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AWAKENING A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE: TOWARD A MODEL OF ACTIVIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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This dissertation is dedicated to
Carrie Barefoot Dickerson
1917-2006

She was a powerful activist and an inspiration to many.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry into the process of activist identity development. Specifically, the experience of identity change over time was examined in 12 animal protection and environmental activists to see if "prototypical stories" of activism exist, in order to determine the "essence" of becoming an activist. Three prototypical stories emerged from the data. In the first prototypical story, an individual becomes involved in activism at a young age, becomes strident about their cause, and then mellows somewhat with time, becoming an effective and congruent activist. In the second prototypical story, an individual becomes involved in activism later in life, experiencing their stridency as depression or anger held in, and then following the same course outlined above. The last prototypical story involves taking action, but without adopting the identity of an "activist." In this story, individuals do many things that can clearly be categorized as activists, yet do not recognize themselves in that way.

A Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID) is proposed having five stages: Contact, Commitment to Action, Stridency, Adaptation, and Deepened Understanding. These stages bear similarity to established models of identity change (e.g. Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence, Downing and Roush model of feminist identity development). Implications and limitations of the research are also examined.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of problem

Pro-social behavior – volunteering and involvement in activist movements – is a popular activity in the United States. Every year approximately 85 million people volunteer for various causes throughout the United States (Independent Sector, 1999). They choose to volunteer their time, emotional energy, and personal resources. Many service organizations rely on an active volunteer base to sustain their efforts over time. Activism, which is primarily volunteer work, propels social reform and the passage of new legislation. Researchers have examined motivation for action (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Ferrari, Loftus, & Resek, 1999; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), predictors of action (Allen & Ferrand, 1999; Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Greenslade & White, 2005), characteristics of activists (Franz & McClelland, 1994; Jones, 2002), how individuals "learn activism" (Durrenberger, 1997; Finger, 1994), and aspects that help people sustain within social activist networks over many years (Passy & Giugni, 2000; Passy & Giugni, 2001; Whittier, 1997). Yet no research has examined how people come to view themselves as activists. The purpose of this research is to more closely illuminate

the identity shift that occurs when a person comes to view herself or himself as an activist.

Several identity researchers have researched and tested a process of identity development over the past three decades, specifically examining racial, feminist, and women's identity development over time (Cross, 1971, 1978; Downing & Roush, 1985; Helms, 1990a, 1990b). These theorists have described a process of identity transformation that occurs when individuals are confronted with discrimination or prejudice, and feel compelled to act (Downing & Roush, 1985; Fischer, Tokar, Mergl, Good, Hill, & Blum, 2000). The first model developed, The Cross Racial Identity Model, was formulated to express the process of racial identity development that occurs when African Americans recognize the presence of racism in their lives (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). This model was adapted by Downing and Roush (1985) to reflect the discrimination that women perceive in a sexist society, in the Model of Feminist Identity Development, and was again later reformulated to reflect women more broadly and cross-culturally in the Womanist Identity Development Model (Helms, 1990b).

As described by Cross (1978), Helms (1990a; 1990b), and Downing and Roush (1985), these models share a common course of action, beginning with some sort of introducing event, wherein the individual experiences discrimination or personal dissonance. Then the person enters a period of "readiness," opening the individual to significant change (Downing & Roush, 1985, p. 698). This is followed by involvement in a movement that counteracts this discrimination, in which the person becomes heavily, often militantly, involved. Later, these attitudes are moderated by a deepened understanding of the movement's ethic and a more balanced incorporation of the

movement's values. Lastly, some individuals will continue to engage in activism to reduce discrimination throughout the course of their lives (Cross, 1978; Downing & Roush, 1985; Helms, 1990a; 1990b).

Statement of problem

These models of identity development have inspired much research and theorizing pertaining to the explicit processes of racial identity development and womanist or feminist identity development. However, no one has examined whether or not these identity development processes actually describe a broader phenomenon experienced by individuals who engage in other social activist movements. In other words, perhaps this pattern of change is a path shared by many activists across issues. Perhaps this process of identity development is the awakening of a social conscience indicative of an identity conversion process, rather than indicating that an individual has become *specifically* a feminist or racially aware.

Gaining better insight into activist identity development could be important for many reasons. First, if this is a process that is shared across movements, areas of interest, and political ideologies, then general ideas of how to inspire and motivate non-activists to become involved may emerge. Likewise, if a general activist identity development process can be identified, more insight may be gained into how some individuals become overly involved in activism at the expense of their personal and financial lives, as well as how some people become involved in dangerous, illegal forms of activism, such as Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front activists who set fires and sabotage machinery.

Conversely, instead of becoming deeply involved, many activists burnout and drop out, leaving many volunteer, service, and activist organizations with a constantly shifting base of support. Activists have noted a high turnover rate within the ranks of various volunteer and activist groups (Shields, 2002). By interviewing veteran advocates, individuals who have dealt with these feelings and maintained motivation for advocacy, specific developmental processes and potential stumbling blocks and hazards for activists may be illuminated. Ideally, interventions can be created and utilized to protect activists early on in the process. Additionally, coping mechanisms such as these may prove beneficial to organizations that rely on a volunteer base for programmatic efforts.

The goals of this research are to gain a better understanding of activist identity development, compare activist identity development with racial, womanist, and feminist identity development, and to discover the kind of events and experiences that facilitate and impede activists in their development. As little research on this subject has occurred and many broad questions exist, a qualitative methodology has been chosen, in order to allow for deep exploration and reflection on the issues. A phenomenological qualitative approach will be used in order to maximize the exploration of the personal experience involved (Creswell, 1998).

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1) Are there prototypical identity development processes for social activism?
2) How does activist identity development occur?
3) What are the similarities and differences between prototypical developmental processes for social activists and racial, feminist, and women's identity development models?

4) How is activist identity development experienced by the activist?
5) Do certain life events or circumstances facilitate or impede activist identity development?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review will describe current thinking and research related to identity theory and models of identity change predicated by the perception of prejudice or discrimination (e.g. Cross' model, Downing and Roush's model of feminist identity development, Helms' Womanist model, and models of homosexual identity development). Models of identity change will be compared to other significant personality changes, such as "conversion experiences" and activism construed as secular "religion." Possible parallels to activist identity development will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Identity theory

Broadly, identity may be defined as the salient "ascribed, achieved, and adopted roles" in a person's life (Minton & McDonald, 1984, p. 91). Individuals may possess certain traits, such as being female or middle class, which constitute ascribed characteristics, or those specified by society. Persons achieve identities when they become a doctor or a mother; they adopt identities when they convert to a religion or pick up a new passion, such as becoming a student of yoga or an avid bird watcher. In terms of activist identity, the role of "activist" is an adopted identity, comprising both a felt sense

of *being* an activist and the enactment of certain behaviors that confirm to self and others that one *is*, in fact, an activist.

In examining identity development, many theoretical frameworks exist that may be extended to new inquiry. Habermas' (1971) theory of ego development is especially suited to activist identity development because it explicitly discusses personal interpretations of societal norms. This theory examines the recursive relationship between individuals and societal norms and values. According to Habermas' theory of ego development, the achievement of an integrated identity is predicated by first adhering to societal beliefs and then critically processing those introjected values (Habermas, 1971). According to Habermas, humans are purported to progress through four stages wherein they initially cannot distinguish a self or identity (Symbiotic stage). Then they begin to separate self and environment but lack the ability to take others' perspectives (Egocentric stage). Later, they introject societal norms, beliefs, and values (Sociocentric-objectivistic stage), and finally, they achieve personal consistency in terms of their own values and beliefs via critical evaluation of societal dictates (Universalistic stage, Habermas, 1979). Thus, as the individual's ego develops, different forms of identity emerge. In the Symbiotic stage no identity exists, while in the Egocentric stage a "natural" identity, based on an appreciation of physical boundedness and uniqueness, emerges. In the Sociocentric-objectivistic stage, role identity develops, in which the individual's identity is based on perceived ability to satisfactorily perform social roles. The Universalistic stage, the final stage in Habermas' ego development theory, establishes ego identity, which integrates and brings consistency to an individual's sense of personal identity – in

essence the individual will have a solid understanding of personal values and their intersection with society and personal action (Habermas, 1979).

Habermas' theory of ego development could help explain why some individuals begin to re-evaluate social norms and take action, moving from routine behavior (e.g. lack of interest in gay rights) to new behavior (e.g. promoting equality in marriage law). Adherence to social norms and customs, while initially allowing an individual to satisfy role identity needs, becomes irrelevant to the self after examination of introjected societal standards. Upon this critical self-examination, the individual incorporates their new beliefs into their ego identity, bringing consistency to their beliefs and sense of self.

Another body of literature has examined how people come to explore and adopt particular identities (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992, 1994, Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Marcia, 1966). Marcia (1966) drew from Erikson (1968) to develop four identity statuses related to self-exploration – or the lack, thereof – and identity commitment. Diffusion refers to a personal identity that lacks coherence and has not been cognitively processed or chosen. Foreclosure is purported to occur when an individual has prematurely decided on their identity, without exploration or cognitive processing of alternatives. An individual is said to be in the moratorium status when they are in the process of cognitively processing their identity and alternatives through self-exploration. The achievement status signifies that an individual has thoughtfully explored and adopted their identity (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992, 1994, Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Marcia, 1966).

Berzonsky (1992, 1994, 1999) has further refined this model to include "social-cognitive *processes*" (1992, p. 772, emphasis in original) that typify the individual

behaviors associated with each status. It is hypothesized that individuals in the achievement and moratorium statuses employ an *information orientation*, characterized by seeking out of information perceived to be salient and relevant to the self. Research has demonstrated correlations between an information orientation and need for cognition, openness to experiencing, introspection, and coping (Berzonsky, 1994). Conversely, those who possess a *normative orientation* prefer to conform to social and familial expectations (Berzonsky, 1992) and typically demonstrate a foreclosed status, characterized by a preemptive problem-solving style (Berzonsky, 1994). Lastly, the *diffuse/avoidant orientation* is often associated with the diffusion status. Individuals who employ this sort of exploratory process are usually reluctant to engage in introspection and use procrastination in order to avoid decision-making. In addition, this strategy is associated with an emotion-focused and avoidant problem solving style (Berzonsky, 1992, 1994).

For the purposes of activist identity research, parallels may be drawn between identity status and associated cognitive processes. For instance, prior to contact with or knowledge of a perceived social problem, individuals may be somewhat foreclosed in terms of an activist identity. Individuals have been shown to consciously avoid information that might threaten their sense of well-being (Holeman, 2005; Jones, 2002), perhaps demonstrating a diffuse/avoidant or normative processing style. Once faced with information they feel they can no longer neglect, they may engage in emotion-focused problem solving, plunging into involvement in an activist movement and entering a moratorium identity status related to their activist identity. After a period of affiliation with an activist movement, concomitant with associated self-exploration and

introspection obtained through an information orientation, the individual may enter the achievement status, referring to the integration of a stable sense of self as an activist (based on interpretation of Berzonsky, 1989, 1992, 1994 and Marcia, 1966).

Identity theory in general helps lay the foundation for understanding how people experiment with, try on, and explore new identities. Identity evolves through various stages related to the ego with the growing understanding of one's self as a bounded entity interacting within a society. Comparison with others, the internalization and later critical analysis of societal norms, and thoughtful self-exploration can allow people to determine what fits for them – who they perceive themselves to be and how they desire to be seen by others. Research on specific patterns of identity change is reviewed below.

The Cross Racial Identity Model

The Cross Racial Identity Model has been considerably refined since its initial description in 1971 by William E. Cross, Jr. (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The model was originally developed to describe the pattern of identity changes and behavioral correlates assumed to occur following an African American's involvement with the Black Panther movement. It was later extended by Helms (1990a) to also incorporate an African American's experience in ordinary social life in the United States (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). In discussing the process of research on long-standing personality change William E. Cross, Jr. said,

> In the analysis of any identity transformation, researchers are interested in (a) how a person perceives change in himself/herself, and (b) an objective analysis of the person's personality, attitudes, ideology and behavior in order to determine the extent to which the person actually has changed. (Cross, 1978, p. 96)

Cross' model was one of the first identity models to be widely researched and accepted. The original model hypothesized the existence of five stages pertaining to the identity examination and change of an African American individual: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment (Cross, 1978).

In the Pre-Encounter stage, the individual is relatively ignorant of Black culture and identifies with Whites, while denying discrimination. In the Encounter stage, a personal or social event jolts the individual out of their complacency, leaving her "(vulnerable) to a new interpretation of [her] identity…" (Cross, 1978, p. 85). Immersion-Emersion occurs when the person literally immerses themselves in Black culture, having a swift backlash in attitudes against Whites and White culture. This is a time of active engagement in protest, education, and militancy, where Black culture is revered and White culture is shunned. This stage is characterized by rage and resentment and a deep immersion in the "black is beautiful" ethic (Downing & Roush, 1985; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, & Cokley, 2001). Individuals in this stage may experience guilt at having participated in their own oppression, by buying into the ethic of discrimination perpetuated by the majority society. The Internalization and Internalization-Commitment stages both bring a balance to the two extremes, leaving the African American individual empowered and (if proceeding to the Internalization-Commitment stage, which is optional) ready to effect change in society (Cross, 1978). While this model broadly captures the identity change that occurs over time, research has led to considerable refinement of the original model.

The new model has been expanded to include six levels pertaining to Black identity and organization, the immense number of possible Black identities, socialization to various identities through childhood and adolescence, identity changes and conversion experiences, recycling of identity (i.e. re-entering various stages of identity exploration when confronted with a salient life event), and identity mechanisms (e.g. adopting White cultural norms in certain contexts) (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Thus, the new model is quite complex, encompassing many different forms and ideas of Black identity and identity change. Additionally, and fundamentally, the Internalization and Internalization-Commitment stages have been collapsed to reflect one unitary stage (Vandiver et al., 2001). In making this change, Cross also revised his assertion that the Internalization stage is correlated with positive mental health (1995) and that individuals in the Internalization stage embrace multiculturalism and diversity (1991). Rather, individuals in this stage may hold a multitude of opinions regarding the ethnicities of others and are not necessarily immune to mental health problems. The defining characteristic of the Internalization stage is a state of reflection that surpasses stereotypic thinking (Vandiver et al., 2001).

Another significant change is reflected in the assertion that Black individuals in the Pre-Encounter stage do not necessarily harbor pro-White and anti-Black sentiments (Vandiver et al., 2001). This discovery, along with the conclusion that Pre-Encounter attitudes do not necessarily reflect low self-esteem, led to the identification and examination of numerous Black identities, rather than the overly broad personality states described in the original model.

Another significant inclusion is Cross and Vandiver's (2001) distinction between a person's "personal identity" [PI] and her or his "reference group orientation" [RGO] (p. 372). The first is thought to incorporate personality characteristics, such as self-esteem, optimism or pessimism, cognitive skills, etc. Thus, an individual's PI may include traits such as being outgoing, intelligent, friendly, temperamental, etc. The RGO is thought to incorporate socially ascribed descriptors, such as African American, upper-class, female, lesbian, etc. The authors note that PI indicators do not heavily influence a person's sense of Black identity or "social identity awareness" (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 373) and therefore the model is based on an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions related to his or her RGO.

The new model also offers one level associated with socialization and identity change over the life course, as well as a level dedicated to the understanding of "conversion experiences," (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 378). By looking at socialization processes across a number of identity types (i.e. Assimilation, Racial Self-Hatred, Miseducation, Militantly Pro-Black, Biculturalist, Multiculturalist; for a complete list see Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 377), those "at risk" for identity conversions can be isolated. Thus, if an individual is socialized to be bicultural they likely will not experience significant identity change related to Black identity. If, on the other hand, they have been socialized to be assimilated, they may later experience an adult identity conversion experience. This experience, addressed in a separate level of the model, occurs when an individual who formerly accorded low salience to race or actively hated or misunderstood Black culture, is confronted with a triggering event concluding in significant identity

change. Thus, after a conversion experience, an assimilated individual may achieve a more racially aware identity (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

This model has been tested empirically through the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B, Helms, 1990a) and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS, Vandiver et al., 2000). Results are mixed, suggesting that the model may describe general changes in individuals, but not supporting specific or fine-tuned predictive power. For instance, one study of test-retest reliability of the RIAS-B concluded that racial identity attitudes reflect state variables rather than trait variables (Lemon & Waehler, 1996), cautioning that "at this time, under these conditions" a person may express various racial identity attitudes (p. 82). In terms of corroborating evidence, Pre-Encounter respondents endorsed more items related to the perception of general and cultural stress (Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997), the suppression of anger, adherence to social desirability, and external definitions of self (Fischer, Tokar, & Serna, 1998). Immersion/Emersion respondents endorsed items related to expressive and reactive anger, as well as closer affiliation with other African Americans (Fischer et al., 1998). Those in the Internalization stage, possessing the highest levels of racial identity development, were associated with less self-derogation and higher self-esteem (Lemon & Waehler, 1996) than those in the other groups. Calls have been made for more psychometric refinement of the RIAS-B (Fischer & Moradi, 2001) while the CRIS has only been subjected to limited testing to date (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001).

