, effectively building relationships based in trust and reciprocity requires understanding any present barriers to equity, connection, and mutuality, and the histories that created those barriers.

Similarly, in their article on the use of care by women of color activists in the U.S., Chaudhary and Dutt (2021) define an ethic of care as a moral approach that is centered around investment in and attention to relationships. Chaudhary and Dutt specifically analyze the relationship between care ethics and the development of oppositional consciousness in women of color activists, proposing the concept of a "liberatory ethics of care" (p. 328) to frame how relationships are both necessary to activism and an outcome of activist work. Applied to their research, the authors argue that care ethics can "foster a sense of connection and togetherness among activists to inform and sustain their critical action" (p. 329). For activists who are already marginalized and disenfranchised by their race and gender, the authors advocate that this approach to activism helps women of color activists feel empowered, supported, and motivated by each other.

While care ethics first emerged from research on cognitive development, human psychology, and morality, contemporary applications of the theory expand upon these origins to focus more on the normative aspects of care. The cognitive development research focused on how a person's environment and experiences (and biologically determined sex) may lead them to develop the capacity to care and prioritize care in decision-making (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, [1984] 2013). The normative approach differs in describing an ethics of care as a collection of values that can be applied to any relationships and used in any environment (Chaudhary and Dutt, 2021; Lawson, 2007; Tronto, 1993). It is this normative application that makes care ethics useful for my research, and I will be drawing on the values embedded in this theory in my analysis of feminist mentoring as strategy of care. The emphasis on fully showing up to relationships—in both presence and attention—is crucial to my study because feminist mentorship seeks to recognize the wholeness of both mentor and mentee, asking each person to tend to each other's emotions and lived experiences (Bona et al., 1995; Moss et al., 1999). Care ethics also advocate for relationship-building as a method of sustaining people, a strategy which I argue can be carried out in social justice movements by intentional, one-on-one feminist mentoring relationships to which participants bring a mutual understanding of the goals and values embedded within the model.

This framework further aligns with my thesis because the literature on sustaining activists' involvement in social movements already focuses on relationships of care within movement communities (Chaudhary & Dutt, 2021; Gorski et al., 2019; Porter, 2017; Santos, 2020; Syedullah & Leiner, 2021). There similarly exists a precedent in social movement research of scholars using an ethics of care to talk about emotional labor performed within social justice movements (Chaudhary & Dutt, 2021; Hernández Cárdenas & Tello Méndez, 2017; Montes &

Paris Pombo, 2019). Further, I am identifying feminist mentorship as a *strategy of care* that employs the *values* of an ethics of care, and the literature on feminist mentorship highlights the importance of care in discussing the values of this specific model of mentorship (Bona et al., 1995; Fahs & Swank, 2020; Moss et al., 1999).

Reproductive Labor

Reproductive labor theory similarly has its historical roots in feminist theory and feminists' attempts to increase the social and economic value of work traditionally relegated to women (Federici, 2008; Merchant, 2005). In her book *Radical Ecology*, Carolyn Merchant discusses the history of ecofeminism and its argument that, in the same way that ecological systems sustain and perpetuate life, women have been assigned roles that sustain and perpetuate life within social systems. From this attempt to assert the legitimacy of this labor traditionally performed by women in relation to the reproduction of life comes the idea of "reproductive labor" (p. 211). According to Merchant, this represents both the "intergenerational biological reproduction of humans and other species and the intragenerational reproduction of daily life" (p. 211). In other words, this labor includes both the literal birthing of children as well as any labor that involves the sustainability of a community, the regeneration of land for cultivation, and the raising and teaching of children.

Sylvia Federici (2008; 2012), a leading scholar on reproductive labor, similarly writes about reproduction as it extends beyond childbirth. Discussing the importance of reproductive labor as a concept, she uses this theory to redefine what constitutes work in many of her writings and speeches. In a 2008 talk on the evolution of work under capitalism, Federici discusses the history of feminist theory on the origins of sexist oppression and the view that patriarchal hierarchy "[stems] from [an] unequal division of labor forcing women to work for the

reproduction of the working class" (n.p.). In the same talk, Federici defines reproductive labor as "the work that produces and reproduces labor power" (n.p.), critiquing the Marxist theorists who discuss labor under capitalism without acknowledging the work historically assigned to women and people of color that is devalued to allow capital accumulation.

Federici (2008; 2012) documents how the identities of the people relegated to perform reproductive labor have helped a capitalist, racist, patriarchal society to devalue reproduction. Reproductive labor, most specifically childcare, elder care, and domestic work, has not only been historically performed by women, but by people of all marginalized genders, and predominantly by people of color. This goes hand-in-hand with its devaluation. In her thesis on how emotional work serves as a form of reproductive labor, Nina Porter (2017) similarly highlights how this work has long been "undervalued (and often unpaid or underpaid)" (p. 10) in order to contribute to the capital accumulation of the people with the most economic power. Resituating this theory in the present, Porter argues that the ongoing association of this work with women and people of color can cause even social movements to "recreate these patriarchal and white-supremacist dynamics" (p. 11) of placing more value on the action-based work of activists than on the work of "supporting community members emotionally" (p. 11).

Federici (2008; 2012), Merchant (2005), and Porter (2017) each argue that the feminist movement needs to make reproductive labor both visible and valued. Federici writes that the daily tasks done by marginalized people in Western society–women, people of color, immigrants–are the locus through which we can "learn to reconstruct the world as a space of nurturing, creativity, and care" (p. 14). The consequence of society not recognizing reproduction as essential work has been the defunding of social services that support the cost of child and elder care, health care, and education. Without sufficient financial and structural support from

governments, an increase in the amount of work and a decrease in the conditions of work have been experienced by those already marginalized members of our communities who are relegated to performing care work, worsening their quality of life. Recognizing reproductive labor as essential work for the functioning of society is a necessary step to improving the societal standings and working conditions of those who perform the bulk of this labor.

It is the intragenerational component brought forth by Merchant (2005) that aligns with some of the work of feminist mentoring relationships. Situating oneself within the perpetually unfolding history of a movement's work is an important practice for activists who may otherwise feel the full responsibility of completely eradicating an issue of social injustice. This feeling of sole responsibility can create an unsustainable amount of pressure on oneself to achieve unrealistic goals. Porter's (2017) discussion on the historical devaluing of emotional work as reproductive labor makes clear how important it is to recognize the supporting and caring work of activists as important and valuable labor within social justice movements. Feminist mentorship can aid in the transference of stories that help contextualize the moment of a movement in which an activist is working, helping support activists in creating attainable goals that they then work to achieve. These relationships can also create space for care to be practiced, for activists to grow, and thus for a movement's culture to be reproduced.

Sylvia Federici (2008) argues that "no movement can survive unless it is concerned with the reproduction of its members" (n.p.). The identification and prioritization of care-oriented, reproductive strategies within social justice movements is a part of each movements' sustainability. Histories, lessons, and strategies should be passed through generations to ensure that a culture can continue to survive. Through the work that allows individual members to learn and be supported–and thus sustained–comes the possibility of collective longevity. And through

the reproduction of the collective comes the possibility for movements to achieve their long-term goals.

Applications of Theoretical Frames

This thesis uses care ethics and reproductive labor theory to illuminate the benefits of feminist mentorship as a strategy of care for social justice movements. In addition to providing a lens through which to study this model of mentorship, these theoretical frames inform the processes of data collection and analysis in this thesis. In the semi-structured interviews conducted with activists, I wrote guiding questions that seek to understand how care is being practiced, received, given, and experienced by activists within social movements. These questions are framed to provide an understanding of how an ethics of care may already be informing relationships among activists within organizations and collectives.

I also pose questions to activists about how they have learned to organize, who taught them the skills they have been using, and how they have mentored or been mentored by others throughout their activist work. These questions are focused on how movements are or are not currently reproducing themselves, and how activists currently practice skill, knowledge, and history transference. I am also seeking to understand through these questions whether this type of relationship—oriented around reproduction—is seen by activists as necessary or valuable, and whether this type of work is currently acknowledged within organizations and collectives.

By using these frames in my data analysis, I present the stories of care and reproduction shared by participants through a lens that makes care work and reproductive labor visible, highlights their significance, and valorizes those who perform this labor. Analyzing data through these frames also helps to highlight how social justice movements can unintentionally embody

the hegemony of white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist ideology which devalue care, reproduction, and those who perform this work.

Chapter 4: Methodology & Methods

In this chapter I provide an overview of my research design process and the steps I took to collect my data. I also explain how I use narrative inquiry as the methodology for my research. I describe my recruitment process for participants and provide a general overview of the participants' demographics that were identified during each interview. Some participants mentioned racial and gender identity as important to their activism while others named their sexuality or previous careers as influences on how they participate in social justice movements. These aspects of their identities were noted as influential to the participants' stories and experiences. I then explain my analysis process and how my methodology and theoretical frame both influenced how I analyzed my data and identified important themes. Lastly, I discuss the assumptions, ethical considerations, and limitations of my research project, including the specific limitations of my methods and the influence of my personal subjectivity. I conclude by suggesting how further research may build upon the data and conclusions of this thesis.

Narrative Inquiry - Lived Experience as Knowledge

The methodological approach I used for my thesis is narrative inquiry. According to Lorrie Blair (2016), a narrative approach takes the view that "[k]nowledge is created through listening to and shaping experience" (p. 58). With this value at its core, Blair writes, narrative inquiry uses stories from research participants to gather insights and information that help provide answers to the research questions. In their book *Narrative Inquiry,* Clandinin and Connelly (2000) draw heavily on the academic work of philosopher John Dewey, who theorized about experience. They write that his work is an "imaginative touchstone for reminding us that in our work, the answer to the question, Why narrative? is, Because experience" (p. 50). Narrative, according to each of these authors, is a way that humans organize and understand their

experiences. In other words, narrative inquiry is an effective way of studying experience because it is a means of both sharing one's experience and interpreting it. This idea is key to my data collection. I did not seek to determine a universal truth about activism, burnout, or feminist mentorship. Fontana and Frey (1998) write that the "goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding" (pg. 60, emphasis in original). Thus by using narrative inquiry to inform my data analysis, I sought to understand people's *experiences* of being an activist, their *experiences* of care and mentorship, and their *experiences* of burnout, and thus the relationship and intersectionality between them all.

Narrative inquiry also offers space for the complexity of lived experiences that are shared by research participants. Jeong-Hee Kim (2016) writes that qualitative approaches to research, such as narrative inquiry, formed in response to the limitations perceived by researchers of the positivist view of knowledge-creation long employed in the natural sciences. Narrative inquiry, in contrast to a positivist approach, makes room for "rich nuances of meaning in emplotted stories" (p. 11) which can then be analyzed to help researchers understand the transformative power of certain moments, relationships, and experiences of participants. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that stories bridge "the generic demands of science with the personal, practical, concreate demands of living" (p. 8), helping us to understand phenomena through different forms of data. Christine K. Lemley (2006) refers to this quality of narrative inquiry, writing that this methodology is grounded in the belief that there is no "one truth" (p. 72), and that "storytelling becomes an act of resistance against a dominant paradigm of rationality" (p. 72).Kim (2016) further writes that researchers who use this methodology seek to "honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental" (p. 18) rather than as a straightforward, iterative process in which an event is experienced and its lessons immediately internalized. As one goal of

my research is to help make space for activists to process their experiences, and for both me and my participants to learn from them, this foundational assumption of learning as a complicated, ongoing process serves to helpfully frame the positive aspects of my data collection process.

Because narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that seeks to produce knowledge through storytelling and interpreting, the process of how research gets qualified as valid necessarily differs. In quantitative scientific research, numerical information is most typically used to show why certain results should be considered valid. In qualitative research, and specifically with narrative inquiry, this is not exactly the case. While the frequency with which a theme was found in my data helped me identify what themes were important, how I categorized data within a certain theme had nothing to do with numbers. In fact, some themes that were pulled out through the analysis process were unique in their appearances in a single interview, but were clearly important and transformative to the participant sharing. Kim (2016) writes that qualitative research "focuses on understanding human action through interpretation" (p. 4). With narrative inquiry specifically, stories are contextualized by the identity of the storyteller, their history and other experiences, and worldview. Stories are valid data when they are utilized as a way of processing and understanding a participant's experience, perspective, or ideas about a certain topic.

Demographics

I interviewed nine activists for this thesis who varied in race, gender, sexuality, and age. To determine what constitutes an "activist," I used adrienne maree brown's (2019) definition from her book, *Pleasure Activism,* in which she writes that "[a]ctivism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society" (p. 13). An activist is thus anyone who takes part in

these efforts. Participants were asked to identify aspects of their social identity that they felt played an important role on how they performed activism and which movements they engaged in. The following list describes aspects of each participant's identity that were brought up during their interview.

- Amelie: white; paid organizer; woman; queer; 30s
- Karen: white; student; former paid organizer; woman; lesbian; 20s
- Finn: white; former paid organizer; man
- Sarah: white; teacher; unpaid activist; woman; 30s
- Rosey: Black; former teacher; paid organizer; woman
- Zimran: Black; paid organizer; 30s
- Gabriel: Latine; student; unpaid organizer; genderqueer; queer; 20s
- Theresa: white; Jewish; lesbian; 70s
- Carlos: Latine; professor; man; 50s

Diversity in identity was important to me in gathering my participants because of the ways that identity can influence activists' experiences and challenges in social justice work. In their 2019 article on activist burnout in antiracist work, Erakat and Gorski highlight that the causes and effects of burnout are inequitably experienced among activists, especially across differences in race and gender. For women activists, there is an additional layer of stress from heightened "public ridicule and invalidation" (p. 785), while activists of color face "intensified hostilities in response to their activism" (p. 785). Finally, the social justice movements that interviewees participated in included focuses on reproductive justice, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, feminism, anti-globalism, anticapitalism, public education and voting access. Differences in experience with certain movements were also important to this research so that any

conclusions drawn from the data would not be limited to specific realms within social justice movement work.