The Downing and Roush Model of Feminist Identity Development

In 1985 Nancy E. Downing and Kristin L. Roush published the first article to adapt the Cross model to another version of identity development based on perception of

prejudice and discrimination. These authors (Downing & Roush, 1985) note that the model is based on their personal observation, the "meager" literature available at the time (p. 696), and the development of a positive minority identity via the Cross model. They asserted that as feminists they were compelled to write from a feminist perspective, acknowledging the significant effects of prejudice and discrimination on women's lives. This acknowledgement led to their conclusion that women may share characteristics, such as a process of identity development, with minorities, allowing relevant research on minority experience to inform research on women's experience.

The five stages in the Downing and Roush (1985) model were only slightly modified from the original model proposed by Cross. The first stage, Passive Acceptance, describes women who are either ignorant to the reality of sexual discrimination or actively endorse traditional notions of gender roles and the superiority of men. At the end of this stage, the woman enters a period of openness to change and the acquisition of new information, allowing her to enter the next stage, Revelation. Downing and Roush (1985) note that women may experience several threatening or awareness-raising events that precipitate the Revelation stage, which is characterized by polarized thinking in which all things female are seen as positive and all things male are seen as negative.

The Embeddedness-Emanation stage reflects two changes, embeddedness, followed later by a transition toward emanation. Embeddedness is marked by a withdrawal to safe-havens of similarly minded women. Embeddedness-Emanation is characterized by the seeking out of all things female, such as women artists, musicians, authors, etc. Women in this stage typically seek out support groups or become involved in women's activism. Some may end relationships with friends who do not share their

beliefs; some may divorce (Downing & Roush, 1985). Downing and Roush (1985) state that this period may be more difficult for Caucasian women than for African Americans in the Immersion-Emersion stage (Cross, 1978), stating that women are so deeply embedded in the dominant culture that it can be challenging to find a culture that embraces and supports females (i.e. "female is beautiful"). Interestingly, the authors note that lesbians may have an easier time during this stage, but make no mention of why they distinguished Caucasian women as having more difficulty, as opposed to other women of color. The emanation stage sees a softening in a woman's stance toward males, allowing for more reflection and shades of grey, in contrast to the black and white thinking purported to occur in the Revelation and Embeddedness periods. This softening allows for the transition to Synthesis, stage four.

The Synthesis stage sees the reintegration of the women's identity, allowing her unique and individual characteristics to re-emerge and interact in a unified way with her new found understanding of oppression. Thus, a woman in this stage would most likely respond thoughtfully but appropriately to discrimination, rather than reacting in a knee-jerk manner. Lastly, the Active Commitment stage, which Downing and Roush (1985) state few women actually enter, is characterized by a deep and life-long dedication to righting social wrongs. Some research has noted that this stage is the behavioral expression of the Synthesis stage (Rickard, 1989), but recent research has demonstrated that the two are related but separate (Moradi & Subich, 2002).

Like Cross, Downing and Roush (1985) also suggest that women may recycle back through these stages when confronted with difficult triggering life events. They assert that women are able to use previously acquired skills and tools to help manage

these times, but note that nonetheless women may stall within a certain stage. It is asserted that the stages most likely to cause stagnation are the Revelation stage and the Embeddedness stage. No research is presented to support this assumption. The idea of stalling within a certain stage appears to have been included based on Downing and Roush's (1985) anecdotal observations.

This model has been operationalized via the Feminist Identity Scale (FIS) (Rickard, 1989), the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS) (Bargad & Hyde, 1991), and the Feminist Identity Composite (FIC) (Fischer et al., 2000). More recently, Moradi and Subich (2002) conducted comparison analyses of these three instruments noting that the FIC is most structurally sound when testing the entire model, while the FIDS and FIS perform better on certain individual stages. An extensive review by Moradi, Subich, and Phillips (2002) suggests mixed results for the model, with general support for the set of stages described by the Downing and Roush (1985) model. For instance, women expressed greater or lesser support for female artists over male artists (Rickard, 1990), perceived more or less hostility toward women in a campus environment (Fischer & Good, 1994), and reported more or less sexism in their lives (Fischer et al., 2000) at varying stages in the model.

The Helms' Womanist Model

The Womanist Model, one of Janet Helms' (1990b) contributions to identity theory, closely follows the Cross model of Black racial identity development. She posits four stages – Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization (Ossana & Helms, 1992). A woman in the Pre-Encounter hasn't thought much about her status in society as a female. Rather, she tends to bow to given social norms, viewing

men as superior to women. The next stage, Encounter, occurs when she begins to question these social norms, based on some sort of triggering event or information. Eventually, in the Immersion/Emersion stage she will move into a period of outright dismissal of socially derived definitions of womanhood. Female role models are adopted and revered; close relationships with women are nurtured and deepened. As this stage draws to a close, she will begin to craft her own definition of what it means to be a woman. This marks the transition into the Internalization stage, during which time the woman will achieve an integrated female identity based on her own definitions, rather than external influences or dictates of womanhood (Ossana & Helms, 1992).

Some important distinctions between the Womanist Model and the Downing and Roush (1985) feminist model emerge under closer examination. First, the Womanist Model was developed in order to adequately represent the experience of all women, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, etc. In fact, the term "womanist" was adopted from Black feminist authors who desired a broader vision of feminism, rather than one that represented White, upper-middle class American females (Ossana & Helms, 1992). In addition, Helms' model denotes a positive identity resolution as the development of a personal definition of womanhood. The Downing and Roush model implicitly endorses a political ideology by defining a healthy identity resolution as the development of a feminist identity (Ossana & Helms, 1992). Also, the Womanist Model places an emphasis on the development of a personal understanding of womanhood, while the Downing and Roush model examines discrimination and oppression in women's lives (Moradi et al, 2002).

This model has been operationalized by the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale (WIAS) (Ossana & Helms, 1992) and has been tested in a limited manner (Letlaka-Rennert, Luswazi, Helms, & Zea, 1997; Ossana & Helms, 1992; Moradi, 2005). Findings suggest connections between higher levels of identity development and self-esteem (Ossana & Helms, 1992) as well as a sense of empowerment (Letlaka-Rennert & Luswazi, 1996). This last study, conducted with South African women, found no association between locus of control and the Internalization stage. This is surprising given the model's emphasis on higher levels of womanist identity development and internal definitions of womanhood (Ossana & Helms, 1992). It should be noted, however, that this study employed a longer version of the WIAS (55 items instead of 43) and did not describe how or why additional items were added. The longer version of the WIAS has not been used in other studies (Moradi, 2005). Lastly, some have noted that the model needs refinement and that "serious psychometric concerns" with the WIAS plague current research on the topic (Moradi et al., 2002, p. 34; Moradi, 2005). The model's developer, Janet Helms, has done little research on the model in the past several years and has not completed the original paper (1990b) on which the model is based.

Helms also developed a model of White racial identity development (1990a). However, it is based on a person's gradual awareness of their experience as a White racial being, borrowing from the literature on culture shock (Helms, 1984). While part of the development process may include an awareness of one's own privilege, particularly in relation to the discrimination and oppression of other racial groups, this model is not based on identity change instigated solely by discrimination and oppression, and thus will not be included in this literature review.

Models of homosexual identity development

Several models of gay identity development (referred to alternately as homosexual identity formation, homosexual identity development, gay identity development, and lesbian identity development) have been proposed (Cass, 1979, 1984; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Troiden, 1979). The Cass (1984) model of Homosexual Identity Formation (HIF) has been tested empirically, gaining support in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) identity development literature (Cass, 1984; Halpin & Allen, 2004; Marszalek, Cashwell, Dunn, & Heard Jones, 2004). This model generally describes a process of identity development wherein individuals gradually realize they differ from others in their sexual orientation (Identity confusion) and struggle with a sense of duplicity and isolation while others continue to believe they are heterosexual (Identity Comparison). They wrestle with their own acceptance of this orientation (Identity Tolerance), and – if continuing toward homosexual identity achievement – "come out" (Identity Acceptance). This is followed by intense association with GLBTQ individuals and political efforts (Identity Pride), and eventually a balanced sense of comfort and self-respect based on an integrated gay identity (Identity Synthesis) (Cass, 1984). A similar model has been proposed for lesbian identity development, postulating four stages – awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The lesbian identity development model was explicitly modeled on gay, racial, and gender identity models (Marszlek et al., 2004) described in this literature review (i.e. Cross, Downing & Roush, Helms, Cass).

Notable similarities to racial, womanist, and feminist identity development trajectories include: feelings of social and familial alienation related to the growing

awareness of one's sexual orientation; seeking out a community of similar individuals; "identity pride" (Cass, 1984, p. 152), when individuals seek to publicly demonstrate pride in their sexual orientation, often through political channels; and the development of cohesion and synthesis of a unique personal identity, as opposed to solely a gay identity. Downing and Roush (1985) noted a time of self-imposed isolation and the need to seek out a new community when a woman begins to transition through feminist identity development. Identity pride seems to reflect the Immersion/Emersion and Embeddedness-Emanation stages with the sudden, intense, and occasionally militant involvement by individuals within a movement of like-minded others. The relative balance achieved through the cohesion and synthesis of a gay identity among other personal identities (e.g. I am male, I am middle class, I am American) seems to reflect the Internalization and Synthesis stages wherein individuals incorporate a movement's ethic more deeply, achieving a reflective, non-stereotypical understanding of their movement's values and its meaning within their personal identity.

The Cass model remains theoretically prominent, but has received little empirical scrutiny. Current research on GLBTQ models of identity development demonstrates that gay individuals of discrete age periods compose each of Cass' HIF stages, indicating that individuals move through the stages developmentally and sequentially as a function of age (Marszlek et al., 2004). Additionally, a U-shaped effect was found for psychosocial well-being with individuals at the first stage (Identity Confusion) and last stage (Identity Synthesis) reporting the highest levels of well-being (Halpin & Allen, 2004).

Summary of identity models

All of these models describe a change in identity caused by the perception of difference and discrimination based on that difference. Across models, individuals are purported to experience moments of denial of or discomfort with difference, isolation from former peer groups with growing recognition of this difference, intense involvement with a like-minded community while coming to terms with this difference, and a gradual incorporation of and comfort with this difference as a unique and vital part of one's personal identity. This seems similar to Carl Rogers' (1961) description of personal change, moving away from rigidity and an external locus of evaluation, and toward fluidity, non-judgment, and an internal locus of evaluation. In fact, these models of change seems to implicitly describe a movement from rigid, stereotypic thinking based on external norms, to more fluid, accepting thinking based on internal norms. In addition, self-esteem has been purported to increase with higher levels of identity development, and has been shown to do so in some research (Lemon & Whaeler, 1996; Ossana & Helms, 1992).

Table 1 presents a graphical representation of these models roughly aligned according to stage. This table is based on a similar example presented in Minton and McDonald (1984).

Table 1 – Stages of identity development

Model	**Stages of identity development**						
Habermas (1971; 1979) Model of Ego Development	Symbiotic (lack of identity)	Egocentric (natural identity)	Sociocentric-Objectivistic (role identity)	Universalistic (ego identity)			
Marcia (1966)	Foreclosure	Foreclosure	Diffusion	Moratorium	Moratorium	Achievement	Achievement
Berzonsky (1992; 1994)			Diffuse/ Avoidant Orientation or Normative Orientation	Diffuse/ Avoidant Orientation or Information Orientation	Normative orientation (with activist group) or Information orientation	Information orientation	Information orientation
Cross (1971; 2001) Model of Psychological Nigrescence			Pre-Encounter	Encounter	Immersion Emersion	Internaliza-tion	

Model	Stages of identity development						
Downing & Roush (1985) Model of Feminist Identity Development			Passive-Acceptance	Revelation	Embedded-ness Emanation	Synthesis	Active Commitment
Helms (1990b) Model of Womanist Identity Development			Pre-Encounter	Encounter	Immersion Emersion	Internaliza-tion	
Cass (1979; 1984) Model of Homosexual Identity Formation			Identity Confusion	Identity Comparison Identity Tolerance	Identity Acceptance Identity Pride	Identity Synthesis	

Identity and activism

The models described above discuss a particular version of identity change based on an awareness that one is different from the majority of society. Thus, these models describe the awakening of awareness – I am different, those like me are different and judged by society for being so, I am being oppressed, others are being oppressed, etc. It can be speculated that the mechanism of identity change lies not in the specific trait that is different from society (e.g. being female, being gay, being African American) but rather that the mechanism of change is in the recognition of injustice. If injustice is the fulcrum for action, these models might all be describing a process of general change – a conversion process – rather than specific processes of change related uniquely to the population described.

Does the recognition of a social or environmental injustice carry the same weight, in terms of ability to alter identity, as recognizing personal discrimination, as in the Cross model? Can a person experience injustice vicariously and yet personally enough to motivate one to action? Is this enough to motivate identity change? In other words, are there similarities between activist identity development and existing models of identity development? Do prototypical stories of activist identity development exist?

Cross' stages, like other identity stage models, may tell the story of awakening to social injustice, and the reactions and actions resulting from the knowledge. His (1978) model, while designed to describe the process of an African American becoming aware of their culture within a context of social inequality, seems to be adaptable on a broad level to many phenomena of change. If so, his interpretation of identity transformation may well apply to other social activism contexts.

The framework for the Cross model (1978) may illuminate the process whereby uninvolved individuals become highly motivated activists. For instance, uninformed individuals (Pre-Encounter) may learn about an issue that they find personally poignant and subsequently might decide to become involved in activism to educate others about that issue (Encounter). From there they may become militantly devoted to their cause. Intense emotions may surface at this time, possibly including feelings of guilt, grief, anger at complacency, and exhaustion at the lack of progress (Immersion). This could be the pivotal stage in which activists burnout and drop out or manage to mitigate those feelings and move on. With time and continued exposure to their cause, the activists who persevere will likely lose some of their hostility and return to a more balanced manner of devotion to a cause (Internalization). At this point, the values and ethics of the movement can then be incorporated into the daily life of the individual in a more practical and relativistic way. As no models of activist development currently exist, a better understanding of the developmental processes unique to activists would have far reaching implications for both the causes activists serve as well as for the individual's personal well-being.

Activism as conversion process

Another framework for understanding activist identity development is through the lens of the religious conversion experience. Support has been found for a six-stage model of religious conversion (Kahn & Greene, 2004; Rambo, 1993), hypothesizing a crisis, a quest, an encounter, an interaction, a commitment, and consequences. Rambo (1993) also emphasizes the context that may help or hinder conversion. He speculates that "few conversions take place in areas with well-organized, literate religions supported by the

economic, political, and cultural powers of the region" (1993, p. 47), which may highlight the contextual influences which make conversion so dramatic. Conversion, it appears, functions as an external response or reaction to the status quo, rather than operating within it.

Rambo's stages (1993), as tested by Kahn and Greene (2004), are offered as examples of a process, with stages purported to occur sequentially. Rambo noted that not everyone experiences every stage and that some stages may be recycled, with overlap between them, as well. Conversion is purported to begin based on different contexts. A life crisis may occur, casting the convert in a more passive role or, more actively, when a quest for "something more" is sought out by the individual (Kahn & Greene, 2004, p. 235), or both. Whether coming from the passive tradition or the active tradition, the individual proceeds into the encounter stage, in which a dynamic process occurs between the convert and converter. During this phase the convert may make use of several new gains, such as a new epistemology, rituals and symbols designed to reinforce and consecrate daily religious life, emotional relief, and access to religious power through prayer, healing, etc. (Kahn & Greene, 2004).

Next, the convert moves into the interaction stage, which encapsulates the individual within a new culture, with varying degrees of isolation and education regarding the new religion. This stage brings new relationships, transformative learning via ritual and the development of a shared vocabulary, and changes in roles and expected behaviors (Kahn & Greene, 2004). This is followed by a deepened dedication in the commitment stage, typically marked by a formal conversion ritual (baptism, completion of Catechism class, etc.). During this stage the individual's sense of "surrender" is at its

peak (Kahn & Greene, 2004, p. 236), and the experience is "often fragile and precarious." (p. 237). To prevent the momentary high that comes with peaked dedication from dissipating, testimony and other demonstrations of dedication are repeated, in order to further inject and sustain the sense of surrender in an ongoing way.

Finally, the convert progresses into the consequences stage, when the reality of a life-long conversion requires daily adaptation (i.e. leading a Muslim lifestyle). Throughout this phase, which spans the rest of the convert's life, an individual contemplates and addresses issues such as tithing, life mission and purpose, etc. (Kahn & Greene, 2004).

It should be noted that this model was developed specifically, and exclusively, to apply to formal religious conversions, as opposed to spiritual seeking or spirituality (Rambo, 1993). Nonetheless, this model may share similarities with the "conversion" that many activists appear to experience as they enter a lifetime of committed action. It is interesting to note that recycling of stages appears throughout the models presented, as life circumstances require a re-processing of significant psychosocial material related to identity.