Basing my recruitment strategy in organizing tactics, I used a combination of direct outreach and networking to find participants. Direct outreach included emails and direct messages on social media to different organizations' publicly available accounts. Organizations were selected based on location (in Arizona), availability of contact information (a collective email address and/or Instagram account), and on mission statements (the inclusion of activism and social justice in its description). Networking included emailing an alumni group of a political campaign I worked for, asking activist friends for references, and making connections through members of my thesis committee. I also directly approached activists at a pro-abortion rally I attended in October 2021.

Throughout the data collection process, it was also necessary for me to be conscious of the labor that I was asking for from activists of marginalized identities. To compensate for their time, each participant was offered a $25 Visa gift card (two participants refused this compensation). I also traveled to the city in which each participant lived, reserving meeting spaces as close as possible to the general location of each participant. This limited the amount of time that each person would need to carve out from their day to participate in the interview.

Method

To gain approval for this research project, I submitted application materials to Northern Arizona University's Institutional Review Board in which I explained the scope, purpose, and design of the study. I submitted a written consent form as part of this application and was approved for my study. After conducting three interviews, I amended the application to include that I would produce a publicly accessible zine as part of my attempt to make this thesis useful

for activists (the zine's significance is discussed in the following section). I added a statement to my consent form so that participants could agree to portions of their interviews being copied into a zine for distribution. This amendment was approved, and I had my three previous participants sign the new consent forms in addition to all further participants.

In order to gather stories from my participants and understand their experiences with mentorship, care, and burnout in activism, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews ranging from 42 minutes to 77 minutes. I prepared an outline of questions for these interviews to help guide the conversations and make sure important topics were discussed. For the full list of interview questions, see Appendix C. These interviews took place in person, with all nine participants living throughout Arizona. The intent behind conducting in-person interviews was to create more intimacy between myself and the participant, allowing for more vulnerability and thus more personal stories to be shared by activists.

The interviews that I conducted with my participants were organized into four main sections. While I did not always read each question as written or in the written order, the script guided me on which themes I needed to cover in each interview. Questions were asked on the topic of activist history (how long each participant had been an activist, how they learned how to engage in activist work); activist burnout (what were the effects of activism on the participant's physical and mental health, how did they address those effects); mentorship (what does mentorship mean to you, have you experienced it); and closing thoughts (what advice would you give to new and experienced activists). In cases where a participant was asked questions in a different order, or where certain questions were not asked at all, topics either arose without specific prompts or multiple topics were covered through one story or response. Further, some questions were modified based on the terminology used by participants or the repetition of

certain themes in their answer. For example, when a participant discussed burning out before being asked, I would ask about their specific experience with burnout rather than ask more broadly about challenges they faced in activist work.

During the course of each interview, I found myself identifying with stories shared by participants about the joys they have found through their activism, the relationships they built, and the hardships they faced. While I cannot know how much more vulnerability was possible in these spaces, the intimacy that was experienced impacted my own personal belief that these types of conversations offer critical space for processing and catharsis. Even during those moments when participants shared opinions, beliefs, and concerns with which I don't agree or align, I found myself sincerely honoring their experiences and worldviews. I felt grateful for the trust in me that participants showed by revealing their frustrations and disagreements with other activists in their movement worlds.

Finally, narrative inquiry as a methodology "invite[s] participants to become co-researchers, co-constructors, co-narrators, and co-storytellers" (Kim, 2016, p. 99). The idea that participants can and should be collaborators in narrative inquiry research is an ethos of this methodology that speaks to its unique role in shaping research. That a participant can co-construct a research project means it is possible to blur the boundary between the academy and non-academic spaces and still produce new understandings of and knowledge about a topic. As an activist and organizer who is not currently strongly connected to any social justice work, this collaboration feels crucial to producing research that speaks to the current, real, lived experience of activists.

To honor participants as co-narrators, participants were given the opportunity to read and listen to their interviews and identify portions that felt important to include in this thesis.

Participants were also able to choose which excerpts from interviews they wanted included in the zine and could contribute other art or advice. They were also able to read through my writing that included excerpts from their interviews and discuss whether their words were accurately represented, still felt true, or needed clarification. Few participants responded with requested edits, and the requested changes focused on participants' identifying details (adding sexuality into one's demographics, asking for a different pseudonym). No participant made a request for certain excerpts to be included in the zine, so I selected quotes that I felt most accurately captured certain themes explored in this thesis and would be most inspiring for other activists to read.

Analysis

Answers to both of my research questions arose through an analysis of the stories shared by interview participants. Using my theoretical frameworks of care ethics and reproductive labor to inform my analysis aligned well with gathering stories as my data. Feminist theories are similarly interested in how a person's intersecting social identities inform their experiences and position in the world (Federici, 2012; Gilligan, 1982; hooks; 2000; Merchant, 2005; Noddings, [1984] 2013). Through the lens of care ethics and reproductive labor, I was able to analyze participant stories to understand their experiences of care and mentorship in social justice movements, paying close attention to the feelings and perspectives that arose through participants' narration of events, relationships, and situations.

The information gathered in my literature review also helped to answer the first question: *How do feminist mentoring relationships help sustain social justice movement communities and enable them to achieve social change?* Answers to my second question, *What care practices do feminist mentors and mentees find effective in their efforts to mitigate activist burnout?,* came

from the interviews. In order to identify answers, I coded each interview multiple times. First, I read each interview, searching for themes based on my theoretical frames: care ethics and reproductive labor. Based on care ethics, I looked for portions of interviews where participants described healthy relationships with other activists, broader cultures of rest within organizations, and practices of checking in with each other throughout the work. Stories shared by participants that included practices of community building, tending to emotional wellbeing, transparency in relationships, and helping each other take breaks were identified and compiled into their categories. Based on reproductive labor theory, I searched for excerpts about teaching and learning practices, inviting in new activists, and story-sharing among activists. Participants' stories about activists sharing experiences, teaching others skills, helping new leaders emerge, and modeling healthy practices were compiled.

After coding for these anticipated themes, I read each interview again, searching for emergent themes that arose in multiple participants' stories, or ideas that seemed important to each participant based on the emphasis placed on certain stories. For example, one participant discussed multiple times how gender issues feel like a source of division between herself and younger activists, so these stories were highlighted along with other excerpts about intergenerational struggles. Across all interviews, the emergent themes include how activists model overcommitment and martyrdom, how certain differences in worldviews create intergenerational tension, and what caused activists to burn out.

The final step in coding and organizing themes from my data was to print out all the excerpts from interviews that I compiled in the two stages described above. Once these were printed out, I mixed them up so they were no longer categorized, reread each excerpt, and made new thematic groupings. Some of these themes ended up the same as from the initial two rounds

of coding, such as the effects of activists modeling martyrdom and honesty in relationships. Other themes were newly identified or shifted from a broad theme into multiple more specific themes. For example, an initially identified theme was how organizations generally create internal cultures of care. In the third round of coding, this became two specific themes: relationship building and tending to others' emotional health.

As part of my intention to make this research meaningful for participants and practice reciprocity (Lemley & Teller, 2014), I compiled stories, advice, and insights gathered from the interviews into a zine that will be distributed for free across the activist networks I work with and already know. Participants will also receive multiple copies of the zine to keep and distribute. In her article "Zine-Making as Feminist Pedagogy," Kimberly Creasap (2014) writes that some contemporary feminists "use zinemaking as a means of asserting their own subjectivities" (p. 157) in response to the hegemony of exclusionary white feminism. Creasap argues that zines occupy a "middle-ground" (p. 155) between formal academic literature and the immensity of the Internet and can thus be an important platform for marginalized voices. Participants had the option to submit art to the zine, as well as to request certain parts of their interviews to be included, though no participant chose to make such requests. For my research, the zine thus serves as an accessible, easily disseminated source of the collaborative knowledge produced in the interviews and story-sharing of this project.

Discussion

Ethical considerations

From my perspective, there are benefits to the activists who participated in my research, most particularly through the interview that offered space for self-reflection, emotional processing, and support from another activist (me). The creation of these pockets of time and

space is crucial to the sustainability of us as activists, which was a main part of my motivation for undertaking this research on feminist mentorship. However, this does not mean that entering these spaces was easy or free from labor. Especially for those participants who were currently engaged in substantial movement work, taking time to participate in an interview could create logistical and emotional stress. Additionally, my identity as a cisgender woman, white, able-bodied and economically-privileged activist added a layer of complexity to my ask for emotional labor and participation from an activist of a differently or more marginalized identity.

While participants' identities are intentionally obscured in this thesis, it is still possible that identities could be deduced by colleagues, friends, or family members of participants. Participants had the opportunity to review any writing that included excerpts from their interview, listen to the audio and read their transcript, and ask for specific details to be more obscured. However, some stories shared by participants focused on conflicts, tensions, and challenges with other people and organizations with whom they still work, and so the risk–albeit minimal–of identification does exist.

Limitations (or Personal Influence on this Research)

I made several assumptions about the topics of activist burnout, care work, and mentorship in conducting this research and they are important to note because of their influence on my data analysis. First, I assume that reproductive labor is necessary to the sustainability of communities. I further assume that mentorship is an important form of reproductive labor, or in other words, a way that people teach and learn how to do certain work and live in certain ways. Additionally, in making recommendations about how to incorporate more care work into social justice movements, I assume that these movements do not want to have toxic work cultures, foster harmful relationships, or burden the people who work within them. These assumptions

guided my analysis to validate stories of mentorship, care, and teaching and learning within movements. If other assumptions were made–such as an assumption that emotional care is distracting from movement goals–different ideas could have been highlighted from the interviews.

Narrative inquiry shows us that stories are a valid means of sharing knowledge, but the specific qualities of this type of data collection should be acknowledged. First, stories are necessarily subjective, and can thus be influenced by memory or emotions; a story of the same event will differ depending on who tells it. This can be revelatory in the display of emotions and perspective taken in the storytelling. However, within the context of a research project, participants may try to favorably edit themselves in their stories, omitting certain details or emphasizing aspects that place themselves in a more positive light. This does not mean there is no knowledge to be gained from stories, however. As discussed earlier in this chapter, narrative inquiry asserts that stories and lived experiences are knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Blair, 2016; Kim, 2016). While it is true that stories of the same event will differ depending on who is narrating, the event as experienced and interpreted by the narrator is the data. The feelings and details of focus convey what was and is important about an experience to the narrator, and thus inform how the story serves as knowledge and as theory.

Additionally, my own subjective experience with the topics of focus–mentorship, activism, burnout, and organizing as a field–can influence how I listen to and understand the stories shared by participants. And finally, because some participants are still currently employed by or members of the organizations discussed in the interviews, or in relationships with the people referenced, there may have been limits to what each person felt comfortable sharing about their experiences.

One other potential limitation of my analysis is the separation of reproductive practices and care practices into distinct themes. For this thesis, distinguishing between practices of reproduction, such as knowledge-sharing, and practices of care, such as honesty in relationships, felt important for clarity in answering my two research questions. However, all of the practices described in the next chapter are interconnected, and I argue that all of them help provide care for activists and aid in the reproduction of movements.

Future research on feminist mentorship within social movements should be expanded outside the state of Arizona. More activist identities should also be represented. Six out of the nine participants in this study were in their 20s and 30s, so it would be beneficial for future studies to focus more on the experiences of activists in their 50s and beyond. Additionally, none of my participants were transgender, a perspective which is important for research on mentorship considering that one of the biggest barriers to intergenerational understanding named by younger and older participants was gender inclusivity. Finally, future studies could also be more intentional about focusing on activists who have mentored others and who have been mentored. While some participants in this study referenced relationships in which they received mentorship, only one discussed a relationship in which they felt confident they were providing mentorship to someone else. This finding is important to note, because many participants described struggles to form mentoring relationships, especially across generations. These struggles could constitute their own research focus.

Chapter 5: Data Results and Discussion

In this chapter I share and discuss the data collected through my interviews, placing similar stories from different activists in conversation with each other to highlight the similarities and differences in their experiences of activism, burnout, and mentorship. Each section of this chapter is organized by themes found through the process of coding my interviews. The first section covers two themes (Activist burnout and Ideas of mentorship) that contextualize the rest of the data by revealing how participants have struggled with activism and its effects on their health, and how they understand mentoring relationships. The next section covers the themes that illuminate how reproductive labor practices of feminist mentoring relationships can be useful in social justice movements. I analyzed participants' stories about how activists–and especially activist elders–perform reproductive labor, or in other words, how they help others to become and remain activists. These stories cover the following themes: making space for other activists; sharing experiences; mentorship as teaching and learning; and modeling healthy habits and practices. I then cover the themes that identify what care practices are effective for activists. I analyzed participants' stories about how an ethics of care is woven into their organization and group cultures and into their relationships with other activists. These stories cover the following themes: the importance of honesty and transparency; resting and breaking; relationship-building for friendship and community; and tending to others' emotional health and wellbeing.

It is important to note that only four out of nine participants identified as having been in mentoring relationships, either as mentees or mentors. While our discussion still covered many of the practices of feminist mentorship, this is a finding that greatly shaped the conversations that I had with participants about barriers to forming positive relationships with activists of other generations. The final section of this chapter addresses these barriers to the implementation of mentorship and care-based practices. That section covers three themes (Intergenerational

challenges, The Personal is (the) political?, and Martyrdom). Each section ends in a discussion of the themes in conversation with the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3.