The conversion model can be used to interpret a swift identity change, such as that which may occur with activists. Activists may experience a crisis (e.g. be diagnosed with a disease or lose a child to a drunk driving accident) or activists may seek more in life, desiring to take up a cause that expresses their spirituality (e.g. choosing to live in a tree as a forest protector). An encounter with another activist or activist group might give the fledgling activist hope or an outlet for catharsis. This is followed by several new interactions – the development of new relationships with other activists, the adoption of

new rituals (e.g. protests), the development of new rhetoric, such as a shared lingo with other activists, and the adoption of new roles (e.g. environmental defender, recycler, protester). While there likely exist few "formal" rituals, such as a baptism, to mark the transition into the role of dedicated activists, some people may take public measures, such as becoming vegan (making use of no animal products in diet, clothing, furniture, household goods, etc.), placing political bumper stickers on their cars, and so forth. Sustaining a level of ongoing, deep dedication is difficult for activists, as well, and instead of using testimony, many activists make use of several strategies to protect themselves from burnout. One study (Holeman, 2005) found that activists will shift responsibilities, take time off, use humor, and make use of communities in order to help sustain their dedication to a cause. The consequences stage is likely the life-long, gradual change in decisions, consumption, politics, and ideology related to incorporating and actively leading an authentic, congruent lifestyle as an activist.

The conversion experience has been examined through the rubric of activism as functional religion. A qualitative study of animal activists in the United States and Switzerland examined the extent to which activist groups mirrored religious groups (Jamison, Wenk, & Parker, 2000). Using a grounded theory approach, the researchers found significant resemblance to Yinger's (1970) criteria of functional religion – a conversion experience, congregation with a like-minded community, adherence to a belief system, overt and expected behavior codes, and ritual and symbol having cult-like tones (Jamison et al., 2000). A central tenet of this study is that activism is chosen as a quasi-spiritual choice to defend against the chaos caused by modernity. Rather than

embracing religion, Jamison et al. (2000) propose that jaded and educated individuals seek different avenues for expressing their spirituality.

Activists in this study described a "moral conversion," characterized by intense ideological, emotional, and behavioral change, followed by a period of withdrawal from their former social network and association with a new, like-minded community (Jamison et al., 2000, p. 310). The epiphany/conversion phase seems to reflect the Encounter and Revelation stages, while the withdrawal and development of a new community parallels the Immersion-Emersion and Embeddedness stages in the Cross (1971) and Downing and Roush (1985) models, respectively. Jamison et al. (2000) even go so far as to note that several participants divorced after their conversion, which was also mentioned by Downing and Roush (1985) as a possible consequence of the Embeddedness stage.

While individuals within the Immersion-Emersion and Embeddedness stages may not have an explicit set of rules, code of conduct, or formal belief system, they likely have a well-developed sense of what is expected. That is, individuals within this stage, surrounded and supported by others in this stage, recognize that expressing pro-African American (Cross) or pro-female (Downing and Roush) sentiments is anticipated. Participating in action to support or advertise their cause is likely also expected. Jamison et al. (2000) end their analysis of animal rights activism as functional religion without a resolution stage, such as Internalization or Active Commitment. Rather, they see activists as existing within the creed, code, symbol, and ritual world of intense, quasi-religious participation, merely redoubling their efforts when they have moments of doubt, guilt, political loss, or epistemological change (Jamison et al., 2000). While some activists may remain at this level of intense, dogmatic participation, it is likely that some activists are

able to reach a more relativistic incorporation of their movement's ethic. That is, like African Americans who enter the Internalization stage and feminists who enter the Synthesis and Active Commitment stage, some activists may eventually gain non-stereotypical, non-judgmental perceptions of those whose minds they attempt to change. They may achieve a more integrated, reflective activist identity, rather than a reflexive, condemning identity. More research is needed to explore this issue.

In addition, not all activists will engage in radical activism or meet with like-minded others. Some individuals may consider themselves activists because they send emails or letters to Congress people, write letters to newspaper editors, incorporate their thinking into their teaching, make conscious consumption choices, forgo driving or eating meat, etc. One purpose of this study is to examine whether activists who engage in more subtle forms of activism experience identity change in a way similar to those activists who are more radical, vocal, and organized.

Limitations of the models and philosophical considerations

A weakness of the identity models outlined above is that they describe a fairly homogenous, simplistic process of change. A person is confronted with some new information, reacts in some fashion, becomes highly involved, and then mellows somewhat. Attention to the complicated thoughts and feelings of the individuals has been minimized as has an examination of significant life events or circumstances that may fetter or facilitate an individual, such as socio-economic status. For instance, will a poverty-stricken mother of four follow the same course of identity change as an upper-class single? Will a substantial loss, such as the loss of a partner or the loss of one's faith,

affect changes in identity? In short, we don't know, as limited testing on all of the models has been conducted to date.

These models may not really capture "difference" between individuals. As the above examples suggest, the identity development models are limited due to their over-generalizations of the human experience. While this researcher believes that prototypical stories (e.g. many stories containing a shared thread and similar themes) may unveil truths and be utilized as guideposts regarding a phenomenon, they may also be guilty of some of the same limitations inherent in quantitative group designs. That is, these models may be too broad, losing an appreciation for individual differences.

The notion of developing a model sensitive to individual differences is almost counter-intuitive. Models typically represent a reduction of information to its most basic parts. These steps or phases capture the meaning or chronology of events. Philosophers have examined ways of capturing knowledge and proposed methods for doing so. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, a well known ethnographer of First peoples, introduced the method of *bricolage,* which he developed from watching a Jackdaw (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). The Jackdaw, a highly industrious and intelligent bird, will make a nest out of whatever materials are available. In the same vein, Lévi-Strauss suggested that one way to discover the inherent meaning or structure within a text or idea, is to assimilate and compare descriptive contents provided within a story. A champion and founding father of structural anthropology, Lévi-Strauss afforded more importance to form over content (Hahn, 2002). He applied *bricolage* to his examination of the myths of Native American and South American Indian tribes, determining that within the various contents of the stories, main themes, or prototypical stories, could be found. These stories

represented fundamental themes or archetypes, having a unique form within the content (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

However, Jacques Derrida argued that archetypal, underlying structures are neither inherent nor valid (Hahn, 2002; Kamuf, 1991). Rather, Derrida believed that, as humans, we impose a meaning upon a story, and then assume that this meaning has somehow always been and is, thus imbued with a sense of pre-existence. Derrida challenged these pre-given forms and emphasizes, or foregrounds, that which is different and subjective (Hahn, 2002). He is doubtful about discourses and perspectives based on generalized stages, and thus would likely believe that developmental models, in general, are forced onto phenomena in order to create over-generalized conclusions about life. To further extrapolate from Derrida's view point, with time certain models are given privilege over others and become "sedimented" as structured Truth. To prevent over-generalization in this study, the researcher intends to propose prototypical stories, but at the same time deconstruct them by foregrounding any marginal or overlooked stories.

Marxist philosopher Terry Eagleton offers another point of view, arguing that post-modernists such as Derrida go too far with radical subjectivity (Eagleton, 2003). While Eagleton acknowledges that values and beliefs may not be empirically pure scientific constructs, he rejects the hard-lined post-modern relativity that leaves no foundation from which to act. He contends that as human beings we are united by the fact that we are embodied in flesh and blood and that death comes to everyone of us. From these basic biological connections, he projects the value of equality (Eagleton, 2003).

Social activists, whether they acknowledge it intellectually or not, appear to live lives based on the assumption of equality. Some activists extend this notion of equality to

animals and to the Earth, itself. It is out of these very fundamental beliefs in solidarity, which emerge from the above-mentioned biological connections and the assumptions derived from them, that I have approached this study. I have attempted to bring into play each of the perspectives outlined above. It is with this complexity, acknowledging marginalization, believing in the interconnections and solidarity between living things, and believing in the potential usefulness of prototypical stories (with the awareness that they are overgeneralizations), that this research project was carried out.

The next chapter will define the research design of this study, as well as the methods, participants, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used in this study to gain a better understanding of individuals' experience of identity change over the course of their activist careers. Specifically, the study explored how participants became involved in their area of activism, how their level of involvement changed over time, how their thinking and behaviors changed over time, and how their feelings related to activism changed over time. This chapter will discuss the research design, methods, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Rationale for the Research Design

This research used a qualitative, phenomenological design. As little research on activists, in general, and no research on activist identity development, in specific, exists at this time, a qualitative design was chosen to explore this new knowledge domain. Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of a complex phenomenon. Researchers ask questions about "how" and "what," as opposed to demonstrating differences between groups and examining causalities (Creswell, 1998). John Creswell, author of numerous qualitative studies and a text on the method itself, defines qualitative research as follows:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998, p. 15)

This method of conducting research allows a researcher to cast a wide net, offering depth and breadth of coverage, although with a narrower pool of participants than a typical quantitative study would employ. By "going deep" with a small number of participants, qualitative research attempts to gather broad, rich stories about how a process works or what a person's lived experience is like. In addition, qualitative research design is particularly well-suited to phenomena not previously studied, on which little research exists, or when theories are being developed (Creswell, 1998). Thus, in order to begin to gain a preliminary understanding of whether or not prototypical activist identity development stories exist, and how – if they do – this process unfolds, a qualitative approach was used.

A choice of methodology should primarily be based upon the research questions, letting the questions and the theory guide the research. However, this choice may also reflect the researcher's personal beliefs about knowledge and how those beliefs intersect her or his research. Quantitative research, based on logical-positivism and the scientific method, tends to reflect an epistemology based on facts and measurable phenomena; qualitative research tends to examine phenomena that are changing, relative, contextual, or have socially constructed meaning (Glesne, 1999). This philosophical lens is called the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm (Glesne, 1999) and recognizes multiple realities and multiple meanings.

Some philosophers, such as Martin Buber and Jacques Derrida, have distinguished between the objective, external study of an object and the more integrated, fluid interaction with a subject. For instance, Buber (2000) differentiated between I-Thou interactions and I-It interactions. I-Thou exchanges come from a place of honesty, openness, and mutuality, resulting in a legitimate dialog, while I-It exchanges pre-suppose a difference in equality between the two participants, with a primary emphasis based on observation of one by the other (Buber, 2000).

Derrida expanded on this framework, devoting a careful explanation to interaction with the "Other." Derrida believed that one can only truly know oneself by acknowledging differentiation from another person (Kamuf, 1991). Thus, the "Other," in essence plays a major role in defining the self. Derrida put it bluntly, stating "…there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself *as* a culture *of* the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the *difference to oneself*." (Derrida, 1992, p. 10, emphasis in original). Derrida believed that humans tend to minimize or miss entirely the differences between themselves and others, assuming more similarity between the two than exists.

In order to guard against this implicit assumption, Derrida advocated openness to the process of *deconstruction* (Kamuf, 1991). This process, which Derrida describes as an event, rather than a method, opens linguistically-bound constructs to interpretation of multiple meanings and multiple realities, without any privileging of Truth. He argues against dualities and hierarchies, such as good/evil and male/female, noting that the two are more similar than this privileging and separation allows (Hahn, 2002). Thus, for

Derrida, reduction of overly simplistic dichotomies causes us to further miss the connection and shifting meaning that is constantly occurring between two ideas.

These two philosophers lend support to the credibility of qualitative research, in general, and to this project, in particular. By attempting to understand the complex, nuanced, and shifting meaning of what the experience is like when becoming an activist, this project needed a philosophical and methodological foundation that allows for an appreciation of ambiguity. As a main goal of this research is to examine the personal, uniquely experienced sense of identity change over the course of a person's activist career, attempting to measure facts and causal change would not likely provide the information sought. A qualitative, phenomenological approach best captured this complicated picture.

Within the qualitative framework exists several types of qualitative research designs. This study used a phenomenological approach, as it explored the individual's unique perception of their experience (Creswell, 1998). Interestingly, one of Derrida's earliest works and dissertation was a critique on the philosophy of phenomenology (Kamuf, 1991). As discussed in the previous chapter, Derrida believed that structuralism, and similarly, phenomenology, lend too much credence to innate, archetypal meaning in consciousness or experience (van Manen, 2002). Rather, to Derrida, all meaning is wrapped up in and influenced by linguistics – as our primary mode of thinking is verbal, language necessarily interacts with meaning (van Manen, 2002). Given this caveat, a competent linguistic phenomenology "reminds us of the importance of writing, the enigmatic powers of language, the contingencies of interpretive meaning, and the

invitational desires of the space of the text in the project of human understanding" (van Manen, 2002, paragraph 3).

As a method of research, phenomenology has been defined as focusing on a "description of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study" (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). Phenomenology attempts to enter a person's interior frame of reference, understanding how they perceive their experience, how they experience their perceptions, and how these two interact. The main goal of a phenomenological study is to uncover the "essential invariant structure (or essence)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52) of a concept or particular experience. Thus, while one person describing an experience might constitute a biography, several people describing a similar experience of a phenomenon are describing a pattern containing the essential structure or essence of the phenomenon. It should be noted, too, that in order to prevent over-generalization, there are likely multiple essences of a phenomenon.

Further, phenomenology, based on the philosophical writings of mathematician Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 1998), denies a subject-object dichotomy. Instead, Husserl asserted that the important factor between a subject and an object is not the interaction, but the subject's consciousness of the object. Thus, the reality and any meaning given to this object stem from the subject's intentional awareness of it. Creswell writes, "The reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). Also of central importance in the practice of phenomenology is bracketing one's personal assumptions and biases regarding the phenomenon in question, deemed *epoché* in phenomenological research literature. According to Husserl, this allows the object or phenomenon to speak for itself,

unencumbered with *a priori* notions of meaning or value (Moran, 2000). Thus, while one goal of this research is to examine similarities and differences between activist identity development and other forms of identity development, data analysis had to be free of forced comparisons or implicit assumptions on the part of this researcher.

This phenomenological study therefore examined the meaning made between an individual and their lived experience of becoming an activist. In addition, as this study was created in pursuit of a better understanding of activist identity development as a process, particular attention was paid to emerging themes, or what may be called *prototypical stories*. As described in anthropology and linguistics, prototypical stories encapsulate cultural knowledge (Holland & Quinn, 1987). Within the context of a phenomenological study, prototypical stories can be viewed as variations on the essential structure or essence of a phenomenon. In this instance, if similar thematic components emerged, prototypical stories of activist identity development were sought.

It can be useful to acknowledge that the scientific preoccupation with objectivity frequently loses the individual subject at the center of the observation, relying instead on a sum of averages across individuals. A language useful in qualitative research must revolve around the subjective experiences of the individual. The whole constellation of experience a person associates with her or his story of social activism provides a point of entry into a deeper understanding of what might be a prototypical story of activist identity development. Of course one person's associations will necessarily be different from others, even though all included in this study will have passed through the gates of social activism. Still, the point of departure in this study was the subjective exploration of what it is like to become an activist. Participants were free to meander without undue influence

from the researcher, arriving at valuable bits and pieces of subjective truths through contemplation. This study did not adhere to a nominal-rational causality and objective empiricism but attempted a type of subjective empiricism. However, it is believed by this researcher that the current area of investigation requires a subjective, exploratory methodology which looks at the dynamic interplay between variables within a field of relationships progressing through different cycles and phases. I attempted to track the cyclical evolution of participants' social activist identity development in qualitative terms.

Method and Sampling Strategy

This research was an exploratory investigation into the lived experience of identity change as it occurs over the course of an activist's career. In order to begin an examination of this variable, a series of interviews were held with activists. I administered a semi-structured interview, asking participants about their involvement in activism, how they became involved in their field, how their level of involvement changed over time, how their thinking and behaviors changed over time, and how their feelings related to activism changed over time. Questions were open-ended and clarifying statements aimed at gathering better insight, detail, or more information were employed in a non-directive manner. Interviews were tape-recorded and lasted between one and two and a half hours. They were conducted in person. Upon transcription of the interviews I presented each participant with a summary of their interview in order to "ask: 'Did we get the story right?'" (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998). Known as a member-check, following up with interviewees allows further refinement of the interview material and acts as one of several verification checks used to enhance the validity of the study.

In order to secure participants for this study, I used a snowball technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This sampling technique entails asking respondents to refer other potential participants in an accumulating fashion. This is a form of purposeful sampling, which by its very nature, specifically targets the individuals selected for inclusion. When attempting to gain participants from outside a mainstream population, or individuals who possess certain distinct characteristics, this form of sampling can be useful (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Glesne, 1999). For the purposes of this research, I contacted individuals within the community whom I know to be activists. I asked them to participate in the study and asked them to refer other potential participants.

In terms of sample size for a qualitative study, Creswell (1998) and Glesne (1999) both recommend aiming for data saturation and "thick" descriptions, as opposed to using a particular number of participants for inclusion. Creswell notes that most phenomenological studies include no more than 10 participants as they make use of longer interview protocols than other qualitative designs (Creswell, 1998). Participant recruitment was discontinued when the data appeared to become redundant, indicating data saturation. This study originally included 14 participants, but due to equipment malfunction, two interviews had to be discarded.

Participant Characteristics

In order to examine the process of activist identity development, I interviewed individuals who consider themselves activists. Their level of engagement, time spent in activism, and the types of activities they define as activism, are largely irrelevant as the important factor in this study is the individual's sense of being an activist and how they came to hold that view of themselves. In addition, in order to more deeply explore

notions of personal activism, I also interviewed two individuals who engage in behaviors that would likely be considered to be activism by others, but who have not internalized an activist identity (i.e. they do not consider themselves to be activists). Their unique perspectives rounded out the picture of activist identity by contributing more information on the essence of activist identity development.

As this was an exploratory investigation of activist identity development I limited the participants to two overlapping groups of activists – environmental activists and animal rights activists. As protection of the environment and protection of animals generally intersect with one another, it was assumed that these two groups were somewhat similar in their thinking. The purpose of using this exclusionary criterion was to allow for greater homogeneity with the participant pool so that initial generalizability would be maximized. Ideally, future studies will explore more areas of activism in order to see if results from this study can be extended to activism in general. For the purpose of this study, however, findings related to activist identity development relate specifically to environmental and animal rights activists.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1999) note six phases of qualitative data analysis: organizing large amounts of data, developing themes or categories, coding this information, testing initial hypotheses emerging from this data, looking for contradictory or disconfirming evidence, and finally writing a comprehensive report. For the purposes of this research each interview was transcribed. The transcriptions were then read through and coded by the principal researcher. Two other independent raters also helped with data

summary and analysis by independently coding three sample interviews in a process called *triangulation*, described in more detail below.

The primary researcher coded important statements and narrative elements emerging from the transcripts. These statements were grouped according to shared meaning and then into thematic groups. These themes were then interpreted into a "narrative description" of the phenomenological process of activist identity development (Creswell, 1998, p. 32). During this process of coding and grouping I sought differing descriptions of activist identity development and tested emerging hypotheses of activist identity development through peer review. That is, when a theme or hypothesis emerged, I consulted with other individuals familiar with identity development theories about these emerging ideas.

Within phenomenological research literature the coding process employs precise terminology. *Horizonalization* refers to reducing an interview manuscript into its barest forms of meaning, statement by statement. The initial grouping of like elements is separated into *clusters of meaning*. These are then transformed into a *textural description*, the "what" of the experience, and a *structural description*, the "how."

All transcripts were coded line by line for meaning. Data reduction was achieved by reading through the transcripts repeatedly until three emerged that seemed to contain unique themes, indicating the most difference from one another. These were then coded for the broader themes emerging from the narratives (e.g. methods of coping or changes in relationships). These broader themes were then compared to the other transcripts to see if they adequately described the rest of the interview narratives and to ensure that no major elements were being omitted. Finally, these major themes were further refined and

collapsed to reflect the essence of activist identity development as experienced by the participants in this study.

To facilitate the management of a vast amount of data, I employed several visual data displays, (i.e. matrices and tables). I also kept a reflective journal and field log during this study in order to capture immediate impressions, additional descriptions or intuitions, and to stay abreast of my own biases on the topic.

A final narrative that hopefully captures the essence of activist identity development was submitted to a process of verification called triangulation. One form of triangulation occurs when a primary researcher allows another researcher to independently code the data and return their interpretation of the data's clusters of meaning, themes, and essential essence (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation allows for further corroboration of a researcher's conclusions on the material (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and, in this case, the data was triangulated by the two independent raters mentioned previously. Thus, in all, this study employed five verification procedures – member checks after transcription of the interviews, use of thick description via the use of direct quotes from the participants' narratives, peer review, clarification or researcher bias, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVISTS AND LAYOUT OF RESULTS

The next few chapters will describe the findings from this study. I will start with an introduction to the activists[1] included in this study and then move into an analysis and description of their felt experience of change over time, supplemented heavily by direct quotes from participant interviews. Because a phenomenological inquiry attempts to describe the essential meaning of something, it is particularly important to let the activists tell their stories in their own words (Creswell, 1998).

Chapter five will address antecedents to activism, or those experiences that primed activists to become involved. These include childhood influences, direct or indirect parental support, mentors, and epiphanies. Chapter six will examine early stages of activist identity development while chapter seven will look at the mature activist identity. Chapter eight will summarize a model of activist identity development and contrast that model with existing identity models. A final conclusion with implications and limitations of this research can be found in chapter nine.

[1] Pseudonyms used throughout; identifying information has been changed.

Activist biographies

Condensed summaries of the participants involved follow. These mini-biographies of activist participation serve to provide background on the participants in this study; they do not capture the full-range of activities or life events of the activists involved. More detail will be provided throughout chapters five, six, and seven and a demographics table is provided on p. 54.

Ben

Ben, 54, is an environmental and social justice activist. He has been involved in social action since the 1970s when he became an outspoken advocate of Libertarian politics and political candidates. Ben later became involved with the Catholic Church, making a conversion and now working full-time as a minister of music. He also started two different statewide organizations dedicated to fostering social change and environmental protection – a Catholic Worker House contributing to the support of the poor, and a local food co-op which delivers locally grown food to people's doors in many cities throughout the state. Ben also enjoys chronicling his work and beliefs, writing and editing many different local almanacs, newsletters, and pamphlets. He has been involved in developing workshops that teach permaculture, gardening, and bread-baking, as well as being involved in rallies, pamphleteering, organizing and implementing change initiatives, training volunteers, and educating the public.

Clara

Clara, 89, is an environmental activist who waged and won a nine-year court battle against an electric company with plans to build a nuclear power plant near her home. Clara had been involved in nutrition and nursing home management, and started

an organic bakery in 1957. She did not become involved in political activism until she was 55 years old and heard about plans for the nuclear power plant. Clara organized a citizen's action group, staged rallies and demonstrations, organized fundraising concerts featuring Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt, designed and created several quilts that were sold to raise funds to pay for lawyers' fees. She also used the proceeds from selling her nursing home, some tracts of land, and mortgages on her home and farm to pay for her $550,000 court battle. After plans for the plant were scrapped, Clara continued to be active in energy activism by contributing to listservs, organizing volunteers and asking them to petition their energy companies for wind power, and maintaining ongoing education of the public. She and her daughter wrote a book about her crusade to prevent the nuclear power plant from being built and she also wrote a children's history of wind power that is currently in press.

Dallas

Dallas, 32, is an animal protection and vegetarian/vegan outreach activist. He was raised a vegetarian by his parents, who are farmers. Dallas's mother also taught him transcendental meditation when he was a child, which he continues to practice on a daily basis. Dallas has been active in vegetarian and vegan outreach since his senior year in high school at which time he began handing out pamphlets and educating people about vegetarianism and veganism. Dallas has also participated in rallies, organizing volunteers, and organizing community development vegetarian potlucks. Dallas started a vegetarian community group at his university and continues to contribute to pubic education.

Jane

Jane, 50, is an animal protection activist. She has been involved in animal protection since the mid-70s when she first heard about the clubbing of pup seals in Canada and the depletion of elephants for ivory. Jane volunteered regularly for many years before becoming employed full-time in the animal protection movement. She has planned events, lobbied for legislation, testified in court against animal abusers, organized and trained volunteers, and sat on numerous planning committees and boards dedicated to animal protection. Jane also started a coalition for animal rights groups in her state.

Jennifer

Jennifer, 28, is an animal rights volunteer, and said that she did not consider herself an activist although she could see why her activities could be construed as such. Jennifer started volunteering at an animal sanctuary at age 13. She kept this up regularly through the years, taking time off when other life activities began to take more of her time. Jennifer returned to volunteering after a traffic offense required community service. Since that time she has volunteered, organized events, worked for various animal protection groups, recruited and trained volunteers, educated people, engaged in outreach bringing animals to schools, and organized fundraisers, among other activities.

Jessica

Jessica, 37, is an animal protection volunteer and has spent considerable time advocating for other political causes, as well. Jessica, like Jennifer, does not consider herself to be an activist, noting that she takes action for causes she believes in, but has trouble when it comes to labeling herself. Jessica has been involved with demonstrations,

door-to-door canvassing, and marches, but stated that she feels uncomfortable with this sort of activism. She prefers, instead, to do "quiet" things like sending emails, making conscious product and consumption choices, volunteering with animals, and shopping at places that support her beliefs. Jessica described her involvement with activism as something she feels compelled to do by frightening or anxiety-provoking circumstances. She noted that she was socialized to liberal-minded activism by her parents, in particular her mother, who was an active picket-line member. Jessica is a professor at a research one institution in a southern US state.

Kate

Kate, 27, is an environmental scientist and activist who became involved in social change when she developed and implemented a recycling program at her high school. She later interned with her city and was instrumental in helping to implement a curbside recycling program in her large southern hometown. Because of her contributions to the city's welfare, Kate had a day of honor named after her when she was 19. Kate has been involved in organizing and developing environmental initiatives, fostering leadership in others, and founding groups to help create local environmental change. She recently completed a master's degree in Environmental Policy and hopes to work for environmental change and sustainability on the national or international level.

Lois

Lois, 50, is an environmental activist. Lois attributed a part of her initial interest in social activism to the time she grew up, seeing the Vietnam War on television and hearing about large scale demonstrations and marches. Lois became involved in a group that rallied against the building of a nuclear power plant in her home state, and the plans

to build the plant were eventually discarded. She cited several mentors that helped inspire and sustain her, as well as the realization that she could adapt her involvement in activism to fit her personality style and religious views, instead of having to conform to stereotypic notions of activists. Over the years Lois has been involved in numerous activist initiatives, including animal protection, car freedom, and the protection of urban green space. She currently sits on a city review board that makes recommendations about the use of green space.

Robert

Robert, 63, is an environmental activist working in the field of green building for the past 30 years. Robert started his life of service when he became a Peace Corps volunteer and was stationed in Ghana to teach math. He spent two years teaching in Ghana and helped with training new Peace Corps volunteers, as well. Upon return to the US and completing a master's degree in architecture, Robert became involved in housing advocacy for low-income Latino families in an urban neighborhood of a southwestern city. He started designing and building energy efficient, affordable housing and continues in this line of work today. Robert is a professor of architecture at a research one institution in a southwestern state, which he views as an outlet to pass on the information and passion he feels for sustainable building. He also works for a homebuilding company that designs and constructs energy efficient, sustainable entry-level housing.

Sam

Sam, 28, is an environmental activist who focuses on sustainable energy development and fostering community. He helped co-found a statewide organization that promotes action, organization, and education, which he now chairs. He has also lobbied

the state, attended a state political leadership academy with plans to do so again, and been involved in many forms of community organizing. Sam said that he has found that his approach to involvement is to be diplomatic but stand his ground, give when and how he has to of himself, but make his beliefs and goals known in order to gain ground for sustainable energy in his state.

Trinity

Trinity, 41, is involved in animal protection and individual rights activism. She is a homesteader in a southern state, where she raises free-range animals on her farm. She describes her activist slant as "an animal rights activist, preservationist, because I believe animals have the right to be animals and to act the way animals behave." She contrasts her view with those of more extreme animal rights activists, such as those held by individuals within the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, whom she sees as romanticizing and anthropomorphizing animals. Trinity became involved in political activism when she first heard about the National Animal Identification System which will institute prohibitively restrictive rules on the identification and movement of farm animals. Since hearing about these proposed laws in January of 2006, Trinity has been involved with lobbying lawmakers, contacting and educating others whom these rules would affect, moderating listservs, traveling to other states in order to educate and help organize volunteers.

Valerie

Valerie, 35, is a vegan and vegetarian outreach activist. Valerie became a vegetarian when she was 18 and said that she was already leaning that way but had not heard much, if anything, about vegetarianism while growing up in a southern state. A

year after becoming a vegetarian, Valerie became vegan due to experiences while volunteering. Vegans choose a diet that does not include any animal-based products, such as meat or diary. Valerie has been involved in vegan and vegetarian outreach since 1991 and has volunteered and worked for numerous animal rights and protection organizations. Valerie said that she has passed out pamphlets, done considerable tabling, engaged in demonstrations, done hands-on and undercover volunteer work, writes a newsletter, and various other activities. She heads a statewide vegetarian group that meets regularly, sharing potlucks, information, moral support, and organizes events. In her role with this group, she has expanded membership, outreach, and programming.

Table 2 – Participant Demographics

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Activism	Education	Marital status	Children
Ben	European American	Male	54	Environment-related	HS (192 college credit hrs)	Single	0
Clara	European American	Female	89	Environment-related	MS	Married (Widowed)	4
Dallas	European American	Male	32	Animal-related	HS (college degree in progress)	Partnered	0
Jane	European American	Female	50	Animal-related	PhD	Married	0
Jennifer	European American	Female	28	Animal-related *	BA	Partnered	0
Jessica	European American	Female	37	Animal-related *	PhD	Married	0
Kate	European American	Female	26	Environment-related	MPA	Single	0
Lois	European American	Female	50	Environment-related	BA	Married	4
Robert	European American	Male	63	Environment-related	MS	Married	3
Sam	Native American	Male	28	Environment-related	BA	Married	1
Trinity	European American	Female	41	Animal-related	GED	Married	2
Valerie	European American	Female	35	Animal-related	Most of MS	Married	6

* Do not identify as activists

CHAPTER FIVE

ANTECEDENTS TO ACTIVISM

This chapter will review results pertaining to antecedents to activism, or those experiences that primed activists to become involved, laying the foundation for an activist identity to emerge later in life. Antecedents have been grouped into two large categories – childhood experiences and epiphanies. This chapter will describe life experiences leading up to participants' initial involvement with activism. The next chapter will pick up where this one leaves our activists, describing where and how they move through their lives once they have become involved in activism. Interpretations and assertions will be supported by the activists' words.

Childhood experiences

Many of the activists described events occurring in childhood as having special significance or meaning related to their future activities in activism. Some began the roots of their activist careers as children, engaging in action in childhood. Others received parental encouragement, support, and a clear demonstration of values leading to involvement in pro-social behaviors. Younger activists recalled childhood education about environmental problems and that it was in their youth that they were taught about concepts like recycling. Some older activists mentioned the influence of historical events

related to the awakening of their activist conscience. Activists' evolution of beliefs and values, in some cases moving them away from their parents' belief systems, is examined at the end of this section.

Action in youth

Valerie first began hands-on action as a young person. She described a self-directed process beginning in the highly local and centralized territory of her home. She noted:

> …my personal evolution went from being into nature and wanting to help out the local animal shelter, activism in my front yard and in my backyard, like literally. But it wasn't even in my neighborhood, it was just my yard. And so animals who came into my yard I would pet or feed, I collected the water that dripped from the air conditioner to feed the plants, so you know, it's recycling of water.

Valerie describes a compassion for animals and plants, living beings, which began in early childhood. She also describes a rather sophisticated understanding of the need to conserve water, by recycling the water from her family's air conditioner. The intelligence and sensitivity she displays seem uncommon for a young person.

Jennifer also described action beginning in her youth, noting that she became involved in volunteering at the prompting of her mother.

> When I was 13 my mother wanted me to get involved in some kind of summer program. And the Junior League coordinates a teen volunteer program – they recruit a bunch of different organizations to provide opportunities for kids to be able to volunteer during the summer. And I've always had pets. I don't remember a time when I didn't have a pet. And so when I was learning about the different places I could go I got a first, second, and third choice and on all three of them I wrote (the name of a local no-kill animal sanctuary). And I started volunteering over the summer, summers – multiple summers, from the summer when I was 13…That's when I started being a part of the community. And I mean it was a regular two, two to three days a week.

In this passage, Jennifer notes the important place that her pets had in her life *before* she began volunteering, influencing her decision to pursue that volunteer opportunity. And

interestingly, it was her mother's desire to have her participate in volunteering which led to a much longer career in animal protection. What started as a way to spend her time over the long, hot summers, grew into a great love for animals and a passion for animal protection.

Jessica began volunteering with animals as a young person, as well, combining an interest in animals and a desire to be involved in pro-social action.

> I first started doing volunteer work probably when I was in eleventh grade and we had a Guiding Eyes for the Blind shelter thing in my hometown, where they raise the dogs and then do the ceremony…and I did volunteer work there. Like just going there on weekends and helping shovel dog poop out of cages. That was my introduction to the world of working with animals.

In addition to these three activists, Ben, Dallas, Kate, and Sam also reported being involved in some sort of volunteer, activist, or political activity during adolescence or youth. Engaging in prosocial activities early in life has been linked to long-term involvement (McAdam, 1988; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Research indicates several issues contribute to life-long devotion to prosocial activity, including simply having the opportunity to become involved, sharing similar prosocial values with a family or social network, and developing a personal sense of commitment to sustain over time (Hart & Yates, 1997). Thus, for these activists, being involved in direct volunteer action at such a young age was a healthy predictor of their sustained involvement over time.