Activist Burnout: Causes and Effects

> "And that's what hit me so hard is I was meeting people where they were after the overturn of Roe [v. Wade], and then it hit me, and then I just was like I need to step away. You know? Because it felt like we were attacking each other rather than attacking… I don't know, why are we fighting each other when that's what the institution wants? Higher government was like, they can battle it out on the streets and there's nothing we can do about it! We won!"

In order to fully understand the significance of the stories participants shared in our interviews, some excerpts from our conversations must be addressed before others. Activist burnout refers to a condition of debilitating physical and mental distress caused by partaking in activism, often leading activists to step back from or leave movements altogether. While the causes and effects of activist burnout are not the main focuses of this research, participants' experiences with burnout help to illuminate how activists practice care, what kind of care they seek, and how their organizations or groups make care a part of their culture. Gabriel's story above highlights one explanation that activists gave for why they have sometimes needed breaks from organizing. Fighting each other on an individual level, rather than coalescing around an issue and aiming our energy at the institutions that have made decisions we don't agree with, means that our attention is directed away from the methods through which we could make real change. Our energy becomes drained, and the ability to keep working diminishes.

Other participants discussed the norm among activists of working beyond one's capacity. Sarah discussed how the reproductive rights group that she works with…

> "is all women…or femme-identifying people, and I tend to see people as giving so much…like way past their limit…because there's a sense of–whether it's real or not–but there's a sense that like, if I don't do it who will?"

Zimran similarly discussed how people in their organization…

> "burn themselves out to some degree by like, operating beyond their capacity, and they want someone else to save them…but it's like, they're also burned out and tired, so like, they could, but it's probably not gonna be consistent or sustainable, 'cause they're tired too."

By feeling unable, or being unwilling, to say no to more tasks, more work, or more responsibilities, activists can overburden themselves to the point of emotional or physical exhaustion. This difficulty with recognizing and honoring one's own limits can be exacerbated both by the pressure to maintain action against social injustices and by witnessing other activists take on more and more responsibilities.

Working conditions within organizations were also named as a trigger of burnout. Amelie discussed her time working with a chapter of the Democratic Party and the mistreatment she witnessed of other organizers, specifically staff of color. Field organizers were "treated as disposable" and "lied to constantly" about the status of their contracts and the responsibilities assigned to their positions. Rather than being able to address these concerns with staff in more senior positions, Amelie described how the field organizers who spoke up were "chastised for creating hostile working environments." In the end, all of the field organizers hired for this specific project were fired without warning, and Amelie described the disheartening effect this had on herself and those activists.

When participants were asked about the effects that these struggles had on their physical and mental health they shared instances of developing physical illnesses–such as contracting the flu and coronavirus while participating in protests or other activities–and mental distress. Due to the stress and anxiety brought on by the constancy of his work, Finn developed gastrointestinal tract issues and "crippling shoulder and neck pains" that prevented him from being able to sleep well. Meanwhile, since mid-2020, Rosey had contracted coronavirus twice, three different bouts

of flu, and pneumonia. She believed she got these illnesses from a combination of teaching and community-organizing during the coronavirus pandemic, both activities which require physically interacting with the public on some level. Continuing to teach was required as a consistent source of income, but the experienced urgency of needing to participate in actions against police brutality made activism feel necessary for Rosey to continue taking part in as well.

In addition to these mostly physical health effects, most participants described harm to their mental health and nervous systems as a result of activist work. In describing the amount of pressure he placed on himself to meet a variety of goals and standards that were both personally and externally set, Finn said that "anxiety is a bitch…. And anxiety gets a hold and, well, it's kind of a tailspin thereafter." Carlos also discussed his experiences with anxiety as a result of attending so many public protests and demonstrations in his 20s. After attending these public events, Carlos said, "what happens to your psyche is like a deep amount of paranoia…and some trauma," which in this case caused him to be anxiously anticipating arrest or retaliation from police forces for days after he returned home from each event. Zimran, a Black activist who works with a racial justice organization, reflected on how hard of a year 2020 was with the coronavirus pandemic, cases of police brutality, and the resulting upswing in activism. They described feeling like "Black people need a reprieve right now," time to rest and have some distance from addressing social challenges. They also said that as a result of the harrowing past few years, they feel that Black people have a "desire to be in community in ways that feel good and feel like a reprieve and not necessarily labor."

Discussion

The stories and experiences shared above reflect how activists internalize the work they do and are both physically and emotionally affected by it. These stories correlate with the

literature on activist burnout, significantly Chen and Gorski's (2015) research. In their article they point to how organizations' and collectives' internal tensions can be a factor in burnout, just as Gabriel and Amelie described. The stories shared by participants such as Carlos, Finn, Rosey, and Zimran also showcase some of the "affective manifestations" (p. 4) and "physical manifestations" (p. 4) that Chen and Gorski describe, which include anxiety, illnesses, and physical pain.

These manifestations illuminate why care is important in activism and social justice movements. When burnout or any of its symptoms are experienced, activists search for help in different ways, and some of the ways that they provide and receive support are discussed in later sections of this chapter. First, however, I turn to participants' understandings of mentorship in order to further contextualize the data in this chapter about what kind of care and support is important to social justice movements, and how activists seek out this care.

What is Mentorship?

> "We are a compilation of every one of our experiences and every person that we've met, so it's intentionally keeping someone around that can teach you things you want to know, and that you can also share in that experience of learning."

When interviewing participants, I asked each person to share with me what comes to mind when they think of mentorship as a concept. This line of questioning helped me understand the context for the care practices that were discussed in each interview. Activists shared their initial understandings and ideas about what constitutes mentorship, such as the explanation above from Amelie. Many participants referred to specific practices they associated with mentoring relationships, some beneficial and some harmful. We also discussed whether each participant feels they have mentored or been mentored by other activists. For some participants,

there was a desire to form these kinds of relationships, while for others the idea of mentorship as a relationship model was off-putting even if some of its specific practices were appealing.

Beneficial practices of mentoring relationships were discussed by many participants. For example, most spoke in some way about how sharing knowledge is an important and helpful part of a mentoring relationship. This was described as teaching a mentee something they might not know, as well as sharing one's insights or alternative perspectives based on their experiences. Amelie, Gabriel, Karen, and Finn all referred to the learning process as a major draw of mentoring relationships. Finn, who was able to identify many mentors throughout his organizing journey, said, "I have a lot of folks that I can look to… people who have a depth of knowledge and experience who are willing to share that wisdom." Gabriel specifically articulated that mentors should provide honesty and rationality to their mentees through pragmatic conversations about the odds of meeting a certain goal or help with planning an action in the most effective way. They also said that having an older mentor would be helpful for finding these qualities, as they've "seen more things" and can understand what younger activists might be going through.

Gabriel, Finn, and Karen also described mentorship as a holistic practice, with space made for both personal and professional development. Finn described his best mentors as people who "really cared about me, my health, my safety, as much as my development as an organizer." Karen talked about how mentorship between organizing staff should be "a reciprocal relationship" because employees give a lot of time and energy to their work and thus deserve to have support for their personal goals from their supervisors. Gabriel expressed that a mentor should be "somebody you can turn to when you start to feel that burnout." To each of these participants, there was a deeper, more relational aspect to mentorship that they saw as necessary to these relationships.

Through some of these conversations, less positive feelings that some participants held about mentorship were also revealed. A few participants talked about how the structure of mentorship can be harmful or less appealing to them than other kinds of relationships. Rosey, a former teacher, discussed her experience with mentorship as an educator, articulating that "mentorship in these traditionally professional spaces means get [new employees] to assimilate" and typically involves a mentor telling a mentee to "do what I do and nothing else." Carlos, who is in his 50s, referred to mentorship as "this kind of hierarchical thing" in which an elder activist is seen as holding more expertise. While Carlos described this as not necessarily a bad thing, because someone with more expertise can share what they know with others, hierarchy does imply a difference in the status and amount of power that each person holds in the mentoring relationship.

When discerning whether they have been mentored by others, many participants could not identify specific mentors who helped them learn to be activists. Karen, Finn, Zimran, and Amelie were the four out of nine participants who could identify clear mentorship in their activism, but the other five participants were only able to identify certain practices, like experience sharing, that came from friends rather than mentors. Carlos, who expressed a lot of challenging feelings towards the possibility of intergenerational mentorship, asserted that he could not recall ever wishing he had had mentorship from elder activists, and knew that the possibility had presented itself but that he had not wanted to take it. When asked if she had ever mentored younger activists, Theresa expressed feeling like young folks in the movement weren't interested in learning about her experiences and perspectives, and thus she had not formed these kinds of relationships. Zimran succinctly stated their perspective, saying that "so much of

organizing is that unlearning and learning process… and a lot of us don't have elders in our movement, don't have specific mentors… so, yeah, we're struggling out here."

Discussion

Both the positive and negative qualities of mentorship discussed above mirror the discussion of mentorship models in Chapter 2. Proponents of "alternative" approaches to mentorship emphasize that they are working to dismantle the hierarchical structure of the traditional model of mentorship that Carlos and Rosey referred to (Bona et al., 1995). Moss et al. (1999) argue that mentorship should holistically tend to its participants' needs, which coincides with the ideas discussed by Finn, Karen and Gabriel who described expecting mentors to do more than just pass on skills and knowledge, offering care as well.

These ideas of mentorship helpfully showcase the malleability of how mentoring relationships can be structured, and thus why it is important to specify what model of mentorship I am advocating for in this research. After each participant discussed their own initial ideas about mentoring, I shared with them the approach that I am taking with the feminist mentorship model and its values. Explaining the mentorship structure that I am advocating for helped connect this part of the interview to other parts of our conversations about how each participant learned to be an activist, how activists practiced care for each other, and what kind of support activists want more of. Details about how participants actually felt they received or provided mentorship in some form–whether feminist mentorship or not–are described in further sections of this chapter.

Main Research Results

Now that data from interviews has been explored to help contextualize the rest of my research, I will turn to the data that directly helps to answer my two research questions. The themes that are described in the following two sections intersect in many ways. It is difficult to

truly separate some ideas, such as how activists model healthy habits for each other and how activists form positive relationships. For clarity, the data below are separated into two main sections. The first covers how my interviews helped to answer my first research question: *How do feminist mentoring relationships help sustain social justice movement communities and enable them to achieve social change?* Because this question focuses on the sustainability of social justice movements, I use the data collected on the reproduction of activists as the main source of answers. For my second question, *What care practices do activists find effective in their efforts to mitigate activist burnout?*, I focus more on the data about care practices and care ethics. However, while these sections are separated for ease of understanding and data analysis, the overlap between reproduction and care is important to note and will be discussed in the chapter conclusion.

How do feminist mentoring relationships help sustain social justice movement communities and enable them to achieve social change?

> "You're about to change the common sense of everything. So, everything that we've been saying for many, many years that seemed insane, it's gonna be really commonsensical to people, but only for a short period."

In this quote from Carlos's, he introduces his role as an experienced activist watching the Black Lives Matter movement unfold in 2020, understanding through his own experience that there is a window of time in which this social justice movement could strategically wield its power to have a lasting impact on public consciousness. He goes on to share how he used his positionality as a researcher to affirm through public forums—radio, newspaper—the logic and commonsense of this movement and its visions. When experienced activists participate in social justice movements, they can be made stronger and more effective.

Activists learn about social justice movements in a multitude of ways. Some participants discussed having parents and relatives who participated in movement work (even if those family

members did not call themselves "activists"), though none viewed those relationships with family members as mentorship. Participants also frequently discussed how different authors and scholars–such as bell hooks and adrienne maree brown--motivated them to get involved in activist efforts and influenced their organizing philosophies. However, these examples don't speak directly to the ways that feminist mentorship can be a useful relationship model. A mentor might recommend or provide someone with a book as a means of sharing knowledge and history, but the book itself does not constitute mentorship. Similarly, while family members who do volunteer or community engagement work are modeling what it means to be involved in community-improvement efforts, serving as a role model does not necessarily mean you are also a mentor. Instead, it is the participants' stories about elders and peers intentionally teaching them how to perform a specific task, sharing what they've learned from their experiences, making room for activists to become leaders, and modeling positive, effective practices that showcase how mentorship can support activists' growth and engagement. Below is a brief explanation of each of these practices which are then discussed in more depth.

- *Making space:* Making space refers to the practice of recruiting and welcoming new activists into movement spaces, allowing them opportunities to lead actions or discussions and build their confidence as activists.
- *Mentorship as teaching and learning*: This section reveals how activists teach each other skills and share resources with each other that help strengthen each activist's ability to contribute to a movement.
- *Sharing experience:* Sharing experience is the practice of telling stories about movement histories, wins and losses, and lessons learned; activists give and receive advice and

wisdom through the sharing of experience, learning how to carry their movements forward without repeating every step taken by previous generations.

- *Modeling healthy habits and practices:* This practice involves activists leading by example, setting boundaries around their time and energy, and helping others to do the same.

Making Space

> "We also want the community to feel like they are agents of change, and that they can be a part of the movement, too…. So we had a teach-in that kind of explained to people, like, this is the work that we do and it's not complex, you could do it, too."

Throughout my interviews, many participants brought up the idea of how new activists can be intentionally brought into an organization or collective. In order for mentorship to occur, with new activists learning with and from more experienced leaders, there has to be space made for new activists to join movements in the first place. This concept is not simply about whether or not a group does recruitment, but is also about what the general attitude of leaders is towards onboarding new members. Established groups can create opportunities for new activists to volunteer in an action, attend meetings, and learn relevant skills, such as through Sarah's example above of her organization hosting a teach-in. This requires intentional planning and coordinating by existing members and leaders, but it also means that the established group must be interested in making new activists feel welcome, desired, and able to participate in meaningful ways.