Success at an early age

Two of the activists, Kate and Sam, became involved in activist endeavors during their youth and experienced significant success. Kate describes her success at age 15 as follows:

> I knew there was no reason not to have a recycling program [at our school] and it was just their obstinateness that they didn't want one… It was great. I worked

> with [a recycling company] to pick up the paper and then the recycling coordinator back then, Ms. R, donated a while bunch of little classroom paper recycling bins. And the faculty was just so great and just enthused to be able to recycle. And so people were just really supportive. Then I did a mini-mester [with a large southwestern city]. I worked with [the city] on a curbside recycling project and we did a pilot program for 6 months and it was a huge success. And then [the city] decided to adopt it as a city wide program, and then it was kind of like poetic justice, because at my graduation the very administrator who said I couldn't do a recycling program at [my high school] had to make an announcement that May 28, 1999, was going to be "Kate Smith" Day in [our city] for my contributions to the environmental integrity of [the city.] (laughs) And every May 28 I try to have a little recycling party. (laughs) So that was a very empowering and enlightening moment in my life, I'd have to say.
>
> MEETING WITH THAT SUCCESS EARLY ON?
>
> Yeah! Exactly. I mean I was young. I was 19 and to be a part of something that had city-wide ramifications! I mean top officials, city council, and the mayor and everyone signed this proclamation of a day named after me and it's kind of one of those things you're listening to it and you're like "Is this for real?" And when you tell people the story and they're like "No!" I mean it sounds like a joke…But I think I garnered a lot of respect and support at a young age and that's made a lot of difference.

Sam also reported meeting with success at a young age, while participating in a recycling program in high school, as well.

> We got an award from the governor's office for having the best recycling program in the state. I think it was a combination of having the interest and then the good accolades for being involved in it, like "Oh this is something worth putting time and energy into."

Both attribute their desire to remain involved to that early success. Perhaps it was recognizing that their efforts mattered to individuals beyond themselves, and seeing that they could make a real difference. This success brought encouragement and support from others, which also appeared to be effective in sustaining their drive and dedication.

Support and encouragement from others was described by several participants as important to their development as activists. In the above comments Jennifer notes that she began her volunteering at her mother's encouragement, indicating that her mother shared

a desire for her daughter to use her time in this manner. While not specifically mentioned by Valerie or Jessica in this context (Jessica later cites her mother as heavily influential, discussed below), it is likely that they also received parental support or some measure of validation by their parents for their actions.

Parental support and encouragement

Parents played a large role in encouraging burgeoning activists in other ways, as well. One activist recalled developing his interest in the natural world through family vacations and direct contact with nature. Two others attributed their beliefs to the examples provided by family. Additionally, activists cited their parents as instilling values such as charity, frugality, and hard work. Finally, some of the activists described their parents as being proud of them for taking action and as providing emotional and instrumental support to their work.

Sam described linking his love for nature and his ensuing desire to protect it, to family outings that encouraged direct contact with nature.

> But in terms of being engaged in community issues…It got started early on, as a little kid, by my parents taking me out to parks and taking me out to the countryside in Western [State]. And that exposure I think instilled an interest in the natural environment.

This connection between childhood exposure to wild nature and ensuing activism is supported by recent research. Wells and Lekies (2006) found that playing in and contact with nature before age 11 predicted environmentally protective tendencies in adulthood. Evidence was found supporting the same link between childhood contact and less wild environments (i.e. working in a garden, playing outside in the yard, picking flowers or vegetables), as well, however the link was much stronger when the contact was with "wild" nature, such as camping, hiking, bird watching or fishing (Wells & Lekies, 2006).

Parents were also responsible for transmitting values directly to their children. Dallas, for instance, described how he learned his ethical values related to animal protection from his parents and later became active because of those values, although his parents were not actually activists themselves.

> Well, I was raised a vegetarian. And the reason my parents raised me vegetarian was mainly ethical reasons. My father became vegetarian. He grew up on a ranch here in [this state] and he didn't like what he saw and he didn't want to participate in it, basically. So he became a vegetarian when he was about 13 years old, and he kind of converted my mom when he met her up here at [the university] and they were both students here. And so vegetarianism, from an ethical viewpoint, has been a part of my life my entire life. I didn't really become active in any kind of activism until, I don't know, probably my senior year in high school.

Dallas also made reference to his grandparents as having contributed to his ethical viewpoint regarding the treatment of animals.

> And even my grandparents, even though they raised hogs, cattle and chickens, I always felt like they had a lot of respect for the lives of the animals, even though they ate the meat. My grandpa was pretty militant about making sure the neighbors treated their animals well and that type of thing. Several times we had neighbors that would tie up their goats or horses and not feed them well and neighborhood dogs would attack them, and all kinds of stuff, while they were tied up and they wouldn't do anything about it. My grandpa would go over there with a baseball bat and threaten to beat their head in if they didn't do something about it, kind of thing you know. Which is a little, I don't know, I was raised a little more pacifist than that.

Dallas describes being influenced by his relatives' stories. He heard his father describe his "conversion" to vegetarianism and his grandfather spoke of his strong sense of dedication to the ethical treatment of animals. Dallas' family members provided him a model of sensitivity and courage to act in the face of injustice.

Jessica also references her mother as having provided her model for action while she was growing up.

> Yeah, my mother was, um, from as young as I can remember she would picket. There was this local nuclear power plant that she and her buddies were always

picketing at. So, yes, I learned this from my mother.

Both Dallas and Jessica described seeing activist ethics – in his case, his parents' and grandparents' beliefs, in her case, her mothers' actions – modeled at home. Other activists described the importance of their parents' and familial values, as well, although in a less activist-oriented context.

Clara, 89, described growing up during the Depression, her family's beliefs in frugality and hard work, and competing and winning in 4-H through school.

> I met my husband on a 4-H Club trip to Chicago. I had won first in state on a timed topic, a five minute speech…And I had never dated….And we were *so* poor, it was during the Depression years. And this was towards the end, but still it was Dustbowl days. And it was so hard to make a living so we had to work our way through school. To me money, you know being raised as a very, very poor person and having to work *so* hard, money did not have the same…You know we sold eggs for 3 cents and 5 cents a dozen. And my stepfather gave me, I think he gave me a quarter, and that's all I got when I was in college…But times were hard. So to me money did not mean anything except taking care of your needs and this [financing her court battle against a proposed nuclear power plant] was a need.

Clara's description brings up the values she learned in youth, as well as her participation with an agriculturally-oriented group. Research has demonstrated that participation in 4-H, the YMCA, and other groups helps contribute to increased social, political, and self-awareness (Yates & Youniss, 1996) while Wells' and Lekies' (2006) research has demonstrated the link between involvement with nature during youth and ensuing interest in protecting the environment.

Lois also told about learning values in childhood that likely contributed to her development as an activist:

> …it goes back probably to my childhood even though you don't realize it. I mean your parents instill things into you, certain things about fairness and justice… I wouldn't say we were activists by any stretch of the imagination…My mother is a wonderful woman. She is 69-years-old and still uses a reel lawn mower. I'm

> talking reel – R-E-E-L, human-powered. She doesn't have a dryer either. But she's not an environmentalist activist, she just probably approaches it more from growing up in a working class family. You know we do things frugally.

It is evident that both Clara and Lois were deeply affected by what they describe. While they were not directly taught activist beliefs or behaviors in the same way that Dallas and Jessica were, their experiences, role models, and values played a part in the people they would later become. Clara, for instance, worked tirelessly later in life and spent her hard-earned money to prevent a nuclear power plant from being built. Lois is now heavily invested in living simply and frugally, which she sees as a moral commitment. Thus, these values, no doubt contributed to who they became.

In the above examples many of the values are learned unconsciously. They are like tiny seeds too small to see or recognize in the moment, but which later germinate into deep-rooted, tall trees. Not surprisingly, research on learning values indicates that parents play a role in what their children later believe (McAdam, 1988; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Pancer & Pratt, 1999). Altruistic and pro-socially active teenagers have been found to be more similar to their parents, in terms of their ideals, than demographically similar teens who did not demonstrate these qualities (Hart & Fegley, 1995). Other research has suggested parents' values, parenting styles, and parenting practices (e.g. modeling behaviors, as mentioned by Dallas and Jessica) all contribute to creating children interested in participating in community service (Pancer & Pratt, 1999; Pratt, Arnold, & Hilbers, 1998).

In addition, interest in nature and nature protection may be linked to parental example (Peterson & Hungerford, 1981); however, this finding has recently been contradicted (Wells & Lekies, 2006) so the link is unclear. The former study investigated

the early lives of individuals who later went on to become environmental educators, while the latter examined all sorts of individuals with varying beliefs about nature protection. Wells and Lekies (2006) suggest that one interpretation of this data might be that spending time in nature during childhood with adults may indicate that this time was required or structured in some way that was off-putting to children. Conversely, free, voluntary, unstructured play in nature – with or without parents – may lead to increased environmental awareness and a desire to take positive action, in terms of protection (Wells & Lekies, 2006).

This can be interpreted in another fashion, as well. If children are required to spend time outdoors, the context may be more dogmatic and rigid, while if children are allowed to be outdoors, perhaps encouraged to be, they have more free choice over the matter. Regarding values transmission from parent to child, this may be an important element (Baumrind, 1971), as children may develop values most similar to their parents if they are provided with authoritative parenting styles, as opposed to authoritarian parenting styles (Pancer & Pratt, 1999). Research on parenting styles has indicated that authoritative parenting styles, which tend to be affectively warm with firm, clear expectations of rules adherence, are more successful in terms of raising well-adjusted children, than permissive (i.e. lax) or authoritarian (i.e. rigid, dogmatic) parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971). Children from authoritative homes display more sophistication in moral reasoning (Boyes & Allen, 1993) and greater proclivity toward social responsibility than children from permissive or authoritarian homes (Baumrind, 1971). If children feel that their parents' values are forced on them, they may be less inclined to adopt those values, particularly if they have information-seeking coping styles (i.e. they

explore their values) related to their identity development (Berzonsky, 1992). Thus, it seems that one way to encourage prosocial behaviors that last is to lead by example and to encourage, but not require involvement during childhood (Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Pancer & Pratt, 1999).

In a similar vein, the activists above described parental support through encouragement and validation regarding their children's involvement in volunteering and activism. Kate's parents provided physical support, providing transportation and purchasing materials for her activities, as well as emotional support.

> I always had a great deal of support from my mother. She saw that I really cared about this and she was the one who helped me get the recycling bins [for the school recycling project Kate started] and everything…Um, I mean, my parents were always great lovers of the natural world because my dad was from South Africa… My family is *extremely* supportive of what I do.

Jennifer also described her parents as being emotionally and instrumentally supportive, as her mother drove her across town to the animal sanctuary two or three times a week for several summers in a row. In addition, Jennifer described her father as continuing to be supportive of her involvement in animal protection.

> No one else in the family is really active. They come out and support it because I'm doing it. Like this [concert fundraising] event I'm doing over the summer, my dad is playing. His band is playing. And he's donated money in the past and been involved in the past…he believes what I believe about this, but it's an indirect sort of thing. He's supporting it because I'm doing it.

It is evident that Jennifer's volunteering ethic and enthusiasm have had an effect on her father. Sam also described having a reciprocal effect on his father. While acknowledging some initial tension with his family when he became involved in activism (see next chapter), the situation improved and his father eventually became involved in nature protection to a degree, as well.

> I think he started realizing that he was partially responsible for my land ethic and that was part of his own doing and teaching. And I think he started to embrace that. He actually started to change himself and he now is the president of the [our city's] Trout Unlimited. And it's not just for fisherman, but with fly-fishing, they're taking a real activist approach toward watership quality…But it took a long time.

Relationships with family members and intimate others figure heavily into activist identity development, according to the participants' narratives. Often activists experience tension or relationship trouble when they become initially involved, although not all activists reported this experience; some, like Kate, reported a strengthening of familial relationships because of her involvement. The issue of relationships and activist participation will be treated more in-depth in the following chapter, as many activists experience personal change as a function of maintaining both these relationships and their involvement in activism.

For many of the activists, it seems that parental support, both instrumental and emotional, as well as the direct transmission of values, helped to inculcate and reinforce the belief that being involved in volunteering and activism is a positive, meaningful thing to do. Exposure to these sorts of activities, and praise from parents for engaging in them, no doubt played into some of the activists being socialized to meaningful action, volunteerism, and activism at an early age. This form of support was also complemented by education to help lay the foundation for a life of activist involvement.

Childhood and youth education

Another factor mentioned by participants as having awakened them to the need for action, was education early in childhood. Kate described the emotional tone inherent in her first encounter with environmental education:

> Well, it probably started in terms of my environmental consciousness, in fourth grade. My teacher, Mrs. G, gave us a whole rainforest segment for a week where we watched videos on the destruction of the rainforest, wrote poetry. We had to really kind of think about parts of the world that we'd never been exposed to. It really broke my heart to see all the destruction of the pristine wild land and animals and sloths and stuff like that. So that kind of planted the seed for that.

Kate remembers learning about environmental degradation as well as how she felt when she learned about it – the news "broke her heart." She specifically mentions a childhood experience provided by a respected authority during which she had emotional and cognitive reactions she will likely never forget. This learning helped spark a great passion and propelled her into a life as a strong activist.

Jessica also described an emotional reaction produced by learning about environmental problems in childhood:

> Growing up in the 70s there was the energy shortage and the water shortage, and so my elementary school classrooms had posters saying, "Save a drop, it'll save a life!" Or something. "Turn off all your faucets; turn off all your lights." And so this idea that we should conserve because things are running out got kind of pounded into my head. And [now] it's almost like this weird guilt thing and like I'll wash out my plastic bags and reuse them instead of buying a new box.

Jessica's first exposure to environmental education was within a school context through posters discussing the current economic shortages. She describes the proposed solution, conservation, as something people "should" do and that this idea was "pounded into" her head. As a result, it appears that her ensuing anxiety related to over-consumption and dwindling resources motivates and drives Jessica to action decades later.

Sam mentions involvement and education that occurred through participating in an extracurricular activity while in high school, but does not discuss fear or sadness in relation to his initial exposure to action. Rather, his emotional themes seem to be enthusiasm and fellowship.

> We had a really active environmental science professor at [my high school]. And there was a program, it was the [High School] Environmental Management Team. And Dr. C. was a motivator to get us out of the high school apathy and get us involved and what he had done was set up a really effective high school recycling program. And the enthusiasm was contagious…there was a lot of good involvement there.

Interestingly, Kate, Jessica, and Sam all describe initial encounters with environmental education that "planted the seed" for activism within a school context. It is telling that for them significant events occurred through structured education environments and that likewise, all three are under 40 (Kate is 26, Sam is 29, and Jessica is 37). This may be indicative of a change in the sociopolitical context which allowed this sort of environmental focus to be present in school curricula. In the spirit of foregrounding difference, it should be noted that Valerie, 35, Jennifer, 28, and Dallas, 32, are also under the age of 40 and did not report school-based environmental education occurring in youth.

Likewise, older participants did not describe learning about environmental or activist issues directly through a school curriculum, although certainly other contextual social factors present within school systems were mentioned (e.g. desegregation, participation in 4-H programs). Rather, older participants cited several social and political educational influences occurring early in life, in addition to geographic and economic factors that led to dedicated lives of activism. These educational influences included the aforementioned school-related events as well as growing up during the 60s and 70s, experiencing many powerful historical events.

Historical events

Lois, 50, and Trinity, 41, described the influence of the historical events occurring during their youth. Lois noted:

> You have to remember the time period I grew up in. I was born in 1956. So, in the 60s when we would come home from school we'd turn on the TV set, and remember the war was televised. And so it radically shaped my views of what was going on in the world…my perception of the world starting from the time I was about 10 or 12 on was that it was a very unhappy place, and in our own country especially. You turn on the TV and we'd see riots, we'd see 19-year-old boys being wounded and lied to. You know, My Lai, Kent State, the assassinations. It was very scary. And then on top of that the [threat of] nuclear war and it just seemed like no one had the answers, and it was just really frightening to me in the sense that the world seemed like a very destructive place.

Lois' view of the world – that it was unsure, frightening, and destructive – reflects fear and anxiety, similarly to Jessica's descriptions of hearing about resource shortages.

Trinity's recollections of the time, rather than leading her to make interpretations about the state of the world, led her instead to view those activists and protesters as role-models and a source of inspiration. Trinity recalled:

> When I was a little girl, I saw the state riots on television. I saw New York sit-ins for stuff and I'm thinking, "Where are these people now?" So what was my childhood basis, you know what I saw on television growing up, I'm willing to go do.

In this way her comments seem more similar to Sam, who focused on the positive aspects of involvement, such as "contagious" enthusiasm and "good involvement." For both Trinity and Lois, the media played an influential role, but one that caused different reactions.

Robert, 63, and Jane, 50, were both propelled to action as a reaction to events of the times – for Robert it was joining the Peace Corps when the only other alternative to his dead-end, post-college job seemed to be heading off to Vietnam. For Jane it was the passage of Roe v. Wade. Robert described his initial involvement in pro-social action as a process of elimination.

> At the time I was out of college a year, I'd been working for the federal government as a statistician. Working, basically, counting munitions.

> Great stuff. And I saw that as a big dead end, and so I bailed… I was in a situation where there weren't many alternatives…The Peace Corps, you know, was on everybody's lips, so to speak, as an alternative. There was Vietnam, but my dad was a career military man and he'd been to Vietnam. He didn't want me and my brother to go into the military. So there didn't seem to be any other choice, so I applied to the Peace Corps …And about two months later they sent me a second offer [he turned down the first offer] to teach math in Ghana, and I thought, "Ha! My mother always said I should be a teacher!" So away I went.

Jane described her realization that she needed to be involved in social action as follows:

> I was in high school when the Roe v. Wade decision was handed down by the Supreme Court and that caught my attention. We had a mock legislature my senior year in high school and I was appointed minority whip. (laughs) And I discovered then that there were issues that I was going to work on starting with the Roe v. Wade decision. And throughout, from that point throughout college, well, even my husband and I, after we got married, we worked on social issues of that sort. So it was in high school I remember thinking, "These boys are clueless." (laughs) That's what I started thinking about and it was some time early in college, I suppose, that I thought of it in terms of, I just needed to do certain things.

For Jane, her desire to be involved in activism is described as a sort of calling ("I discovered then that there were issues that I was going to work on…I just needed to do certain things"), whereas for Robert, it seems to have been more serendipitous. He decided to go the Peace Corps because it seemed like the only viable option at the time. It was in the Peace Corps that he met the first of several strong personalities who would serve as personal and professional mentors, and help steer Robert toward a life of action. Mentors played a fundamental role in the development of these activists, contributing to the learning process that constitutes becoming an activist. Mentors will be described more in the following chapter.

Ben, 54, also described the influence of historical events on his early life. He recalled his participation in school integration as having been a pivotal experience in his development as a social justice activist.

> And I think that there were a couple of things that happened when I was young that really set me on my horse, so to speak. One of those was I lived through all the integration events in [this state], and you know I really began on the wrong side of that. Because, well, we were white and lived in [a small, rural town], and we benefited from the oppression and the white-only segregation. And my family was very opposed to the civil rights movement.

Ben's description not only recognizes the influence of major historical events, but also hints at the considerable personal evolution, or movement away from the values and beliefs of his family of origin, that occurred over the course of his lifetime.

Evolution of beliefs and values

Several of the activists described their values and beliefs as conspicuously different from their families of origin. Valerie described her vegan and animal protection beliefs as being considerably different than those of her family. Clara, Jane, and Lois all discussed developing different beliefs and values than their families. Clara described her realization that her beliefs were evolving away from those of her family of origin as a difficult time.

> Never in my mind did I expect to be an activist. I was taught that the government was right. That we didn't question what the government told us. And I was comfortable in that sort of context, but I could not agree with nuclear power.

It should be noted, too, that Clara only began what she describes as activism when she was 55. Prior to that she had been involved in other remarkably progressive activities, such as running an organic bakery in the 1950s, serving organic food at her nursing home in the 1960s and 1970s, and managing a health food store, yet it was involvement in political activism that caused Clara to more deeply reevaluate her beliefs.

Activists who chose different values than those of their families of origin seem to have progressed through Habermas' Universalistic stage, questioning given social norms and developing a consistent, unified ego identity based on the development and

integration of their own beliefs (Habermas, 1979). Likewise, these activists did not prematurely foreclose (Marcia, 1966) on an identity similar to their parents, but "achieved" an identity based on information-seeking and thorough questioning of their own values (Berzonsky, 1992, 1994).

The way these activists have internalized values from their parents seems to be complicated, in that they kept some and rejected others. Lois and Clara, for instance, both discussed some values they'd learned growing up – frugality being a common denominator for both women. However, they later became very different people from their families of origin, holding a considerably different framework of values and beliefs in adulthood.

Ben came from a family that opposed the civil rights movement, an attitude that he quickly discarded, if he ever truly held it to begin with, when he ran away from home at age 16. But no doubt there were other values and beliefs that he took with him, such as a dedication to hard work. He also described a time when his grandmother showed him old newspaper clippings about the early 1900s radical populist farming movement, of which his grandfather was a part. This perhaps indicates that the ghost of a model for involvement, meager though it was, was nonetheless present in his youth. Thus, it seems that these activists explored and developed different values from their families of origin, retaining what rang true to them. While somewhat different, the same likely holds true for those individuals whose parents' held dominant values related to activism, like Jessica and Dallas.

Socialization to activism

In an earlier section activists were discussed in the context of having developed similar values (e.g. frugality, hard work, vegetarianism) to their parents. Dallas and Jessica are certainly similar to their parents in some ways in that they've incorporated many of the ethical and political beliefs their families held. Yet while they both were taught certain ideas about standing up for one's beliefs (Jessica through her mother) or ethical consumption (Dallas through his parents), both of them differ from their parents in terms of their approach to action.

Jessica, for instance, no longer participates in political activism (e.g. protests, marches, rallies), unless she feels utterly compelled by her conscience to do so. She describes this sort of involvement as personally uncomfortable and something she would rather not do. Her mother, on the other hand, picketed a nuclear power plant regularly. Jessica described exploring the values she learned as a child and deciding that they felt right for her.

> I kind of feel weird saying it but I don't feel like there was ever a time when I wasn't a feminist and wasn't a liberal. I just was raised by liberal, feminist parents and I never went through that epiphany where you're like, "Wow, there's sexism?" (laughs)…And that seems snobby, but it's just from the get-go I was taught to be a liberal. So, no, I don't think I've had any epiphanies about this…about whether my values are right or wrong…not that I don't question my own values, but I've never changed them as a result of questioning them. I've always just decided, "Yep, I'm right!" (laughs) Yep, it's good to be a liberal, and that's all there is to it.

Similarly, Dallas had been a life-long vegetarian due to the influence and example of his parents. He took their beliefs further, however, by becoming vegan and an activist. He described his parents as living their ethical principles through their vegetarianism; his mother also taught him transcendental meditation when he was a child, which has

become a daily practice for him. In terms of activism, however, he describes them in the following way:

> They were never, they were real introverted and homebodies, you know, that kind of thing. I grew up hearing my dad bitch about the way things are a lot, but not doing much about it, you know? [My dad's] just one of those guys who always likes to take the devil's advocate point of view. He was real good on the debate team and that type of thing for that. He could argue pretty much any point of view, you know.

Despite what he perceives as his father's lack of action, Dallas's commitment to speak up and educate others may have roots in his father's debating skills. Dallas also said that his mother "came out of her shell" after returning to college herself and that both of his parents are supportive and proud of his work on behalf of animals. Jessica describes purposefully examining her values, but notes that her upbringing prevented her from having a specific "A-ha" epiphany about social problems. Dallas does describe having this moment, but his take on his "awakening" is related to action.

> I had kind of an awakening because it was just second nature to me, you know, being a vegetarian. But I realized that I could make a difference and possibly convert some people and that kind of thing.

Later in the interview he describes the idea that he could be responsible for affecting change and joining with others with similar beliefs as an "empowering" moment. Ten of the twelve participants involved in this study described some sort of epiphany related to their development as activists. The two exceptions, interestingly, are Jessica and Jennifer, both of whom do not identify as "activists," but rather see themselves as taking action they believe in, without the need for a label.

> In relation to her beliefs about animal adoption and protection, Jennifer said:
>
> I can't pick a time when I learned different because I've always, my whole family has always adopted. I mean we've always supported that. The very first animal that I've ever had, although he was purchased from a breeder, he was a dog whose

> testicles didn't drop so he was worthless to the breeder. So in some twisted way you could look at that as some sort of a rescue. But I remember when I was 9 or 10 going to the pound and picking out animals. So I don't remember a specific time when there was a turning point.

In the revised Cross model of African American identity development (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), the authors address the idea that many African American children are now being socialized by their parents to know about racism from an early age, preventing an "A-ha" moment similar to the experience described by Jessica. These children do not have the "conversion experience" that other individuals, who are not socialized to know about racism, may experience later in life when confronted with racism and racist attitudes (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, p. 378). Thus, these children never know a time when they are unaware of racism or its effects on their lives. Similarly, it seems as though Jessica and Jennifer were socialized to their causes and beliefs in childhood, never knowing the world without these beliefs. It is interesting that Dallas grew up this way, as well, yet he does recall experiencing an epiphany, and his was related to what he could *do* with those beliefs.

Summary of childhood and youth influences

To summarize this discussion on childhood roots of activism, it appears that these activists experienced certain triggering events or influences that helped lead to their prosocial careers. See Table 3, p. 91, for a visual summary. Six major themes emerged as common antecedents to a life of activism. These included participation in action during childhood or youth, direct contact with "wild" nature, parental support – both emotional and instrumental, parental values, environmental education, and witnessing or participating in significant historical events. Participants mentioned numerous shared sub-themes, such as the need to feel useful, feelings of connection to nature, selflessness,

awareness of opportunities to express prosocial feelings, early validation of feelings by respected authorities, early success and reinforcement, relatives' stories and histories, innate ethical sensitivity and an innate urge to care, feelings of camaraderie with other activists, identification and personal experience with suffering, the powerful effects of visual media and popular music, the effects of activist propaganda, righteous indignation at the brutality of those in power, and direct parental guidance.

There is something special about these activists. Many people lived through desegregation or the Depression. Many people witnessed the Vietnam War being televised. Many children were exposed to wild nature by their parents. Many individuals were raised by activists and didn't choose that path. But these individuals did. Something in them led to a desire to become involved – to act out and take action on what they feel passionate about. What helps push potential activists to action? What helps parlay individuals into a career of activism if they have relatively low exposure to elements that could perceivably lay that foundation? This area of research would be ripe for future exploration, as it would be useful to better understand personality and life event differences that lead to a sustained activist career.

Epiphanies

The rest of this chapter will examine epiphanies and the role that life-changing moments and realizations had for these activists. Epiphanies played a major role in calling these activists "awake." Ten of the twelve participants recalled epiphanies, special turning points, or crucial moments in their development, with some recalling multiple examples. As so many could recall epiphanies, each will be treated individually in

alphabetic order. Note that as mentioned previously Jessica and Jennifer were unable to recall epiphanies and thus will not be included below.

Ben

Ben described two events as having "set [him] on [his] horse." The first, described in the last section, was having gained a first person view of school integration in a rural southwestern state. He listed the second pivotal experience of his youth as running away from home.

> When I was 16 I ran away from home. And so I had a summer of experience as a homeless runaway. And that was a real switch from going and living in a small town where everyone I was related to was right there and everything was very secure and normal, to being a street person in [a large, urban city], which is where I ended up. And some really terrible things happened to me, at that point. And I think that that was kind of the beginning of my (trails off) by experiencing what it's like on the other side of our society, that that really changed me. Because I got to know black people for the first time really in my life. [At home] we would have relationships with black people, but they were, you know, they were different than what I experienced on the street, where I found that the black people were the most trustworthy people, at least in the context of street life. And they were actually very kind to me as a new person on the street and helped me out, which is how I learned how to adapt, and what to be aware of and things like that.

Running away from home seems to serve not only as a symbolic moment of departure from his family's belief system, but also a real, physical separation, marking the transition to the creation of his own set of beliefs and values. He describes having had fairly shallow and peripheral relationships with African Americans at home, then later moving into deeper, more authentic relationships with them during his time on the streets. Ben describes these two experiences as having "set [him] on [his] horse," laying the foundation for his path as an activist. The first, being present and witnessing school integration, and the second, running away and consequently developing relationships with people of a different race, helped awaken Ben to the injustices of the world, to the

reality of prejudice and baseless discrimination. He later became heavily involved in helping the poor through Catholic charities and accepted a music ministry position at an African American church. His early experiences no doubt helped him really see what was going on around him. Plenty of individuals lived through school integration and likely maintained racist and prejudiced views. Ben, on the other hand, was profoundly changed and began a lifetime of questioning the status quo.

Clara

Clara had an unusual path to activism, making unconventional career decisions throughout the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. owning an organic bakery, serving organic food in her nursing home), before becoming fully and deeply engaged in activism during the 1970s at age 55. She describes her awakening moment as finally confronting her fear of nuclear power when she decided to read an article that someone left on her desk.

> When I would see an article in a newspaper or a magazine about nuclear power it just overwhelmed me. I just felt like I could not cope with it. I didn't want to know. I was frightened of it. And so I would throw it in the wastebasket or skip right over it and I would not read a thing about nuclear power. So one day I made the rounds in the nursing home and I came back to the office to rest…and someone had come in and put an article in the newspaper and had it folded so the article was showing. And the title was *$450 million N-plant for [City]* and I thought, "What in the world is an N-plant?" Then it dawned on me it was a nuclear plant. I read it. It was a nuclear power plant they were planning for 12 miles due south of our farm. And I said to myself, "You can get your head out of the sand now and learn about nuclear power." So I did.

For Clara, this was a huge, emotional turning point. It appears that her connection to profound emotions and an intuitive capacity were conditions that lent themselves to her being able to respond to the news. Nuclear power was fundamentally threatening and scary, yet she steeled herself, forcing herself to read the article. It seems like this was the point of no-return. Once she opened the door to learning more about nuclear power, there

would be consequences – more fear, perhaps, or a feeling that she must take action if she had more information. Yet Clara's description, "So I did," demonstrates the remarkable determination and follow-through that these activists have. These traits seem to be a necessity for a life of dedication to a cause. For Clara, and some of the other activists, a distinct single-mindedness seems to emerge: If I know X, then I must do Y; thus education seems to be a major fulcrum for action. But labeling their distinction between right and wrong as black-and-white would obscure the moral complexities that these activists recognize. What is black and white, however, is their determination to become involved and to live their consciences.

Dallas

Dallas describes a process of parental socialization to his chosen activist values – vegetarianism and animal protection. He defined his epiphany as an "awakening" to the realization that he could have an influence on others, and possibly "convert" them to vegetarianism, as well. His epiphany, therefore, is not related to gaining new knowledge but rather what he could do with the knowledge that he already had. Like Jennifer and Sam influencing their fathers, Dallas also notes a reciprocal element to his activism:

> The experience of meeting people and actually having success in converting them [was an influence]. And them becoming friends of mine and actually being mentors to each other and learning things from each other.

Dallas also described witnessing animal cruelty as a child, and noted that this visceral experience helped solidify his commitment to animal protection.

> And seeing a lot of cruelty to cats and dogs things like that growing up, really kind of spurred me towards doing something about it. I remember like when I was in, I don't know how old I was probably 6th or 7th grade, this guy in my class would go out and get stray cats and bury them up to their neck and run them over with a lawn mower. It was like a spectator sport, you know, kids from the

neighborhood would come around and watch this and that type of thing.

Dallas was steeped in a belief system that honored animals, with a solid family value being vegetarianism based on ethical reasons. Growing up in an agricultural area in a rural southwestern state where animals were treated as commodities or worse, while learning vegetarianism and transcendental meditation at home, makes Dallas' story all the more unusual. So for him the realization that others might be interested in learning his unusual way of life was the moment of significant personal change.

Jane

Jane described a moment of realization, mentioned earlier in the discussion on the influence of historical events. She noted that she "…discovered [after the Roe v. Wade decision] that there were issues that I was going to work on." For her, being appointed the minority whip of a mock legislature at that time was not only an awakening, but also a symbolic prediction, as her beliefs and activism have been in the minority ever since. Jane's involvement in activism began with the Roe v. Wade decision, but her career in animal protection began after viewing a documentary about the clubbing of pup seals in Canada.

> And then the animal [orientation] kicked in towards the end of my college years when we saw those first videos, *Off the Ice*, you know, of the seal hunts. That took a lot of guts to stand out there and film that hunt going on…You think of what, how can someone stand there and do that? Film under those conditions? That was a big turning point.

For Jane it was not only the content of the film that moved her, but also the inspiration provided by the individuals involved in the filming. They were willing to risk emotional and possibly physical harm by standing there, filming the brutality of the seal hunts. Jane recognized that she felt a moral compulsion to participate in action that reflected her

values. She "…just need[ed] to do certain things." As with Clara, a single-minded resolve emerged. In order to feel protected against moral dissonance, she simply needed to do certain things – live her values.

Kate

Kate recalls experiencing two different epiphanies related to her involvement in activism. The first pertained to her career decision-making, while the second was more about self-efficacy. Both, however, are emotionally laden decisions.

> I always thought I was going to be a vet. Then I realized, what's the point in being a vet if there's not a planet for animals to thrive on? Not just domesticated animals, but wild animals, as well, who are going extinct. So [awareness of environmental issues] had a huge impact.

> …in high school when I really started getting involved with the recycling program of [the City]. I really realized that one thing can make a difference in collaboration with many others…And once I saw that, I realized there's just no end to what we can do to solve environmental problems and that sort of thing. They're very complex, but it's about taking different ideas and different angles and coming together and sorting through them into valid solutions. So that was a very empowering and enlightening moment in my life. I'd have to say.