Sarah talked about the ongoing internal conflict of her small collective about if and how they should grow their team. The group, which focuses on reproductive rights, is made up of women and femmes who are mostly in their 30s and 40s. Sarah described a conversation she had with a fellow activist about "[aging] out of the work" as they grow out of their reproductive

years and are "no longer representative" of the people that their efforts focus on. However, while acknowledging that the current leadership might want to concede to others in the approaching future, Sarah said that some folks in the collective want to "[grow] really intentionally, which has sort of meant that we haven't grown." In order to avoid having new members that are even less representative of the community–older white women, for example–the collective has so far only onboarded new members with whom trusted relationships already exist, meaning their friends of similar ages. Younger folks in the community who may be able to sustain the organization as current leaders phase out have not had the opportunity to join and take on leadership roles.

This conflict represents a common struggle among organizers who want to build a broad community of activists while ensuring that the growth of the group doesn't dilute its values or distract from the overall work. Theresa and Amelie both described examples of this tension, but their stories showcase how sitting with and reflecting on the tension can ultimately help a group move through this challenge to eventually bring on new activists. Amelie shared that…

> "[t]here was this idea after a while, on the steering committee of the group that I was working with, that only experienced organizers were allowed to be at the steering committee. And granted, I invite a lot of young people to come and jump on these Zoom meetings which ensued chaos…. But also, from that chaos, the older people started respecting pronouns. And so, just being open to what younger people can offer, 'cause they are dealing with a lot of shit and they're done. And there's just no time for this ego, this idea of status. Of, 'I've been here longer so I deserve to be like, the head.' I think that it's just as honorable to step out of the way and… like, allow a young person to lead, and gently guide. And show the way."

In this situation, working through the challenges resulted in young activists being able to stake a claim on the steering committee and positively influence the group's culture.

In Theresa's case, while working as a volunteer for the midterm elections, she described being directed on what tasks to assign other volunteers who came into the office to try to help the

cause. Theresa discussed how the organization only wanted volunteers to be directed to knock on voter's doors, which many older potential volunteers were not interested in doing, whether because they had done that kind of work so much in their past or because that simply wasn't a job that they had the capacity for. After having so many people refuse to take on this task, Theresa became frustrated and stopped trying to onboard new volunteers, choosing instead to just knock on doors herself. Later in the campaign season, however, Theresa saw some of those same folks who did not want to knock on doors volunteering in the organization's office in a different way. Seeing that, Theresa said "I realized that… people want to do the work, they just don't always want to do the work you need them to do. So, we have to make space." And once that space was made, people committed themselves to working with the organization.

Making space doesn't look the same in every scenario, and the space people need to become activists varies, too. Finn explained that in the organization he worked with for almost a decade, interested volunteer leaders and new paid organizers "received the same training" and support from established leaders, learning the same broad set of skills that the organization valued. In Zimran's case, making space looked like taking the time to talk to organization members who were interested in more leadership and helping them "[discover] what type of organizing do you want to do, that feels good, that feels sustainable." While all of these stories and instances of spacemaking differ, there is a common thread in the influence of existing leaders' attitudes and interest in bringing in new people. One of the main tenets of feminist mentorship is recognizing the value and expertise of every person, working to help develop their own unique skills. This requires making space for new activists to understand how they can serve within a group or organization, to hone their skills, and to eventually become leaders in their own right.

Mentorship as Teaching and Learning

> "Within the abortion movement in this state, there's division, and that division is mostly between that grassroots activists and the institutional groups…. Some people are kind of naïve about those institutions and why they behave the way they behave. I've done this for years and I know who those institutions are… if your expectations of those groups are that they're going to behave in the way you behave you gotta get rid of that idea pretty quick…. And so, I've had those conversations with people, you now, to try to stop them from jumping into the abyss."

Participants also shared stories about how they were taught certain skills, given resources, and generally prepared to take on more leadership. Teaching and learning is one of the most commonly named practices of mentoring relationships, and was viewed by all participants as an important and beneficial practice. At times, the teaching and learning described by participants happened more formally through set trainings and opportunities to practice. In other cases, this process was more fluid, coming through the day-to-day interactions and resource-sharing with other activists, such as through Theresa's story above of conversations she has with newer activists. Reflecting on the idea that many activists discover the possibilities of activist work through books, Finn shared that…

> "there are some things that you don't learn in books, like timing, when do you need to let people make their own choices, you know, how do you graciously lose, who are the big power players in the community, where do they stand, what are the relationships."

Naming the many leaders in his organization from whom he learned these skills, Finn went on to say that much of his learning came from having the opportunity to practice the skills he was trying to learn, such as how to lead effective trainings. It was "trying stuff, failing, having someone walk you through why you totally screwed it up" that helped him hone the organizing skills he needed for his work.

Rosey shared her own experience of being guided and taught when she first came into a leadership role with her organization. Two other activists–both of whom Rosey noted were

younger than her–helped her learn her new role. “It didn’t feel like a traditional job,” Rosey said…

> “I didn’t feel like I was being supervised by someone. It was really natural. There was a personal relationship that was established beforehand that made it easier for them to be like, ‘oh you’re doing outreach now, okay, cool, let me show you how to do some of these things.’”

In this way, Rosey was able to learn by meeting and talking with others who had performed the role she was now taking on.

Finn shared the ways he eventually felt able to help train and support new leaders, describing how he focused on those potential leaders’ “goals, what was their vision for their community, what type of neighborhood or school did they want to leave behind for their children.” Describing how he learned what those leaders wanted to achieve, Finn then conveyed how he understands the “job of the organizer is really to teach them how to do that.” Those relationships were thus grounded first in an understanding of where each new activist leader wanted to get to, and then teaching those leaders the necessary skills to accomplish those goals. In this way, personal power was recognized and tended to by the activist providing mentorship.

Similar to Finn, Zimran discussed supporting new leaders in their organization. However, in Zimran’s case, this occurred less through meetings and more by sharing resources with others who recently joined their organization or who simply didn’t have the same level of knowledge about a topic relevant to their activist work. While outwardly reflecting on whether they’ve mentored anyone, Zimran came to describe how they recently worked on intentionally resourcing a new member of their organization. Learning that this newer activist likes to receive information in a tangible way, Zimran decided to compile a binder full of the resources they had about their organization and its approach to activism, including reflection questions that Zimran wrote to help this person think about their personal connection to the organization’s work.

Noting that this is a new and ongoing relationship, Zimran said after this initial provision of resources, "I did see a difference… in how they showed up into a space. 'Cause I think it went from like, this space of fear and trying to control, to being more inquisitive, to being more curious."

Over time, activists will necessarily learn certain skills to effectively make changes in their communities. These skills range from the interpersonal to the public, from facilitating large groups to managing small conflicts. The resources we need also vary, depending on our role within our movement, the life experiences we bring to our activist work, and our visions for changing our communities. Participants recalled moments in which they received guidance from other activists, and in which they were able to share their own insights with others. Theresa talked about how she is able to teach others in her organization about city planning and local politics because of the knowledge she's gathered through her career and decades of activism. Whether small scale or large, tactical or relational, the skills that we teach and the resources we share make a difference in others' ability to feel confident in their activism. As Finn noted, there are some things that just can't be learned from books.

Sharing Experience

> "I think we live in this amnesia. The United States has this amnesia that every three or four years every person thinks that they're recreating everything, when the reality is, like, no, this goes back to Emma Goldman…. This is not new."

Some of the ways that activists help prepare new members for their work focus less on teaching skills and providing resources. Sharing stories, advice, and lessons learned can also have an impact on other activists' confidence and abilities. Movements are spread throughout history, as Carlos discusses in the quote above, often extending back decades with peaks and valleys in how much widespread activity might have been occurring. For activists who are

joining movements today–for example, the Black Lives Matter movement–learning about the lived experiences of organizers who started their work in the 1960s and 1970s can provide helpful perspectives for the current iteration of the ongoing movement. Activists can learn about tactics that didn't work or how to effectively build on successes. Rather than having this knowledge come through strategic planning sessions or trainings, simply receiving others' stories can illuminate some of the necessary lessons to learn.

Amelie's stories from the five years she spent in Europe involved meeting activists who had been exiled from their home countries for the work that they were doing–and continuing to do then in Europe. She shared how one friend, an exiled journalist, was involved in setting up journalist centers for others who had also been exiled from their home countries. Another person from whom she learned, an artist, continued to organize and speak truth to power from her prison cell, where she was imprisoned for a painting she had made. When asked how she emulates aspects of those friends' practices in her own work now, Amelie said, "I think it's the scrappiness." Being an activist is a messy role, with a never-ending list of things you could learn, but Amelie, in building relationships with people who didn't back down from their work, even when their lives were upended in various ways, has learned that at some point you have to…

> "just stop thinking about it and actually do something. You can learn in the field. …Stop taking yourself so seriously. You're not going to be perfect when you enter this, you're not going to be perfect when you leave it…but you do have to show up."

Finn reflected on what he had learned from his mentors, noting one critical lesson that he'd been given by another leader in his community. She told him, "if you ever think you're indispensable, you're lying to yourself. Nobody is." When we think of ourselves, individually, as necessary to the movement, we can lose sight of how necessary collective work is to a movement's success. We can also forget that our identities extend beyond our activist work. Finn

further described the tension in activism of needing some sort of "guiding light" to focus on so that the massive amounts of energy someone puts into the work feels worth it. There's an extent to which "we have to know we're right, goddammit, otherwise why the hell are we doing this?" Finn said. However, he also shared what he learned about the potential danger of this attitude, warning that "if that is the only guiding light in your life, you're going to be one-dimensional."

Other stories were shared that were less positive, but no less important. In my conversation with Theresa, we discussed how fear of retaliation can influence the attitudes and strategies of activists, particularly younger activists who have been raised on a constant media diet of hatred, violence, and discrimination. This discussion sparked a memory of Theresa's, and she shared how during a campaign she participated in around education and the defunding of public schools, some members of the community became outraged by the activists' stance. She recalled that "there were people who…would find out where we were…homeschooling people primarily--and harass us. And I'm sure the same thing's gonna happen with the abortion petition. So, I know harassment." We discussed the importance of connecting this personal experience of Theresa's to the fears and concerns of less experienced activists, and how it might be important to share what Theresa learned from her experience with those young people.

Amelie shared, too, about the responsibility of helping organize pro-abortion marches in Arizona, where many people have different opinions about reproductive rights and have more access to weapons than in other states. Amelie discussed how she had to navigate preparing herself and others for the possibility of retaliation and arrest, saying that she worked to…

> "convey to some of the younger privileged white people that…if they go out there and block streets and they break laws and the police come in and they start arresting people…not everybody has enough money and we don't have a bail fund."

Theresa's and Amelie's stories speak to the importance of communication between experienced organizers and novice activists. While this communication might also entail teaching skills to help prepare newer activists, the simple act of talking about their experiences can help emotionally prepare others for the possibility of harassment, conflict, and harm. Giving advice, reassurance, and sharing our own guiding principles can help other activists to find groundedness in their work and feel that they can continue to show up, as Amelie said, without knowing everything there is to know. Sharing the more negative or harmful possibilities of this work is also crucial to activists' ability to adequately prepare for certain situations and make informed decisions about when to participate. But these stories also have the benefit of showing that retaliation doesn't have to have the effect of shutting down a movement's work. Collectively, we can learn how to support each other by preparing people with more privileges to be arrested, or standing with someone in solidarity when counter-protestors spew hatred in their face. But in order to prepare, in order to feel motivated, we have to know a little bit about what's possible.

Modeling Healthy Habits and Practices

> "The way that I see it is, like, we all have a bucket, right? And we want to think that our bucket's very big and can hold a lot of water. But if we take on too much water and we can't hold the water, the water has to go somewhere else. And it goes into other people's buckets. …there are young organizers around all the time and we're always looking up to each other, and if I perpetuate that culture myself then other people are going to see it, too."

The final theme of reproductive labor from my interviews focuses on how we model healthy habits and practices. Whether it's how to set boundaries or making sure we take time to eat, there are all kinds of ways that our daily choices can affect the rest of our work and the work of those around us, as Amelie notes above. It's one thing to have a manager tell you to take a break, but when no one around you is actually resting, it can be harder to follow that advice.

Zimran talked specifically about recently choosing to step back from their work at certain moments when other aspects of their life were challenging or taking up too much of their energy. When asked if their choice to take a break affected anyone else in their organization, Zimran shared, "I'll say over time, yes, because… when other people are doing a lot of work and not taking breaks, it's hard for other people to take breaks." They expanded upon how they've seen others follow their lead noting that they could "see more people being more willing to be like, I can't work to this capacity anymore so I'm going to change my organizing work a little bit."

Sarah, who acknowledged that setting boundaries can be difficult for her, discussed how the members of her collective help hold each other accountable to not overcommitting because they all know it's harder for each person to hold their own boundaries. In her experience, Sarah has seen how activism "seems to draw people in who are givers and will give away," so it's important that the members of the collective are able to help each other not take on too much. In one instance, a member offered to take on staffing the support line that community members call when they are in need. Sarah recalled how another member said, "I just heard you say that your husband's going out of town, and you have your three kids… you can't take it." Helping each other say no can make this practice easier to do for yourself later.

Finn discussed how taking the time to be a human, doing more than just working, also helped to strengthen the relationships he was building to help get work done. He recalled going on runs with a community leader, noting how important this activity was "because otherwise he just saw me as someone who was all public business… and it's really hard to trust someone when they only have one face, or one dimension." While this story wasn't focused on how someone else was able to emulate his example, Finn's example shows how bringing your personhood and non-work interests into activist relationships can ultimately help deepen them by

showing others that the person you're working with is not one-track minded and will accept your humanity, too.

In all, it is important to remember that the habits and routines that we each bring to our activist work are not invisible to those around us. Especially in relationships with power imbalances, such as those between Field Managers and Field Organizers, if a staff member with more social power is seen denying their own humanity–not taking meal breaks or never revealing emotions–it can feel to others that those practices might not be viewed as priorities within the group. In Finn's case, even displaying non-activist interests to community leaders can have the positive effect of showing others that there is in fact a person, with needs and emotions and desires, working alongside them. Knowing that you're working alongside other people in their fullness makes it easier to remember that you are a full person, too.

Discussion of Reproductive Practices

The above reproductive practices illustrate some of the ways that activists learn and teach how to get started in movement work and how to make it sustainable for themselves, even if that involves taking breaks from being in leadership roles or from being responsible for multiple tasks. Some of the stories shared by participants provide examples of actual interactions between themselves and other activists in which someone was able to grow, feel supported, learn something new, or embrace more leadership within a group. Other stories provide insights and advice that could be helpful to share with others and which I hope activists who read this work will find illuminating.

Most importantly, the stories and experiences compiled as answers to my first research question exemplify how reproductive labor is performed among activists, as well as the benefits of reproductive labor in these forms. Teaching lessons, sharing wisdom, preparing new activists

for aspects of their work are all forms of the "intragenerational reproduction of daily life" (p. 211) that Carolyn Merchant (2005) discusses in *Radical Ecology*. These stories illuminate how experience can be passed on, but also how care work can be taught and modeled, so that activists can be better resourced to continue taking part in ongoing activist work. This mirrors Sylvia Federici's (2012) writing on how reproductive labor helps us to create a world of "nurturing, creativity, and care" (p. 14).

Some of the stories took place in relationships that participants identified as mentorship. But whether they did or did not, the themes compiled from these stories all represent practices of feminist mentorship as discussed by authors in the literature review. Moss et al. (1999) discuss how they were inspired to practice feminist mentorship because of the exclusivity–or gatekeeping–in the geography field. Making space for new contributors, with new perspectives and different identities, was an important goal of the authors' feminist mentoring practice. Other authors of literature on feminist mentorship describe how these relationships should still incorporate knowledge-transference but can also extend their impact through participants' sharing of more personal experiences and insights (Bain et al., 2017; Benishek et al., 2000).

The practices and teachings described in this section served the participants' who shared them, impacting approaches to the work, overall attitudes about what can be changed in their communities, and feelings of confidence. These experiences and their effects illuminate how some of the practices that constitute feminist mentorship have been useful to activists and the movements they work within. Again, while not all of the stories took place within a mentorship context, they collectively showcase how feminist mentorship practices can be beneficial to activists who are seeking to stay involved in their social movement work despite hardship and struggle.

What care practices do activists find effective in their efforts to mitigate activist burnout?

> "And then also like, you know, healing work isn't valued work. Like, you don't see an immediate change… I don't think people feel like it does something in the way that like, protesting and yelling and all that stuff does. Not to say that that work isn't valuable, it's just to say that this work is also necessary."

Participants shared many stories about how their social justice movement organizations, places of employment, and communities have and have not fostered cultures of care among members. On a broad scale, participants discussed how they talk about care, health, and urgency in their groups, with Zimran noting in the excerpt above that work centered around care is often seen as less important than other activist activities. However, stories about specific practices and communal values did reveal that there are certain ways of involving care in activist spaces that have positively impacted participants' health, sense of community, and engagement in movement work. Again, there is a brief overview of each of the following practices below, followed by in-depth discussions about these practices.

- *Relationship Building: Friends and Communities:* This care practice involves activists intentionally building healthy, liberating relationships with each other, doing activities together that are focused on joy, rejuvenation, and decompression.
- *The Importance of Honesty and Transparency:* Activists practice honesty and transparency when they reveal their true emotions to each other about the work they do, including their belief in their ability to achieve a goal, their anger about challenges, and their fears of losing.
- *Tending to Others' Emotional Health and Wellbeing:* This is the practice of activists accepting each other's full selves in movement spaces, caring for each other in illnesses, through relational challenges, and through difficult emotional experiences.

- *Resting and Breaking:* This is a practice that occurs on a movement-culture scale, when activists are encouraged by each other to take breaks as needed, collectively and individually, from participating in activist work.

Relationship Building: Friends and Communities

> "One of the things we did… was to have an event after one of the women's marches where all of the activists who had been working to elect pro-choice candidates…would get together. And it was amazing, you know, it was the young people and people really talking about who they were and where they were from, and I just felt so good about it, you know, and much better than I'd felt in all the years before that I'd participated in those campaigns."

One of the most common themes across participants' stories was how collectives and organizations incorporate activities focused on relationship-building into their schedules, whether making this part of the daily routine or adding extra events to the calendar. This act of building relationships that are deeper than that of co-workers or supervisor and direct report can create more positive feelings among activists about being involved in certain movement spaces and giving their time and energy to their work. In Theresa's story above, the positive outcomes of the communal event on her feelings about other activists and their work together are clear. This practice also speaks to the holistic nature of feminist mentoring relationships, which focus on much more than professional development. Karen shared that in both organizations with which she did political canvassing work, check ins and check outs were part of the daily and weekly activities that staff participated in. Karen described how her team would…

> "have a Zoom meeting or in person meetings for, like, team-building, or mental health check-ins, and like, most of the team was friends…so we had a good space before to like, take care of each other or like, be friendly with each other."

Karen noted that sometimes these check-ins focused directly on how each person's canvassing went that day, including time to share any positive or negative stories from their interactions with

community members during their work. This part of the work environment, Karen noted, was what she liked so much about the political canvassing she had done.

Zimran also shared how making time for group activities that didn't focus on advocacy work helped them feel good about sustaining their involvement. The events Zimran planned along with another activist leader included meditation sessions and "paint-and-sips," gatherings where the goal was to have fun with each other and let loose from some of the work stress. They noted that…

> "even if we were tired when we were putting it on, it's like, we would leave feeling like our cup was fuller…. I think it's really hard for people to like, recognize that when you're doing this work, you also get to benefit from it. And you can, and you have permission, and you deserve to do work that feels good to you… and not just drains the shit out of you."

Affirming to themselves and to the other activists in their group that these kinds of activities were important to their collective activism and group culture made them feel more positive in general about being a part of this group.

When Amelie and I discussed how she likes to provide care for others, she talked about the importance of sharing food among activists. She and I both reflected on how there have been days in which our movement work felt so urgent and was given such high priority that we worked all day before realizing we had not had a proper meal. Amelie described how she's tried to address this by cooking for other activists, saying "when I'm cooking for other people I'm always going to put in as many nutrients and as much love as possible." In addition to sharing meals, Amelie talked about how making art together can create an avenue for people to talk honestly about how they're feeling and process their emotions with others. Through both activities, Amelie emphasized how critical it is to create environments where people can both be nourished and feel safe, connecting through activities that centered around everyone's wellbeing.

Theresa, who is in her late 70s, reflected on how political activism has helped her to form and maintain friendships. “My friends from when I was in college, in the antiwar movement, the feminist movement, are still my friends today, my best friends. They don’t live here but they’re the people that care about me, know who I am,” she said. For Theresa, whose sense of self is deeply connected to her activism, being known through these activities and connecting with others around common interests, worldviews, and goals, has facilitated deep and lasting relationships that have endured across time and geography. Even now, Theresa explained, when she makes new friends, it’s because of shared political work.

Each of these stories focuses on how important it is to have outlets for the heaviness and emotionality of activist work. Whether through activities facilitated within an organization, or external gatherings for deepening relationships outside of the work environment, having space to talk with others and connect over shared experiences or getting everyone’s needs met helps build camaraderie, solidarity, and love between activists. And while building these relationships, some of the stress and anxiety related to the work can be siphoned off too.

The Importance of Honesty and Transparency

> “The question I would most often get is, why are you here? And there was always a professional angle to that answer, right, but I think at the end of the day people wanted to know, you know, have you suffered? Have you been through some shit? Do I know that when the going gets tough you’re not going to get going?”

Building relationships is a broad theme within which there are specific practices and approaches that activists named as important. For clarity, the theme of honesty within relationships is discussed here as a standout means through which participants described feeling cared for and witnessed by others. The inability to find people with whom to be transparent was also discussed as a hindrance to participants’ ongoing engagement in activist work. As a general practice, being honest with others reveals trust and solidarity, and can also make others feel seen

as equals. In Finn's story above, he acknowledges how activists crave honesty from each other about their motivations and capacity for doing the work so that they can comfortably trust each other to show up for the fight. Karen expanded on her reflections of the check-ins she had while working as a political canvasser, specifically discussing how one of her supervisors positively impacted her experience in the job. When asked what made him a good manager, Karen said that when he asked how she was doing and told her she could be honest about her feelings, she actually felt like she was able to be honest. She said, "he was just a person that made everyone feel comfortable around him, like comfortable saying whatever they wanted to." Not only did this supervisor invite honesty, but he was also honest about his own experiences and reasons for being an activist, a mutuality which made others feel more comfortable being transparent with him.

Finn also expressed his views on the importance of honesty and having relationships in which you felt safe being transparent. Whether it was to share his positive feelings about the work and accomplishments, or the challenges and failures and fears he was experiencing, Finn shared that "it was just so much harder without that type of relationship to share those moments." Finn, who had recently left organizing after years of doing this work professionally, expanded upon his experience, saying that it was "being embarrassed and dealing with shame and troubles in the private life, and not being able to talk about them in a transparent and above-ground way with my supervisors that I think ultimately led to my implosion."

Gabriel spoke similarly about how it can be difficult to be honest with others, or to know when honesty about the chances of succeeding might do harm to other activists' morale. Thinking about the months after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, Gabriel described how other activists in the community were reaching out to them for answers about what they

should do next, and how it felt impossible to respond by saying that they didn't have the answers. When asked why this felt difficult, they identified how feigning optimism makes them feel like they are keeping hope alive for others. Later in our conversation, however, Gabriel articulated how this practice of activists lying to each other for the sake of positivity has made them feel more alone, because it became hard to discern if others were having the same feelings of despair that they were experiencing. Without the space to be honest with other activists about their true feelings, they started to feel "alone in the fight" even while being around other activists who shared their values and were working toward the same goal.

Doing high stakes work, as most activists do, takes a lot of mental and physical energy and emotional management. It also frequently requires interacting with the public. Feeling able to decompress through being vulnerable with other activists who can validate and relate to each other is important to activists' ability to process their own experiences. Being unable to honestly express the anxieties or struggles we experience can impede our ability to move forward, to internalize lessons we are learning, and to find solidarity through our relationships with each other.

Tending to Others' Emotional Health and Wellbeing

> "There are different ways you can be open with someone, and some it's more like, oh I'm your boss and I have to. And he's, like, telling us to, but the way he would always do it is, he, like, genuinely cares about us, he wants to, and I feel like I that way I was more willing to be open and feel comfortable with him."

Another specific helpful aspect of building relationships within activist communities is finding people who are interested in your general wellbeing and in tending to your needs in a holistic way. This is a value of feminist mentoring relationships that clearly distinguishes this model from others. Rather than limiting personal connections among activists to the parts of ourselves that are most obviously connected to movement goals, tending to each other's full

selves is a means of validating each activist's inherent value as a person, and not just the value of the skills they bring to the movement. Sometimes this valuation happens through organizational practices, while at other times this comes through one-on-one relationships. For example, Karen's story about her boss in the quote above reveals how a holistic management relationship can have a beneficial impact on activists feelings. Zimran's organization recently incorporated group therapy into their leadership team's practices, starting with optional sessions but eventually making attendance mandatory to emphasize the importance of addressing the dynamics and emotional needs of the group.

Theresa described how some of the most positive feelings that resulted from her activism–aside from campaign wins and goals being met–came from being able to offer support for other activists who were struggling with failures or feeling disrespected by others. When she has had conversations with others who felt "not respected or humiliated or embarrassed or made to feel inadequate or whatever it might be," it's brought her satisfaction, because she's been able to help others "feel better about what they're doing" and "continue on." Theresa found meaning in helping activists understand that their failures, mistakes, or challenges did not mean that they were not important to the movement or did not have valuable skills and perspectives.

Effective emotional support can sometimes be difficult to qualify, and some participants spoke of the need for helpful practices to be more fleshed out so that they can be implemented more consistently. Sarah's collective has maintained a core group of leaders for about five years now, and while she discussed how often they practice checking in with each other, she also spoke to the tension between volunteer work and paid work, noting that she thinks more time could be spent on checking in about whether members want to be compensated for their contributions to the collective. Members contribute a lot of time and energy to their group's

work, most often on top of performing other jobs as their source of income. Whether or not this division of paid and unpaid labor is serving each member's wellbeing has not always felt easy to discern or discuss.

Rosey also explained how the leaders of her organization are struggling to determine what specific actions they can take to tend to each other's emotional health.

> "We're still on this question of like, what do we do with that? So, like, we're in a meeting and if someone's check in answer is like, 'I'm feeling like crap today, it's been a hard week for me,' what else can we do besides, like, 'I'm sorry do you need anything?'"

Each member of the group agrees that they should be helping to support each other and making sure people get their needs met, but figuring out how to do so in an effective way is a challenge, and this depends on each person's specific needs as well as the capacity of the other members.

However, what is clear in the stories shared by participants is that the simple acts of asking someone how they're feeling, expressing concern for each other's health, and displaying a sincere interest in wanting to care for each other does make a difference. Carlos talked about a friend of his, Noah (not his real name), who he saw as being a good mentor to other activists. When asked what made Noah a good mentor, Carlos said,

> "I think… the ability to present himself as deeply supportive, even at possible moments when he disagreed…. Expressing the love and care, you know, in particular kinds of ways… and being very supportive, really having proved himself that this is a person that no matter what, he's got your back."