Kate's epiphanies, displaying the characteristic determination and follow-through of other activists, also hint at the constant fluctuation between optimism and pessimism many activists experience. Her career goals switched from a desire to be a vet to a desire to be an environmental scientist and policy maker because of an extraordinarily pessimistic thought – the Earth might not be here long enough to sustain a need for veterinarians. The Earth has bigger problems than unspayed and unvaccinated cats and dogs, calling for efforts and problem-solving on a much grander scale. Yet, a later epiphany in high school illuminated her optimism and her faith that enough people can provide viable solutions. For her, this realization was "empowering and enlightening."

Kate's metaphor of seeing all the pieces of a puzzle fitting together eloquently describe the awakening she experienced.

Lois

Lois described several cultural elements that contributed to her change over time. She noted that she was unsure whether she had one powerful epiphany or a series of several small ones that contributed to her evolution over time. Earlier she discussed the impact of the times during which she grew up, citing the influence of the Vietnam War on television, among other events that shaped her views on the world. Here, similarly, she discusses the cultural events and elements that propelled her to action, tying her initial foray into anti-nuclear activism to musical and media influences, and the radiation poisoning and unusual death of local nuclear power worker Karen Silkwood.

> And then there was rock 'n roll. Rock 'n roll introduced us to a lot of things and I was really big into Jackson Browne. And so Jackson Browne made nuclear power his cause, and so that's where I first heard about it. I bought a Jackson Browne t-shirt at a concert here, probably this would have been in '76, and there was a little [label] on the side that talked about nuclear [power]…But anyway, Jackson Browne, whose music I liked, took nuclear energy as a serious matter that I thought I needed to know about. And the media played into it. Movies, *The China Syndrome*, those kinds of things. And, yet at the same time we were living in [the state] where Karen Silkwood had lived.

The Jackson Browne concert Lois described was actually organized and implemented by Clara and her group of safe energy activists. Like Kate, Lois also experienced two significant epiphanies. Lois pinpointed two moments of radical change, each related to different causes. The first was the sense of empowerment she felt from being involved in Clara's successful campaign to shut down the power plant. Her second epiphany was related to her recognition of the power of everyday choices. She describes them as follows:

> …and being involved in [protesting the building of nuclear power plant]. We had a protest up at the site of the plant. We trained for weeks with national training groups. We camped out there. And people were arrested and all those kinds of things. That was a big turning point for me, and eventually the plant not being built, so seeing that…Then there was this book called the *Union of Concerned Scientists Guide to Effective Consumer Choices*…and it was so stunning to me because it was talking about what are the individual consumer choices you make that most effect the environment. And number one was your choice of having a car period, and secondly was food. And, I mean, well golly, without those things, I mean you might as well throw in the towel. How can anybody (trails off). How can anybody be an environmentalist?

Again, this participant takes time to discuss emotionally salient conditions that put her into a readied state of being, allowing her increased receptivity to an epiphany. Instead of being overwhelmed by this news and giving up, however, Lois sought more information and began exploring how her own choices affected the planet. This resulted in her conscious and incredibly minimal use of a vehicle and purposefully purchasing a house within walking distance of her work and her children's school, as well as guiding her involvement in a city advisory panel regarding the use of green space, her participation in a local-food co-op, and consumption choices, such as using hand-me-downs and not owning a dryer. It seems this epiphany had a deep impact on Lois, ultimately leading her to make significant personal changes in collaboration with her husband and family.

Robert

When asked about epiphanies, in general, Robert said they occurred "All the way through, there are always. Those kinds of things happen." He recounted a first epiphany which seems to reflect his somewhat serendipitous involvement with the Peace Corps. An opportunity presented itself and he took it:

> Well, initially, way back when, a builder came to me in [a large, Southwestern city] and said, "I'd like you to design my home." And I said great. And he said, "I want to do it out of adobe." And I said, "I don't know anything about adobe, but I can learn." He said, "I don't either, we can learn together." And he came to me

> shortly after that saying, "the federal government is sponsoring a competition for energy efficiency. Let's make this house that you're designing for me an example and enter it in the competition." And we did, and we won. And so we got a whole lot of attention in [that city] and that essentially put my practice of architecture in high gear. So, bingo. That started it all. Big time.

Robert's admiration of the natural occurrence of epiphanies reflects his appreciation of the spiritual in every day life. His example demonstrates the need to attend to these every day happenings, as noticing them may lead to a long and rewarding path. He described another story in which two of his architecture students wanted licensure credit for working with a local building company. The building company contacted Robert and later offered him a job as the two students' licensed supervisor and to this day Robert has remained heavily involved in developing green building practices through this company. He described it this way, "A kind of chance encounter with a couple of students pulls me into a lifetime's work, so to speak. So there've been a lot of these, sort of, you call them epiphanies, but I call them chance encounters." Robert's views on spirituality, and the synchronicity of chance encounters, will be explored more in the next chapter as this is a common theme for many activists.

Sam

Sam described a painful emotional loss which deepened his commitment to activism. He had already been interested in environmental protection, but the incident described below shifted Sam's focus to more local protection and ideas about involvement with local politics, zoning, and development.

> And it took actually a moment of clarity or a moment of realization when I came back home to the house I was brought up in, and I was really awakened by this childhood creek that was next door to our house, and it had been paved…it was part of a channelization effort for a large, retail development that's gone in. And everyone views it as tremendous progress. But the thing that was so special about it was that this watershed had these reeds and thickets that gave habitat to these

> red-wing blackbirds. I used to walk down there, it was a place that I could go, you know, do a variety of things. And to get away with the dog. But it really bothered me. And I remember asking my dad, I said, "Dad, what is the appropriate avenue there for someone to express concern? I was gone did anybody go and respond to this at the planning commission? Did anyone go and speak to these things?" And he said, "Sam, no one's…(gestures dismissively)" And I know the reality here is that the climate here culturally is not sensitive to that. That's when I first started saying, "Who speaks for the red-wing blackbirds?" (laughs) I thought they needed to have a voice there at the table. I think here in our culture that is considered ridiculous.

The loss of this creek, and the sanctuary it provided to red-wing blackbirds, who had to seek different migration habitat, had a huge impact on Sam. His response is emotional, yet thoughtful. He recognizes that others might see his interest in protecting the birds and their habitat as ridiculous, yet he wants to find a way to bridge the gap. For Sam this moment marked his focus on becoming more involved locally and participating more deeply in local politics. It also resulted in his becoming aware of the underbelly of "progress" and the hypocrisy of anthrocentrism.

Trinity

Trinity experienced her moment of awareness in conjunction with other homesteaders as they learned about proposed rules to change how farm animals are tagged and monitored. She describes her epiphany as an awareness of the threat to her way of life.

> As we read this article and then we began to talk amongst ourselves, we use the internet a lot, Yahoo groups and stuff. We realized this is a big, major threat to our way of life. I mean how more intrusive can the government get than just to say you can't raise chickens unless we give you permission… I'm like, oh my gosh, that's just amazing that people are actually comfortable doing that, having this intrusion. What I consider freedom, other people just don't have any concept of it. I went from "I don't really care what anybody else does as long as they leave me alone" to "oh my goodness, they're coming after me." I actually was quite upset for awhile when I learned this.

Trinity's account of her epiphany also provides a glimpse of the emotional process involved in learning activism. This description shows a range of emotions – indignation, anger, disbelief, fear, and sadness – all experienced at the beginning of Trinity's involvement. She also moves from a conceptualization of the problem as one of general oppression to viewing it as highly personal, and it is out of this personal experience that she finally realizes interdependence with others who are oppressed and a responsibility to act. This highly emotional beginning to an activist career is a recurring theme in many of the activist's stories. Emotion seems to play a pivotal role in moving people to action, while action seems to be a major method of coping with the anxiety and fear that has been provoked. This will be examined in more depth in the following chapter.

Valerie

Valerie describes two moments of radical change, occurring fairly close together. The first was when she became aware of vegetarianism.

> I was 18. I was a senior in high school. And I was, like most people who are vegetarians now, an animal lover…it was in between my senior year of high school and college, and two students from every state got selected to go to this science camp in the hills of West Virginia for a month…and the first day there, the counselors came down and they had all of us together and said "Well, you're going to be here for a month, we're going to be feeding you breakfast, lunch, dinner, and we need to know how many vegetarian meals to prepare. So could all the vegetarians please raise your hand?" And that was the second that I became a vegetarian because I knew the minute he said that. Nobody had every asked me if I was [a vegetarian]. Growing up in [this state], I don't think I even heard the word. When he said it was just like all these wheels started turning and gears started shifting and I was just like, "Of course. Well that, that's me!" So I just raised my hand because nobody had just asked me before…And so when I was finally asked, well it's like anything else. If you want to change the world or if you don't like the way things are, and you think you can change something, you become an activist. Well, if you care about other beings and somebody says "well, you can become a vegetarian," then you do. That's the way my mind

> worked…And it worked out great. And I loved it. I didn't miss a single thing, I just never looked back. It didn't occur to me to look back.

The second epiphany occurred when Valerie learned about veganism.

> And one day I'm sitting there stuffing my envelopes [at an animal sanctuary] and we're all talking and I asked the question that I have since been asked a gazillion times, "If you don't kill the cow and you don't kill the chicken, then what's wrong with eating their eggs and drinking their milk? Why are you vegan if you're not hurting the animals?" And the person on staff who was working there that day…so he, in a very nice, gentle, understanding way said, "Well, let me show you," and took me out to the barn. And even though I'd been feeding the animals I still hadn't really gone through in my mind or even had it explained to me how the dairy cows came to be there, how the veal calves came to be there, how the hens from the battery cages came to be there…So, when I understood that, I left that day and was vegan ever since, because once again it was just so, I mean of course you're in tears.

Valerie's descriptions both display the emotion and black-and-white determination that many of the others have. She said, "Well, if you care about other beings and somebody says 'Well, you can become a vegetarian,' then you do," and notes that in those moments she *became* a vegetarian and a vegan. This was not a gradual process for Valerie. She "never looked back," moving from her previous life as an admittedly reluctant meat-eater to a vegetarian to a vegan. Later in the interview Valerie acknowledges that she realizes giving up meat is difficult for many people, but said that for her it was a simple, easy decision. "If you want to change the world or if you don't like the way things are, and you think you can change something, you become an activist." The single-minded determination exhibited in her story and the stories of others likely aids in building and sustaining the dedication to a life of activism, which must be difficult to maintain over time. For Valerie, congruence between her moral perspective and her behaviors is vital. Because she views the torture and murder of animals for human consumption as immoral, she chooses to live a life that lessens such suffering.

Jessica and Jennifer, who do not identify as activists, did not report epiphanies. These exceptions can be explored in multiple ways. If they had experienced some sort of epiphany, would it strengthen their identities as activists? Is their lack of reported epiphany unrelated to their activist identities, and perhaps just a coincidence that they both report similar stories? Both Jessica and Jennifer were socialized to activist beliefs in childhood, perhaps precluding the "A-ha" moment others felt. Yet Dallas, who experienced similar parental values transmission and socialization in childhood, had no problem remembering the "awakening" he had. It may be that the scope of the interviews did not probe this variable sufficiently. Both Jessica and Jennifer may have been able to produce epiphanies related to aspects of their involvement (e.g. the moment their commitment deepened or when they experienced deeper understanding of the issues) had they been prompted, while not still being unable to recall epiphanies central to the beginning of their involvement.

Summary of epiphanies

Ten of the twelve activists interviewed described powerful epiphanies that marked a significant change in their lives. Before the epiphanies they saw life differently. After the epiphanies they were changed people. Epiphanies were often described metaphorically, such as Sam's meaningful question, "Who speaks for the red-winged blackbirds?" The epiphanies were clearly associated with new "contact," whether that was with new information, new cultures, or new ways to teach others. Activists were mentally, emotionally, and sometimes physically shaken by these epiphanies. They were visceral, emotional experiences in which activists suddenly experience profound learning or personal transformation. Epiphanies were deeply personal, when activists suddenly

saw their personal contribution to the machine of oppression, or saw how a larger system was affecting them, or realized they could effect personal change. Epiphanies were connected to a personal feeling of unusual emotionality and intuition. As they had a powerful emotional impact on activists, they often left them vulnerable to dramatically shifting emotions. Epiphanies also frequently resulted in a singled-minded resolve to act for social justice. They sometimes related to inspiration by other passionate individuals or the experience of graphic violence, either through visual media or firsthand.

In a sense epiphanies allowed activists to see through the mundane and everyday to a form of truth. In doing so the ugliness of modern society, the waste, the abuse, the oppression, the sadness was all revealed, yet these revelations were not without hope. On the contrary, epiphanies frequently acted as vehicles for hope, revealing how activists could take an unforgiving reality and make something better out of it. Above all, epiphanies were empowering, even if this was not explicitly realized. The vision allowed by the epiphany also allowed the decision to change, providing the activist with decisions and control over how they want to continue living their lives.

Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the antecedents to activism reported by the activists. Table 3 (pg 91) presents those influences graphically. Seven of the twelve activists reported involvement in action during their youth, making this factor the most common variable among this group. For two of those seven, success at an early age was a key motivator, marking an empowering and moving moment in their lives.

Parental support and encouragement was also important, mentioned by five of the twelve interviewed. Parents' values played an important role for four of the activists who

discussed this in their interviews. Interestingly, parental support and values may combine most effectively in terms of producing children dedicated to action within an authoritative parenting style. That is, when children are encouraged to participate, and provided with a positive example, they may be more likely to continue pro-social behaviors later in life. Direct contact in "wild" nature played a role for at least four of the activists and may be tied to a desire to protect the natural world.

Structured, curriculum-based environmental education in youth was mentioned by four of the activists. Clara, the only activist over 40 to mention education in youth, spoke of her involvement in the agriculturally-oriented 4-H Club, while the other three activists, all under 40, noted exposure to environmental themes in school. A last significant factor was the role that historical events played in the lives of six activists, all over 40. These activists cited the Vietnam War, the riots and protests of the 60s, the Kent State murders, school integration, and the Depression as influencing their view of the world and their decisions to become involved in activism. It is interesting, too, that none of the activists under 40 cited historical events that happened during their youth.

Ten of the twelve activists interviewed described epiphanies that led to a sudden change in direction, a significant life change, or a realization that they could affect change. These epiphanies were largely emotionally themed and many led to a single-minded determination and commitment to activism. All were moving to the activists involved, and were vividly and sometimes viscerally described, indicating how well they were remembered and the impact they had for those involved.

Childhood experiences appear to have primed activists for involvement later in life while powerful epiphanies appear to have propelled them to action. Together, these

events will lead to the transformation of these individuals, from uninformed people to highly educated activists, initiating the awakening of their social conscience. The next chapter will examine that awakening in more depth, exploring the initial thoughts, feelings, and philosophies of these activists, as well how activists "learn" activism and common growing pains on the road to a mature activist identity.

Table 3 – Childhood experiences

Name	Age	Action in childhood/ youth	Direct nature contact	Parental support	Parental values	Environmental education	Historical Events
Ben	54	Yes					Yes
Clara	89		Yes (farm)		Yes	Yes (4-H)	Yes
Dallas	32	Yes	Yes (farm)	Yes	Yes		
Jane	50						Yes
Jennifer	28	Yes		Yes			
Jessica	37	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kate	27	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Lois	50				Yes		Yes
Robert	63						Yes
Sam	28	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	
Trinity	41		Yes (farm)				Yes
Valerie	35	Yes					
		7/12 = **58.3%**	4/12 = **33.3%**	5/12 = **41.6%**	4/12 = **33.3%**	4/12 = **33.3%**	6/12 = **50%**

* A blank field indicates that the topic was not directly discussed during the interview. This does not indicate that it is not a part of their experiences, but simply that it was not confirmed.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN ACTIVIST IDENTITY

This chapter will review results pertaining to initial activist identity development. The term "activist" will be defined and notions of what constitutes an activist will be presented. This will be followed by a look at activists' decisions to act, which is the moment of departure after which they took action, and the role of emotions in this decision. From there the story will move into an examination at how activists "learn" activism, acquiring and refining the skills which provide them a sense of identity. Lastly, a section on activist "growing pains" will conclude this chapter. It will examine the stridency many activists initially employ, conflict in close relationships, and the activist identity crisis. The next chapter will find our activists transitioning into a more "mature" activist identity development, demonstrating how they believe they have changed over time, as well as how they have sustained and coped through their activist careers. Again, interpretations and assertions will emerge from analysis of the activists' words.

Defining activism

Alexandra Corning (2002) defined an "activist orientation" as "an individual's developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and

institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors" (p. 704). She purposefully developed a broad definition in order to capture the many elements included in the literature on activism (Corning, 2002). Her definition seems to cover the range of individual behaviors demonstrated by participants in this study, also broadly encompassed by the term "activist." Within this study, behaviors range from the regular volunteerism and education to the public provided by Jennifer to the rallies and undercover work done by Valerie.