While offering emotional support is not the end-all, be-all of taking care of another person, it mattered in each of the experiences that participants discussed. As a practice within mentorship, this work also serves to extend feminist mentors' interest in mentees outside of their professional selves. When activists make an effort to help emotionally support others, this can also help make movement members feel more invested in their organizations and groups because of the reciprocity that is experienced.

Resting and Breaking

> "Me and the other healing minister… brought in a culture of healing as much as we could…. I'm seeing us pause more. So, instead of moving urgently and being like, oh we're moving with urgency, we've kind of shifted to more, like, are we moving with urgency? So, taking that pause before, as opposed to being like, oh yeah, we fucked up, like, in retrospection."

The final caring practice that was discussed by multiple participants was rest. Early in this chapter, when discussing some of the causes of burnout, I shared how participants referenced overcommitment and working beyond one's capacity as a reason for burning out. When participants talked about how other activists have modeled positive behaviors for each other, taking breaks was one of the practices that was named as important to see other activists engage in. The final way in which participants discussed resting was through organizational culture and the impact of having breaks built into the norms of a group as a way of making sure that there is time for everyone to collectively not work. In Zimran's organization, there are multiple two-week breaks scheduled throughout the year, and as they mentioned in the quote above, they are working on shifting away from a culture of urgency. During this past year, 2021, the organization took three of these breaks during which the entire organization "shuts down." Zimran expressed concern that the organization was trying to decrease the amount of these breaks in future years to two, to which they responded that actually "we should add one" because they are so impactful to how it feels to be a part of the organization.

In Amelie's organization, in which she has a full-time paid role, there are both organizational breaks and a culture of understanding that each person should take time off as needed. Amelie explained how when she first joined the organization, "they didn't have as much time off, but they realized that people were burning out, like everybody was really burning out around the same time, so [now] we have about a one week break every quarter." In addition to this, her position is an actual 40-hour per week position, which we discussed in our interview is

not often the case for paid organizers. Amelie and I both recollected times when we worked as activists for a salary, often ending up working more than 60 hours a week without being paid for those additional hours. Amelie asserted how she's learned that "no one's going to protect this rest but me," and she's grateful to have found an organization that "respects that a lot."

Incorporating rest into the cultural norms of a workplace or organization makes a difference to the accessibility of taking breaks. Organizational breaks can also help activists for whom rest is hard to take seriously. Even when others around us are taking the time to relax and tend to their own health, activists can make excuses to not do the same. This is also a specific practice that can help support activists' health and wellbeing, and make activists feel seen as full people with valid needs. Just because an employee can earn paid time off through their organization does not mean that the workplace culture encourages taking that time without penalty. Making breaks–at least from the work that the group is doing–a part of the cycle of an organization's work can ensure that there is built in time for members to direct their energy somewhere else or nowhere at all.

Discussion of Care Practices

There are many intersections between care practices and how we learn to be activists. The behaviors and actions that we internalize as normal come from both the actions we see modeled, as discussed in the previous section, and the ways that we feel cared for. Each of the categories of care practices described in this section were important to the participants who shared them, influencing their commitment to their work with a given group and their ideas of what felt possible to accomplish. The practices named in this section are also similar to some of those discussed by authors in the literature in Chapter 2. They reflect the arguments made by those authors that emotional labor and care practices are an important realm of work for social

movements to engage in and take seriously (brown, 2019; Porter, 2017; Syedullah and Leiner, 2021).

One of the main findings from the literature on activist burnout was that not giving attention to the emotional health and needs of activists can contribute to their burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Erakat & Gorski, 2019; Rodgers, 2010). In Rodgers' study specifically, the culture of Amnesty International in which staff were not able to be honest about their challenges and emotional needs related to the work was a contributing factor to the high turnover rate of staff. That honesty and transparency in relationships helped my participants process their emotions and find solidarity in the work aligns with Rodgers' findings about how the lack of transparency contributed to activists leaving their organization.

Nancy Whittier (2015) and Syedullah and Leiner (2021) both discussed how positive relationships with other activists help support ongoing engagement in movement work and continued commitment to movement values. Whittier's conversation with feminist activists about the lasting friendships they formed through their activism and its continued impact on their participation is exactly what Theresa described about finding her own deep friendships through her political work. These relationships are not only useful for sustaining participation, but they're also personally important to activists' wellbeing, because deep, trusting relationships can prevent us from feeling isolated.

All of these themes of care also directly speak to adrienne maree brown's (2019) argument that activism should feel good. In *Pleasure Activism*, brown makes the case for how we can and should find joy and liberation in our activist work, and especially in the relationships that we form through activism. Our activism, brown argues, should not compromise our health or our safety. Rest remains a priority. Friendship is a necessary tool. Nourishment helps us meet our

needs and the movement's goals. In this section, excerpts from participants' stories illuminate how this argument is grounded in their own realities; participants explain how friendship, tending to each other's emotional health, resting together, and responding to each other's needs is important to their personal wellbeing and their ability to feel stable in their activist work.

Mentorship as Reproduction and Care

In each of the sections above, covering how my interviews helped answer both of my research questions, I discussed specific practices that activists found helpful in their journeys of learning both how to be activists and how to sustain their involvement in movement work. It is important to reiterate here that while I separated these sections into reproductive practices and care practices for clarity, I see all of these practices as intertwined. Making space for new activists, tending to each other's emotional health, and modeling healthy habits all contribute to activists' capacity for work and overall wellbeing. In general, investing in the development of new activist leaders is a strategic move for organizations and groups that are seeking to continue their work for the long term. This investment can also be a practice of caring for movement members who want to find meaning in their work, both through their direct actions and their relationships with other activists.

The interconnectedness of all of these practices, and the way that both teaching and caring for new leaders can help sustain a movement, is why I refer to feminist mentoring relationships as a *strategy of care*. Feminist mentorship is a holistic relationship model that incorporates care into mentoring relationships. Each of the practices named in this chapter, from knowledge sharing to prioritizing collective rest, are practices that I see as embodied in the feminist mentorship model, based on both my own experiences in these relationships and the literature on feminist mentorship discussed in Chapter 2. Reconceptualizing mentorship as a

care-based relationship that incorporates all of the practices described in this chapter could change how we, as activists, think about the goals of the relationships we build in our movements, especially between novice leaders and more experienced ones. Doing this reconceptualization would be a strategic move for us as we struggle to maintain momentum and optimism in a world of such immense injustice, pain, and despair. By understanding that the development of new leaders requires a foundation of care in our movement relationships, we can change the cultures of our movements to be more deeply grounded in the values that we advocate for. By incorporating feminist mentorship as a strategic practice of care, we can model the relationships we want everyone to have access to in the more justice and equitable world we're helping to create.

Challenges and Barriers

> "I don't know what leads to everybody feeling like, 'If I leave, everything's gonna be gone.' But I think it also kind of plays into how much work we're willing to share with people. When you get into activism you kind of want to take it all in and hold it all, and just be like, 'I've got it, I've got it, I've got it!' Sharing work is okay. It actually might enhance the movement, you know, when people share things. We have time to move forward together, you know?"

So far in this chapter, I have focused on the stories and experiences that participants shared which help to answer my two research questions. However, in my interviews, I also identified a few common themes that illustrate some of the specific challenges and barriers to being able to either practice care in the ways outlined above or to find activist mentors. These obstacles are important to discuss here because they help to illuminate why some collectives, groups, and organizations might be struggling to find new activist leaders, maintain membership, or create positive working environments. As Gabriel's quote explores above, there is a tension between the individualization of activism and the necessity of collectivity in movement work. The following three themes–Martyrdom and Idolization, Intergenerational Struggles, and The

Personal is (the) Political?–are barriers specifically to the formation of feminist mentoring relationships between activists of different generations.

Martyrdom and Idolization

> "Well, the best organizers are the ones who can step away. If things go to shit as soon as you step back, you know you're doing something really wrong, like, you know, shame on you."

In my interviews with participants, multiple people brought up the tendency for activists to overcommit to the work and ignore their personal needs as a way of asserting themselves as more invested in the movement than others. When discussing other ideas such as setting boundaries and taking breaks, participants would talk about why those things could be hard to do. One reason that repeatedly came up was the internalized comparative game that tells us we have to do more than the activist next to us in order to truly show our dedication to the movement's work. In addition to his quote above, Finn discussed this issue by saying, "everyone's a workaholic. It's always kind of…in that activism and organizing world…it's always a bit of a pissing contest: who's met with more people and who's done the most XY and Z." Karen made a similar point, saying, "people who I've met in the organizing space in general, they kind of seem to have, like, some sort of God-complex based on, like, how much work they've done or what their educational background is." Being willing to take on more responsibilities than might be necessary or healthy is viewed by some activists as a positive characteristic, but for witnesses to this, there can be a harmful effect on movement culture.

While this overcommitment could contribute to negative health impacts for individual activists, it can also become an issue within movement spaces that distorts the role of activist leaders to idols. Rosey commented on this problem, saying…

> "a lot of activists tend to have this mentality of, like, 'well if I don't do it, it won't happen and I'll let these people down.' When there's so many other people in this world also

> helping for this cause. The cause isn't on any individual person's shoulders, and we can't operate that way because then it starts to get real ego driven, you start seeing yourself as the saviors, you start seeing yourself as bigger than the average person when you're part of the movement, too."

When the ego, as Rosey said, starts to influence the way activist leaders operate, we can lose sight of our original purpose and become fixated on proving ourselves rather than creating a more just world.

Carlos also warned against this in his interview in which he advised activists to remember that movements don't exist because of leaders, but because "the working class mobilizes and rises up." He commented on how he's seen when "leadership begins to confuse themselves as the movement," forgetting all the people who are taking to the streets and doing activist work. "They don't realize that they're not the movement, that they're there because these people were willing to come out," he said. When we confuse our role as activists with being martyrs or idols, we can forget why the movements exist in the first place. Movement work involves empowering people, and while that empowerment can happen individually and collectively, movements are necessarily collective. Activists individually working on a goal does not compare in power to activists collectively working on change.

Martyrdom and idolization can both prevent relationships from being prioritized within movement spaces. If activist leaders are holding on too closely to their role, or feeling like they have to prove their dedication is stronger than others, we can start to see each other as competition rather than as allies. Teaching each other skills, sharing advice, and taking care of each other becomes less important to maintaining positions of power within the movement. And, for any new activists seeking to take part in movement work, seeing martyrs and idols all around them normalizes these behaviors, recreating harmful practices and values that don't help us model the equitable world that we're supposed to be working to create.

Intergenerational Struggles

> "Looking at now, I'm that generation going, yeah, I've dealt with that. I'm not gonna say very much unless you ask me, and even if you ask me, I might be a little careful…. I can't deal with that again, because I've already seen it, I know what it is, it's not new to me, and the notion of having to do it over and over again seems to me absolutely intolerable."

On a broad scale, participants also spoke about their struggles to generally connect with activists of different generations. Carlos, who is now in his 50s and works at a university–meaning he interacts with younger people on a daily basis–discussed the ways in which he feels that working with young people in social justice movements is difficult and less enticing than working with students in their 20s. In the quote above, Carlos explains his hesitancy to get fully involved in some of the current internal discussions and conflicts that he witness in social movements. Reflecting on his experience as an activist when he was in his 20s, he shared…

> "I remember being young and having the guy from the '60s… who would come into the meeting and go, like, 'well in'71 or in '68 we did X,' and I just wanted to punch him. I mean I just really wanted to be like, 'shut up'... like I can't stand this, let us do the right thing…. Once it started to happen to me, I realized, like, oh no don't do that. I don't want to be that person because that person drove me nuts, and I also know it won't work."

Based on his experience dealing with older activists who took up too much space with their viewpoints, Carlos decided not to insert himself into today's activist spaces in which there are mostly young people so as not to recreate a harmful pattern.

Amelie, who is in her 30s, also pointed out this generational chasm in which older activists position themselves as authorities within the movement, preventing young people from claiming leadership. But in her experience, Amelie noted that the younger activists in their teens and 20s were being similarly dismissive of the experiential expertise that older activists were bringing to the table. She reflected on a multigenerational group she organized with on reproductive rights, recalling that…

> "young people weren't really respecting the fact that the 80-something year olds had fought for every, like, inch of freedom that we have to begin with, and they know so much from that organizing experience. And them not recognizing the power that young people have, and their ethical voices, and their ability to acknowledge the spherical nature of this issue and intersectionality in general. And so being about 30, I was kind of in the middle."

Amelie doesn't lay blame in this story on either group of activists, and acknowledges her own position of mediation as someone who belongs to neither the older nor younger generation. She discussed the challenges of trying to bridge the gap and help facilitate understanding among everyone in the collective, noting that this work involved some positive growth among some activists, while others left the group due to ongoing frustration with the activists of other generations.

People towards both ends of the generational spectrum were described as having trouble being able to see validity in the viewpoints and ideas of others. Both Theresa and Carlos, the two oldest participants in this research, acknowledged how age can influence how someone is perceived and understood. Carlos said, "what I have found is that the older you get, the harder it is…for people to understand what you're saying." Theresa gave a similar view in her reflections of being a young activist in her 20s, saying that during those years, older activists "were invisible to me, or I made assumptions about their backgrounds." However, based on the younger participants' stories, this also seemed to be true of how they felt they were treated by older activists.

Overall, participants described a generational divide that influenced the ability to understand and be sympathetic to the perspectives of activists of different generations. This struggle was one of the factors that prevented most participants from being able to name mentors of other generations in social justice movement work, instead identifying peer mentors or no mentors at all. As Amelie noted in her story, this chasm prevents young people from fully

understanding their movement histories and the work that was done before they entered the movement. But this has also meant that some older activists have also dismissed young leaders instead of working with them. The intergenerational struggles are not the main focus of this thesis but are extremely important to discuss because of the effect they have on the formation of mentoring relationships. Feeling invalidated by members of other generations could influence the ideas of mentorship that activists have, as well as their openness to these kinds of relationships. Further research on these challenges specifically could illuminate more pathways to connecting generations and eventually forming more mentoring relationships in social justice movements.

The Personal is (the) political?

> "There's no reason why changing pronouns is a bad thing… none at all, in any way, or calling it Latinx or Latine… these are political aspects of collective identification that we have to engage in. Just be careful to think that the struggle is there only."

To get more specific about the challenges that prevent generations from forming positive relationships, this subsection focuses on how identity and intersectionality have contributed to the generational divide. As noted in the section above, it is not only older activists who are dismissed or treated with disdain. Young people, too, have their viewpoints overlooked, in part because their emphasis on identity is challenging for older generations of activists to understand. Older activists don't always feel the same level of urgency or prioritization around some of the issues that young people focus on. As acknowledged by Carlos above, the point of contention isn't necessarily that older justice-oriented activists don't believe identity is politically important. Instead, it's the level to which these issues are prioritized. In particular, gender was brought up by many participants of varying ages as a point of serious division between younger and older activists.

The discussions I had with participants around issues of gender feel important to include in this thesis because of the intense emotions and internal conflicts that activists expressed when trying to explain how gender influenced their relationships across generations. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that I am not transgender, nor am I nonbinary or genderqueer. Some of the ideas expressed by participants might be harmful to activists who have experienced the effects of these attitudes in their daily lives and/or activist work. While I do believe, based on my experience, that conversations about gender fluidity and identity are necessary to have, I also recognize that as a cisgender woman, I have the privilege of engaging in these conversations without direct harm to my wellbeing or sense of self. By including this discussion in this thesis, I am not suggesting that every activist should engage in these conversations, especially when another person is expressing viewpoints that directly cause harm. I firmly believe that ensuring our movements accept, validate, and care for people of all genders is a necessary part of the work for an equitable, just world.

By coincidence, my first few interviews were with activists in their 20s and 30s, all within a few years of my own age. When these participants began discussing some of their frustrations with working with older activists, I was able to identify similar experiences of my own in which I felt disappointed by an older activist's lack of intersectional understanding about an issue, or seeming unwillingness to engage in a conversation with me about why I felt certain opinions they held were harmful. Karen, who was the youngest of all my participants, discussed her most recent organizing experience on the midterm elections in 2022. She worked with her local chapter of the Democratic Party, with "older white people, especially white women" whom she felt didn't "really understand the intersectionality" of the work they were doing to elect pro-choice candidates. Karen described how her frustration with the older activists made her want to

quit her organizing job, saying, "it made me feel like… why am I doing this if they're not gonna listen?"

Zimran, who is in their 30s, shared their more personal experience of trying to maintain a positive relationship with their mother while also remaining true to their values of equity. Their mother, who was involved in the Nation of Islam, doesn't consider herself an activist, but to Zimran, she was one of the early models of community engagement around Black liberation. They described having…

> "this internal struggle of, like, can I really accept her when she's, like, hella homophobic and transphobic and all these things–and I don't agree with her on a lot of stuff–without throwing those people away? And vice versa, can I accept these folks without throwing my mother away?"'

We talked about this conflict, which can change shape when you're reckoning with a familial relationship but is difficult nonetheless when thinking about the people with whom we create movement communities. Zimran said, "it's important to take information from our elders, like, I don't have to agree with your perspective, but your information is still solid." I agree with this stance, but we both admitted that this can be harder in practice than in theory, especially when our elders hold harmful opinions about our own identities.

My last two interviews were with Theresa and Carlos, who are in their 70s and 50s respectively. In each of these conversations–while I personally did not agree with all their opinions–I found myself sympathizing with some of the frustrations they expressed when they found themselves on the other side of these conflicts and struggles within movement spaces. First, I spoke with Theresa, who discussed her identity as a Jewish woman having a heavy influence on her activism, with some secondary influence from her identity as a lesbian. Theresa spoke about how the topic of gender is the biggest source of tension or barrier to relationships that she's experienced among activists. Theresa's experience of liberation through the feminist

movement in the '70s has an ongoing impact on her worldview today, and specifically impacts how she feels concerned about gender fluidity among youth. Making it clear that she is not denying the existence of transgender people or complaining about having to use different pronouns for people, Theresa explained that she has her own worries about young people specifically wanting to make changes to their bodies. This is a concern shared by many people, and an argument can be–and is–made that this is rooted in transphobia. For Theresa, however, expressing this concern is an attempt to have a deeper conversation in which she can share her thoughts on the topic based on her own experience.

We talked for a while about this topic, with Theresa explaining that she remembers early on in the feminist movement how people "were constantly being criticized for being racist or classist or homophobic… and a lot of time was spent dealing with that that could have been spent… doing what we were trying to do." I shared with her stories from my own experiences working with multigenerational and multigendered groups of activists in which we struggled to have our own conversations about gender, speaking to each other from different lived experiences, identities, worldviews, and levels of familiarity. I discussed with Theresa how much fear there is among young people right now, based on the rates of violence against trans and gender-nonconforming people, and how much media coverage goes towards transphobic and homophobic rhetoric. Our conversation was productive for both of us, with Theresa expressing a new understanding of the level of fear young people experience. It especially felt important to Theresa to be asked these questions about her ideas and experiences. She reflected that it has felt to her that young activists simply weren't interested in her experiences. "Very few people have asked me the questions that you're asking me," she said.

Carlos and I had a similar conversation in which the topic of gender was discussed, though Carlos focused less on his own opinions and more on the impact of how deeply we involve our personal identities in activist spaces. Carlos, who was born in a Central American country and immigrated to the U.S., had shared with me earlier in our interview how he had chosen between being involved in two different anarchist organizations based on one of the organizations giving much more attention to the impact of race on political actions. Carlos acknowledged many times that our identities are important to our activism. Quoting Audre Lorde, Carlos asserted that "the personal is political," and that he is in no way trying to argue against that truth.

However, where Carlos's concern stemmed from was what he saw as a "shift from the personal is political to the personal is the political, underline 'the.'" Over time, as he participated in different social justice organizations and activist groups, Carlos noticed "a conflation of politics with individualized identities, and that is the idea that because I am of X… if you disagree with me, you therefore are supporting the systems that oppress me." These types of conflicts among activists are one of the main reasons that Carlos burnt out and has since stepped back from being as directly and heavily involved in direct action.

Discussion of Challenges

Referring to the article "Wounded Attachments" by Wendy Brown (1993), Carlos said, "it's really difficult because we're not saying we're not wounded or [dismissing] the wound but trying to figure out how to decentralize the wound as the location of the struggle." This idea ties all the participants' stories in this section together. We are wounded–by oppression and discrimination, by emotional and physical violence, by daily politics–and our wounds inform our activism, helping us craft our visions of the better world that we want to create, where we can

possibly prevent our wounds from reopening or being inflicted upon others. However, calling back to the problems of martyrdom and idolization, when our individual hurt becomes the central focus of our movements, we can become gridlocked, preventing ourselves from being able to form relationships or take action.

The harm that we can cause each other is extremely real. It is not only the people in opposition to us that damage our wellbeing, our sense of self, and our confidence. The behaviors that we model of overcommitting and competing to be most selfless do real harm to the upcoming generations of activists that are learning how to be effective movement leaders. So, too, can our relationships with each other create or reopen wounds. There is a real and important internal conflict in our movements centered around how much all activists must be in alignment with each other's values in order to effectively do work together. To firmly state my own position, gender fluidity and transgender identities must be validated, accepted, and protected; there is no just world while transphobia remains a hegemonic value. However, there should still be a place in our movements for those activists who have questions and concerns. We cannot erase the work of our elders or the wisdom they hold because of perspectives with which we are not fully aligned. There must be room for nuance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I cited and discussed the stories and experiences that participants shared to contextualize and answer my research questions. I also discussed those stories that illuminate the challenges that activists face in finding mentorship and forming positive relationships within activist communities. Many of these stories align with the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 about feminist mentoring practices, care in social justice communities, reproductive labor, and care ethics. Overall, the data collected in my interviews with activists show that there are

common practices that activists find helpful in managing their emotions and sustaining their engagement in activist work. There are also common behaviors and practices that help activists learn how to be effective, grow their skills, and improve their confidence in being able to help make change in their communities.

Further, the sections in this chapter that answer my research questions are divided into themes that represent the values and practices of feminist mentorship. The reality of my participants' experiences is that most of them have not had well-rounded mentoring relationships. However, many of them had relationships with other activists in which some aspects of feminist mentorship were practiced, such as skill-sharing, tending to each other's emotional health, and having honest conversations about the impacts of the work.

There are still gaps in the care that activists are finding and practicing with each other, and there's an even clearer gap in the ability for cross-generational and cross-identity mentorship to happen on a broad scale. While the incorporation of more feminist mentorship could potentially help address some of these gaps–providing more one-on-one check-ins, resource sharing, and space for emotional processing–establishing these relationships without addressing some of the challenges outlined in the section above would not accomplish much. In order for real feminist mentorship to occur, we would need to address martyrdom and idolization in our organizations and collectives, first ensuring that everyone shares the goal of individual empowerment for collective achievement so that relationships can be founded in care, not competition.

It is also clear from these stories that there is work to be done within our movement spaces to address how we treat our differences in worldviews and understandings as either healthy differences or sources of conflict. At times, conflict must be worked through to get

everyone in a group on a new page so that there is an acceptance of all members. At other times, our gaps in understanding can be acknowledged as frustrating and disappointing without preventing us from doing good work together. When is the time for conflict and when is the time for moving on? This is not the question my research seeks to answer, but answering it is a necessary step in the process of weaving more care into our movements.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> "Even reparing our relationship with the concept of care in a way that's healthy is, like, work itself." (Zimran)

In the preceding five chapters of this thesis, I have introduced my motivations for this research, explained the theoretical frames I used to guide my data collection and analysis processes, and reviewed the existing literature relevant to my own research. I discussed my methodology and explained how I collected and analyzed my data, working with my participants to ensure that this thesis both accurately reflects their experiences and could be useful for them going forward. I conclude this thesis here with a summary of the preceding chapters and an exploration of how I produced meaningful results from this research. I discuss again some of the limitations of the approach I took in my data analysis process. I also reiterate and expand upon suggestions for further research on the topic of mentorship among activists in social justice movements.

Motivation and Discoveries

This thesis was inspired by my own experiences as an activist over the past nine years. Organizing as a student, community member, and paid leader, I worked in a variety of collectives and organizations, focusing on a range of social justice issues, and have had both transformational and detrimental experiences in activist communities. Activist burnout–a phenomena that affects many social justice movement activists–has struck me many times throughout my organizing journey. My episodes of burnout and my related experiences with and without care from activists around me have impacted my approach to organizing. These experiences have also changed how I think about my responsibility to share what I have learned with novice activists. This thesis is one of the ways that I am seeking to share my own experiential knowledge, as well as that of the participants who took part in this research.

Literature on activist burnout, care work in social movements, and models of mentorship that emphasize care are all intertwined into this thesis to build the context for my argument that feminist mentoring relationships can positively serve activists of all experience-levels, ages, identities, and movement affiliations. Scholarship on activist burnout reveals the need for activists to work in healthy environments where care is modeled and practiced by everyone (Erakat & Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019). The literature that more deeply looks at care practices within movements emphasizes how healthy and supportive relationships among activists can impact activists' engagement and ongoing participation in social justice movements (Porter, 2017; Santos, 2020; Syedullah and Leiner, 2021; Whittier, 2015).

Relatedly, the values of feminist and co-mentoring relationships reflect the beneficial practices discussed by social movement scholars as ways to mitigate activist burnout and support activists through their work (Bain et al., 2017; Benishek et al., 2000; Bona et al., 1995; Fahs & Swank, 2020; Godbee & Novotny, 2013). Grounded in care ethics, these models of mentorship emphasize tending to mentors' and mentees' wellbeing, passing on both tactical and emotional knowledge. There is also a focus on reciprocity in these mentoring relationships, with all participants sharing knowledge and practicing vulnerability. Porter (2017), Syedullah and Leiner (2021), and brown (2019) all discuss how practices of reciprocity and care in activist relationships are vital to social justice movements.

Care ethics and reproductive labor theory each informed my approach to this research project, shaping both the questions I asked my participants and the analysis I did of those interviews. These two theoretical frameworks were chosen because of their connection to feminist mentorship. This model of mentoring relationships is grounded in care ethics which explains its focus on tending holistically to participants, helping them to both develop practical

skills and grow emotionally. Mentorship can also generally be considered a practice of reproduction for these same reasons. Through mentoring relationships, mentees deepen their knowledge and strengthen their skills in a field. Activist mentees can thus prepare to eventually take on more leadership roles as mentors phase out of their movement work.

The literature review and theoretical frames summarized above help contextualize both my research questions and the data collected through my interviews. For the first question, *How do feminist mentoring relationships help sustain social justice movement communities and enable them to achieve social change?* stories about the reproductive labor performed by activists provide insight. Not many participants in this study identified having mentorship from other activists, and even fewer felt that they had provided mentorship to others. But the practices of feminist mentorship were named with frequency. Activist elders, or activists with more experience in certain movements, make space for new leaders, teach others skills, share their experiences, and model healthy habits. Each of these practices helps to empower new activists, growing their capacity and building their confidence to take on more leadership. These practices help to both bring new activists into movement spaces and to teach these newcomers how to effectively engage in the work. These practices allow for the reproduction of movements.

For the second question, *What care practices do activists find effective in their efforts to mitigate activist burnout?* the stories of activists practicing honesty and transparency, taking collective breaks, building friendships and community, and tending to each other's emotional wellbeing are all practices that participants named as helpful in their own experiences of their work. These practices also reflect the values of care ethics. While these practices do not necessarily eliminate the potential for burning out, they help support activists through challenges and losses related to their work, and help deepen their investment in movements (Jasper, 1998;

Whittier, 2015). Participants like Finn and Gabriel discussed how much harder it felt to manage their emotional struggles without support from other activists in their movement communities.

Participants' stories show how all the practices of the feminist mentoring model are useful for activists who are learning to become community leaders, trying to manage their emotions, and seeking to sustain their involvement in social justice movements. It is also true, however, that there are challenges that render it hard to form healthy relationships with other activists. Barriers to intergenerational understanding, modeling overcommitment and martyrdom, and bridging perspectives about the role of identity in movements must be addressed as well. Feminist mentoring relationships are not a one-stop solution to the relational and emotional struggles activists face in movement work, but they can be a strategic relationship model to incorporate as we transform our movement spaces to more fully reflect the world we are working to create.

The realities of my participants, all of whom are social justice activists, are realities of distress, frustration, exhaustion, joy, love, investment, and hope. Some have burnt out, some have come close, but all expressed struggling with their emotional health during their activism. Some have received care, most have cared for others, and all identified how supportive relationships had an influence on their experience as activists. Based on their stories, the connection between activists' emotions and relationships within movements is clear.

Sharing the Findings

From the beginning of this research project, I hoped to produce findings that would be of use to activists currently involved in social justice movements, and to those who will in the future. Throughout the process, I have shared my writing with my research participants, including the audio of their interviews and the accompanying transcripts. I have asked for

feedback on the stories used, my representations of their words, and my conclusions from the connections I drew between multiple interviews. By involving the participants in the research process in these ways, I hoped to honor them as co-producers of the knowledge contained in this thesis.

This thesis and the accompanying zine will be shared with all research participants, as well as with those who inspired this research in the first place. My mentors, my thesis committee, my movement co-leaders, and my activist friends are all represented in this thesis because they helped shape me and thus the lens through which I understand the world. Physical copies of the zine will be mailed out, and a few remaining copies will be placed in coffee shops and campus hubs for student action.

The knowledge produced through this research process is contributing to a larger conversation—both within and without academia—about how we honor the emotional labor in activism, how we form healthy relationships with each other, and how our movement cultures affect our ability to transform the world. I hope activists will find insight in the experiences and lessons shared by the participants. I hope, too, that they might find comfort in the certainty that while this work is hard for everyone, we have the power to alleviate some of our pain through collective care and supportive relationships. And lastly, I hope that the stories shared in this thesis, including my own, will help activists see that their desires for friendship, for nourishment, for joy, and for love are all valid desires that have a place within social justice movement work.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research that should be reiterated to illuminate how future research could expand upon the findings in this thesis. Out of the nine activists interviewed, five were unable to identify any mentoring relationships in their activist history,

either as mentors or mentees. This greatly affected the extent to which participants could engage with the idea of feminist mentoring relationships, because most had no experience of mentorship to draw from. Further, because I used narrative inquiry as my methodology, the data I collected was broadly open to my interpretation. Using other methods of inquiry to dissect the relationship between mentorship, care, and activism could produce different results about what specific practices are most useful to activists.

Finally, the distinction I make between reproduction and care can distort the overlap between the impacts of all the practices named in this thesis. For example, modeling healthy habits and tending to others' emotional wellbeing could be differently categorized by another researcher. Not only is there overlap between the actual activities that make up these practices, it is also possible to make the argument that tending to emotional health is a reproductive practice. My separation and categorization of these themes reflects my own understandings of reproductive labor, care, and each of the practices named. Other researchers with other worldviews and lived experiences could draw different conclusions about how certain practices constitute care and reproductive labor.

Future Opportunities for Research

This thesis is an initial bridge between research on social justice movements and research on feminist mentorship. There is more work that could be done to understand the role of mentorship in building and sustaining our social justice movements. Future research could build upon this thesis by expanding beyond the state of Arizona and including activists from a broader range of issue backgrounds. Because of the state of politics in the U.S. at the time of writing, with Roe. v Wade recently overturned by the Supreme Court and a midterm election approaching, most of my participants ended up being currently involved in work on reproductive

justice and voting access. Speaking with activists who work on other issues–for example, immigration justice or labor rights–might reveal other causes of activist burnout or organizational structures that do or do not incorporate care practices.

It is also important that future research focus on activists who identify as mentors or mentees to learn more about what these relationships have looked like in social justice movements so far. Generating more detailed and specific stories about formal mentorship among activists could benefit this area of research by building a more complete picture of the current relationship between mentorship and activist burnout. These stories could also reveal what models of mentorship are most commonly utilized in social justice movements, as well as how those currently employed practices serve activists.

Lastly, to fully tend to the challenges and barriers to relationship-building among activists today, research should be conducted that focuses more specifically on intergenerational relationships. Building a more in-depth understanding of how each generations' culture and issues of urgency influence people's ideas of and interest in cross-generational mentorship is a necessary step in bridging the chasm between generations. Additionally, as we are emerging from the most difficult periods of the coronavirus pandemic, it could be fruitful to research how years of quarantine and isolation may have impacted young people's access to mentorship in general.

Final Reflections

The two years that I have spent as a student in the Sustainable Communities program have been transformative for me. While conceptualizing and working on this thesis, I found a more caring, loving community than I have ever been a part of. Every day that I spent in relationship with the other graduate students and professors in this program expanded my ideas

of what kind of world is possible. Never before had I witnessed or been part of a community that was so collectively invested in each member's wellbeing and growth without any sense of competition or scarcity. Each of us brought our own lived experiences, perspectives, worldviews, and knowledge to our community, and we made each other better. Knowing that this kind of community is possible means that I can never stop working to create the more just and equitable worlds we need. It is hard work, but it is also joyful work. Caring opens us up to love and pain simultaneously. There will be both in the process.

As I learned more about how care ethics and reproductive labor can be practiced through feminist mentorship, I have tried to embody my new knowledge. I have taken more seriously the reality that the behaviors and ethos that I model have an affect on what those around me feel they can do. As a paid mentor to undergraduate students and graduate student facilitators over the past two years, I have taken seriously the critical importance of celebrating successes of all sizes, taking time to rest, being honest about my own feelings about our work, and tending to people's emotional health with the same investment as I do their work. When I felt lackluster about the work I was doing, I expressed my feelings and asked for support. When I needed to take some time off from working so I could reconnect to my other needs, I was vocal about the positive impact this had on my mental health. And when those around me expressed their uncertainty about their power, their agency, or their knowledge, I asserted all of the ways that they are additive to our collective as community leaders and members of our team. I have been doing my own work to disconnect my self-worth from my productivity, and by affirming to others that they are more than their work contributions, I have begun to believe this about myself.

Working on this thesis over the past year and a half has also helped me to deepen my own understanding of the importance of our care practices in social justice movements. I have grown

more grateful for my own mentors through the process of speaking with other activists who have not experienced mentorship in the ways I have. I can also recognize my own stories in each of the thematic categories that emerged from my interviews with participants, and speaking with other activists about these experiences was cathartic for me. I feel indebted to those activist mentors who made space for me to become a leader, teaching me practical skills, sharing with me their insights, and modeling how to balance my internal needs with the external responsibilities of movement work. I feel so much love for those activist peers and mentors who valued my emotional wellbeing, took the time to form personal relationships with me, were honest with me about their own feelings, and who never made me feel guilty for taking breaks. With these revelations about the benefits of feminist mentorship, I believe it is my responsibility to ensure I continue to contribute to social justice movements as a feminist mentor myself. I, too, have skills to teach, experiences to share, and care to give.

I am also grateful for those experiences I had in which relationships with other activists were challenging. I have had my own struggles to connect with activists of other generations, both younger and older than myself. There were times when I let my own ideas about how work should be done prevent me from forming fruitful allyships with other activists with different worldviews. Many of these stories I am not proud of, but I have ultimately grown from all of these experiences. Speaking with other activists helped me grow my own empathy for those with whom I am not fully aligned. Writing this thesis would not have been possible without both reveling in the joy and enduring the distress of social justice movement work.

Mentorship–of any model–will not solve all of the issues within social justice movement work that lead to activist burnout. But in my own experience–and in the stories of care and reproduction shared by participants–the practices of feminist mentorship have a clear place

within our movement work. Reframing how we think about the need for intergenerational relationships in our movements could lead to more allyship across generations and could help us all build broader visions of what kind of world is possible. Time has repeatedly revealed the power of movements to change our societies, our cultures, our worlds. Activism is critical to the dismantling of oppressive structures and the creation of liberating, equitable systems. We have come a long way and we have a long way to go to a truly just, sustainable world. If there is anything you take from this thesis, I hope it will at least be to ask yourself, how am I helping us get there?

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Appendix A

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board for the
Human Research Protection Program

525 S Beaver St
PO Box: 4062
Flagstaff AZ 86011
928-523-9551
https://www.nau.edu/IRB

To:	Keara Hudler
From:	NAU IRB Office
Approval Date:	November 28, 2022
Project:	Sustainable Movements Need Sustained Mentoring: How Feminist Mentoring Relationships Maintain Social Justice Movements Through an Ethics of Care
Project Number:	1948435-3
Submission:	Amendment/Modification
Action:	APPROVED
Project Risk Level:	MINIMAL RISK
Approval Expiration Date:	September 16, 2027
Next Report Date:	
Review Category/ies:	**The project is not federally funded or supported and has been deemed to be no more than minimal risk.**

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

- Northern Arizona University maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00000357).
- All research procedures should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the guidance.
- The Principal Investigator should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the protocol and report any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others. Please refer to Guidance Investigators Responsibility after IRB Approval, Reporting Local Information and Minimal Risk or Exempt Research.
- All documents referenced in this submission have been reviewed and approved. Documents are filed with the HRPP Office within IRBNet. If subjects will be consented, the approved consent(s) are available within IRBNet upon approval notification from the HRPP Office.

Important

The principal investigator for this study is responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals before commencing research. Please be sure that you have satisfied applicable external and University requirements, for example (but not limited to) data repositories, listserv permission, records request, data use agreement, conducting University surveys, data security, international, conflicts of interest, biological safety, radiation safety, HIPAA, FERPA, FDA, sponsor approval, clinicaltrials.gov, tribal consultation, or school approval. IRB approval does not convey approval to commence research in the event that other requirements have not been satisfied.

Appendix B

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Office of Research Compliance

Project Number: 1948435-3
Approval Date: November 28, 2022
This stamp must be on all consenting documents

APPROVED

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Sustainable Movements Need Sustained Mentoring: How Feminist Mentoring Relationships Maintain Social Justice Movements Through an Ethics of Care

Principal Investigator: Keara Hudler

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

This research project seeks to understand how feminist mentoring relationships show up within social justice movements and how these relationships help activists avoid burnout within their work. The project will take place over the course of 7-8 months, but research participants are asked to provide roughly 2 hours of their time for one interview.

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study. The benefits of participating in this research project are a one-time payment of $25 and a dedicated space to discuss the impacts of organizing work on the mental and physical health of activists.

Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted and password protected.

Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes, only your initials. You will be given a pseudonym for the use of any portion of your interview in the final research document.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact **Keara Hudler at (956) 605-2273.**

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Research Protection Program at 928-523-9551 or online at http://nau.edu/Research/Compliance/Human-Research/Welcome/.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date

AGREEMENT TO BE AUDIORECORDED

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix C

Opening remarks

Hi [xyz]. Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me. I know life is busy so I'm grateful that I'm able to speak with you now. As a reminder, I'm specifically interested through this research in the relationship between care and activist burnout. I've been an activist for about 8 and half years now, starting in my first year as an undergraduate in college. I've worked in environmental activism and for democratic candidates, as both an unpaid student activist and a paid organizer, so this work is inspired from my own experiences.

Opening questions

To get started, I would love to know a bit about how long you've been organizing? Tell me about the movements you've been involved in.

What are the aspects of your social identity – such as race, class, sexuality, gender – that matter to your activist work? In what ways do your social identities affect your experience within social justice movements?

How did you learn how to be an activist? Who taught you and how did they teach you?

Topic questions (Activist burnout)

What are the challenges you've experienced as an activist?

How has activism affected your physical health?

How has activism affected your emotional and mental health?

What were care practices like in the organization/group/movement you were/are a part of? What forms of care were most helpful? Are there other forms of care you would have liked?

Activist burnout is a condition that leads people to step back from their activism due to its effects on their physical, emotional, and/or mental health.

Topic questions (Mentorship)

When you think of mentorship in social justice movements, what do you think of?

How have you been mentored in your activist work? How have you mentored other activists?

The mentorship that I have experienced aligns with the values of feminism; rather than career-focused and involving a clear distinction between mentor and mentee, this mentorship is organized around care. Tending to each other's emotions, sharing histories and lived experiences, validating struggle and sharing resources to move through struggle.

Based on this description, would you say that you have experienced this kind of mentoring relationship in any activist spaces?

Closing questions

What advice would you give to activists who may be struggling to balance the emotional aspects of the work?

What advice would you give to seasoned activists about the importance of transferring knowledge to new organizers?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I didn't ask about?

Closing remarks

Thank you again for your time today. This was a really insightful conversation for me, and I hope having this space to talk about your activist experience was helpful in some way for you. I will send you any writing about this interview that I do before it is shared publicly. If you would like, I can send you the full transcript of the interview once I have that. If you have any feedback about what I send, or if you have any questions for me at any point, please don't hesitate to reach out.