The participants in this study had mixed reactions to the word "activist." Some clearly identified with the term, while some clearly did not. Others felt ambivalent, offering other words to define how they experience themselves and their work.

Sam, for instance, noted his discomfort this way:

> COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE STORY OF HOW YOU BECAME AN ACTIVIST?
>
> (long pause) I can. I think I'd like to talk about the term activist at some point.
>
> OKAY…(LATER IN THE INTERVIEW)…WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE WORD ACTIVIST NOW?
>
> (laughs) Well, I think it's because we have limitations in our language that we say someone is an "activist," versus the majority of the people who are dis-active, can you say? Is that a word? They're apathetic. They're disengaged. So you see a small percentage of people who are involved in public policy shaping and civic process, etc. etc. Therefore if you're involved to any degree, you're an activist. (laughs) And I think it unfortunately carries a connotation with it that sometimes is pejorative as being a liberal and it's semantics, but I think it's still the only language we have to describe being really involved and being active. Like activist – activist judges. (laughs) I think "community organizer" is really good. I think a lot of this phraseology came about in the 1960s and activist was sort of a blanket term that could be applied to environmental issues to animal rights issues to race issues. But I think organizer somehow maybe is different. And I like it better.

Sam provides an in-depth analysis of the social and semantic influences on his opinion, and he is certainly not alone in his discomfort with the term "activist." Sam feels that the

term "activist" is too general, applying to almost anyone who does anything. On the other hand, he believes it is often applied in too limited a manner to those on the political left.

Kate, too, has obviously spent some time distinguishing between terms she prefers for personal use.

> Well, I think I have mixed emotions about the term activist. Definitely in my early stages, I was funny. I wouldn't call myself an environmentalist. I'd call myself an environmental activist. And my rationale was that putting that "activist" into the phrase is more about taking action. Whereas an environmentalist insinuated to me somebody who cares about the environment but might not necessarily do anything. So then I became quite aware in my college years, that of course in [this state], that "activist," kind of has a, you know tree hugger [connotation to it]. And you know it's hard because stereotypes I think, trap people, definitely. And they also inhibit your ability to talk to people, if they label you as such, especially in a conservative part of the country. It makes it very difficult to get through to people. So kind of to try to veer away and be like, I'm an environmental scientist and give it that professional edge because I am devoting my life to this and stuff. But I think it's a mixed bag, as with any label. It all depends on how people interpret it. I think what's important is what you do and how you see it as [relating to] a common cause. It goes across political philosophies. To me, that's really important.

Both Sam and Kate address the problematic way in which society interprets the term "activist." Both seem to realize that labeling oneself in this way construes a political meaning, draws boundaries, and prescribes behaviors and beliefs. Extending this line of thinking, they also recognize that semantics and stereotypes trap people into falsely delineated categories. Sam recognizes the influence of the local conservative environment on his feelings related to the word, as well:

> I think growing up here our culture hasn't adjusted very well to activists. You know we're very conservative socially and having people out at the forefronts speaking their minds even on issues that are in the mainstream – I think people still kind of back, they shy away from it a little bit.

Both Sam and Kate have chosen to pursue professional careers in their activist fields and thus are likely to be especially in tune with the need to present oneself to the community

in a neutral manner. Yet while feeling ambivalent about the term "activist," they nonetheless identify what they do with that terminology. That is, they recognize that what they do is a form of activism, and that they can be considered activists, regardless of their preference for another word.

Kate and Sam's take on the self-description "activist" reflects a common theme related to impression management. This careful strategy was particularly apparent with the younger, more professionally invested activists. Both Valerie and Kate, for instance, prefer the word "rally" to "protest" because of the negative connotations of the latter. Trinity purposefully tries to refrain from using emotion during her activism, relying solely on documents and facts. It seems that strategically and consciously developing a presence and a vocabulary is a savvy method to gain air-time and credibility with a skeptical, if not downright hostile, public.

Other activists provided definitions of "activist" with varying levels of ambivalence evident in their descriptions. Robert defined activists peripherally while describing a group of Latino/a activists he had previously worked with: "[They are] people who had the good sense and the tenacity to stand up and say, 'You can't do this to us.'" The main difference between Robert's description and Sam and Kate's is that Robert discusses his direct observations of activists, rather than the political and social implications of the word. As a self-described rebellious non-conformist, the sociopolitical implications are not at the forefront of his mind. Robert applies his activist beliefs in his job, but unlike Sam and Kate, his career is not within the social activism sector. Later he describes one of the most effective activists he has worked with in the following manner:

> The activists who I worked with in [that city] disbanded many years ago. But one of them continued, continued on – beautiful woman, smart, dedicated…ah, thoroughly manipulative. Perfect activist. In the *barrio* trenches, still fighting.

Robert uses the descriptor "manipulative" to describe this activist, but notes that this quality contributes to her being a "perfect activist." He doesn't shy away from acknowledging the difficult nature of activism, which might require the need for interpersonal finesse – or in more plain terms, manipulation.

Ben defined activists as promoting an agenda and having the propensity to question the mainstream, similar to Habermas' Universalistic stage. This is the final stage in Habermas' ego identity model, during which individuals have skeptically explored traditional social norms to develop a consistent, ego identity based on the internalization of their own belief system (Habermas, 1979). Ben said:

> Well, [an activist is] someone who is actively involved in promoting an agenda of some sort, or a cause. I don't think of any connection with any religious or spiritual or political content. One could be an activist for, you know, domino playing. Which is a *fine* thing. So someone who, when I think of activists I think of people who are, who don't buy into as much that radical selfish autonomy and who are willing to give of themselves for something that is really greater than, than their cause, greater than themselves…And I think of something that must be, can only be achieved, by many people working together, or more people working together than one person working alone. I think that activists are equal parts evangelists and agitators because they go spreading the word and trying to stir up action.

Ben's description of activists as "evangelists and agitators" is a comical but *a propos* interpretation. He recognizes the inherent need to pursue an agenda as well as the need to finesse a public, in much the same way as Robert. Ben addresses the idea that activists must be able to be charismatic, articulate, and charming, but also willing to get people "fired up," willing to ask the hard questions that cause serious questioning in those whose

minds they hope to change. He also places activists in the group participant rather than the individual non-conformist camp.

It is interesting, too, that Ben refers to "evangelists" while Dallas repeatedly used the term "convert" and "converted" to refer to his outreach to non-vegetarians. The use of religious language highlights the similarities between activist identity change and religious conversion. Rambo's (1993) six-stage model of religious conversion describes a life crisis, a quest for meaning, an encounter followed by an interaction, a commitment, and the ensuing consequences and life changes of conversion. Activists may not proceed through all of these stages, but Rambo noted that nor do all coverts, either, stating that some may recycle through the stages, as well. If activists do serve as a type of evangelist, they're bringing the good news – or in the case of most animal and environmental causes, not so much good news as a good cause – to people who are not currently engaged.

To conclude this discussion of activists' personal feelings regarding the term "activist," we turn to Jessica and Jennifer who do not consider themselves activists at all. Jessica describes her definition as being based on the emotional motivation of activists and their belief in potential efficacy – or hope:

> I'm not one of those people who thinks that – maybe this is why I don't identify as an activist – but it seems to me that activists are the kinds of people who would have a bumper sticker that says things like, "All radical change was started by a small group of people!" I mean, inspirational activists who think that there's hope. I'm almost driven by cynicism. It's not like I went through and was like, well these are the things that I want to support so I'll support those and that makes me feel good…it's more that over my life I've kind of – I feel compelled to shut things out if they seem evil or dysfunctional or don't reflect my values.

She goes on to elaborate her meaning, noting that she is an unwilling activist who feels obligated to take action, rather than desiring to do so.

> So here's the distinction – when I was doing all that stuff for the Kerry campaign my mother kept, she was like, "Oh, [Jessica]! I admire you so much! Oh my God, what you're doing is so wonderful!" And I'm like, "Mom, I am behaving totally selfishly. Totally selfishly. I'm doing this for me and me only." It's not that I'm trying to make the world a better place. I just hate that [expletive] so much that I'm gonna vomit every minute of my life if I don't try to stop him. So it's not – maybe to me if you identify as an activist, you feel good about that identity. But I don't. I'm almost this unwilling activist. Like "Oh God, life you suck so *hard*, you're forcing me to do all these things." (laughs) For me to identify as an activist, I think there would have to be on some level, a belief that…a hopefulness. Or a belief that people are essentially good and that with education and hard work, we can change the world and make it better. I'm just more of a defeatist than that. It's like I do my activism either out of desperation, 'cause I feel like things are getting to a point where it's so bad, that you know, you just feel like if you don't do something – you're culpable.

Jessica alludes to being forced to participate due to the demands of her conscience, as opposed to her free will. She describes herself as defeatist, which she sees as incompatible with an activist identity. She also views her activism as motivated by selfish interests, rather than being devoted to the common good.

Interestingly, Jessica, who does not identify as an activist, is the only participant to define the word in an optimistic, hopeful tone. The rest of the participants who commented on their conception of the word "activist" all referred to the negative, angry connotations associated with the term. Jennifer, who also rejects the label "activist," does so because of this connotation.

> I don't really think I'm an activist, I'm just… I just feel like I'm that that's just part of what I do. You know, you get up every day and put your shoes on? Just part of your routine, if you have certain habits that you do every day or certain things that define your personality. I don't think of it as activism. So I mean, I guess activism almost has a negative connotation or a connotation of it being picket signs and pickets and fires and, you know, it's just this negative thing, I think. I just never thought of it as activism, just part of who I am, I guess…(later in the interview) I don't often use the word activist, but I guess it's kind of appropriate, isn't it? I just see it as such a negative word.

Jennifer's reaction to the word "activist" is very different from Jessica's. She sees activists as representing anarchy and riotous protesting, while she sees her volunteerism and recruiting of new volunteers as "part of [her] routine." Jennifer initially struggles to see herself aligned with a radical, protesting movement that does not seem to embody her values. Yet upon reflection she seems to realize that what she does could in fact be labeled activism, while still retaining her hesitation regarding the word.

Summary of defining activism

In sum, many of the people grouped together as "activists" in this study have differing reactions and opinions to the word. While I classify them all as "activists," based on the work that they do, some of them do not even see themselves as activists. Starting with their acceptance or rejection of the term, it seems that it is here that these participants began to realize they could take action consistent with their personalities. They could merge the way they see themselves with their conscientious need to become involved in social action without having to modify their personalities in the process. It is obvious that the term brings up emotional responses as well as political implications for some of the activists. Yet, semantics or not, as Sam acknowledges, "it's still the only language we have to describe being really involved and being active." And it's is really not surprising that persons who rebel in an active way towards what they perceive as injustice would also rebel against the confines of a construct such as "activist." They may rebel against the public's negative associations, political spin, or vague generalizations. Some rebel against categorization of any kind.

The decision to act

Distinct from the epiphanies listed in chapter five, the activists described the moment and circumstances surrounding their decision to take action, as well as the transitioning action they took before becoming deeply involved. Many of the activists described a period of education occurring at the beginning of their involvement, deepening their understanding and leading to even more dedicated involvement. Learning activism, which is an important part of activist identity development, occurs throughout an activist's career, and will be discussed in more depth in a later section.

For Robert, the decision to act was the moment he, almost by default, chose to go to the Peace Corps. For Trinity it was when she began hearing more about the animal identification system that could potentially seriously disrupt her homesteading way of life. Ben and Jane both described a political segue into their environmental and animal activism, respectively. Ben began with involvement in Libertarian politics while Jane began with her involvement in the Roe v. Wade decision. Lois linked her decision to act with her growing knowledge about the anti-nuclear movement. She described the interpersonal learning that influenced her decision in this way:

> I'm not even sure exactly how I got involved in it other than in those days we were all concerned about nuclear war and nuclear energy for a variety of reasons. So I went down to a meeting here in this very building, the student union, and got involved in the fight to stop [the nuclear power plant]. And it was something that it appealed to me in terms of justice and concern about our future. And there were lots of *cool* people involved. And also it was something that struck me real odd at that point is that I'm a Christian and it was the first time I had seen people who were involved in it – it wasn't the entire group but a lot of people who were involved in it, who came from a religious perspective. And that was a real eye opener to me.

In this description we again see how activists learn they can become engaged in activism without modifying their personalities or forsaking their values. For Lois, it was moving

and inspiring to see Christians, people who shared her faith, involved in activism. Knowing that she could do both – live her Christian values and merge those values with her out-group activism, was enough to move her to act.

Kate, originally moved by the plight of the sloths and other rainforest flora and fauna, decided to take action when she quit playing basketball, which had been her main extracurricular activity. She was a freshman in high school.

> I decided we got to do something. Every person should take action and that's when I formed the group Take Action. I had student and faculty support [for a school-wide recycling program] but, I didn't have administration support at all because they were that worried it would become kind of, uh, not a hygiene problem, not unhygienic, but just maintaining their recycling bins and stuff. They thought students would just come and go and they wouldn't maintain them and they wouldn't be consistent. But I vowed that that would happen every week. And I went ahead. My mom and I went out to Home Depot and got recycling bins and put holes in them and then made an announcement in front of the whole school. Kinda went, you know, I didn't listen to the administration, basically.

Knowing of the need, feeling compelled to take action, and committing to the grunt work of maintaining the recycling bins, Kate relied on her determination to see the project through. She "went ahead…didn't listen to the administration basically." In a similar vein to Ben's notion of "evangelists and agitators" Kate proceeded with her plan. She had decided it was time to take action, indeed that everyone should take action, so she designed and implemented a plan with school-wide implications, risking the ire of the administration in the process. (The great irony here is that this project would eventually lead to a city-wide day of celebration in her honor due to her environmental contributions to her city, announced to her school by these very administrators!)

Jane's involvement began with regular volunteering for animal causes. She describes the strong urge she felt to take action in the following manner:

> You know when I was working after I'd been married a while I finally said to my husband, "I just want to volunteer for something! An animal welfare issue!" He said, "Well, you don't have time." I said, "Well, if I keep waiting until I have time, I will never do anything." And I started really doing some volunteer work from that point on.

Much like exercise or meditation, or any activity that is added into one's schedule, activists have to deal with the logistical problems inherent in managing busy schedules. For Jane, who at the time worked in a demanding intellectual field, adding in activism would require a serious commitment. Yet the press she felt, the urge, was so strong she recognized she would need to make time. And she did.

Clara's epiphany began when she read an article placed on her desk by someone else, describing plans to build a nuclear power plant 12 miles from her house. She began her involvement by beginning an intense period of study.

> So I read for three months and then I told my husband, I said, "I can't keep quiet about it any longer. We are going to have to stop the nuclear power plant from being built." …[After reading a study that hypothesized a nuclear meltdown would affect an area the size of Pennsylvania:] It was a real shock. I just could not believe that our government would know that an area the size of Pennsylvania could be destroyed and yet would not let the people know. So it was depressing, it really was. So that started my activism. I said, "[this state]'s about the size of Pennsylvania. We cannot allow this kind of cloud to hang over our heads. That's the last straw."

Clara's description of engagement highlights two important themes which will require more analysis. First, she spends considerable time – three months – educating herself about nuclear power. Of note, too, is that Clara began her study well before the Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl disasters. The threat of a nuclear meltdown was, at that time, more hypothetical than real, yet she had the prescience and braveness of spirit to address these issues before those tragedies became a reality. Not surprisingly, research has found that people are more likely to become engaged when they face clear personal

consequences, indicating the prominence of personal connection to an issue (Hallahan, 2001). For Clara, the stakes were huge – the nuclear plant was to be 12 miles south of her home.

As mentioned previously, educating one's self on the issues, while perhaps not as explicit or intensive as Clara's initiative, was common to all of the individuals interviewed for this project. Education plays a vital role in the lives of these activists and will be examined in more depth in the section of this chapter devoted to learning activism, below.

The second theme noted here are the strong emotions Clara felt, the shock and depression that propelled her to action. Emotion played a strong role in pushing our activists to engage. This was evidenced earlier on in the anxiety described by Jessica at the depletion of resources, the sadness felt by Kate at the destruction of the rainforest, and the enthusiasm felt by Sam when he became involved.

The role of emotion as a goad to action

The emotional impact that activists feel is highly salient to understanding activist identity development, but is also quite complicated. Various studies have indicated that emotions evoked by persuasive information (i.e. activist campaign literature) play a significant role in how people respond to the information (Arthur & Quester, 2004; Lord, 1994; Meijnders, Midden, & Wilke, 2001). Conventional wisdom, and outdated research (Janis & Feshbach, 1953) indicated that moderate amounts of fear in persuasive materials are positive, but that too much can cause individuals to become overwhelmed and shut down, thus displaying a curvilinear relationship between fear and response to the appeal.

Newer research (Arthur & Quester, 2004; Meijnders, Midden, & Wilke, 2001) highlights mediating factors, such as threat appraisal (i.e. how likely is it to happen?), self-efficacy in regards to coping (i.e. can I get rid of the threatening stimuli?), quality of information presented, and depth of information processing on the issue. Converging results in several studies indicate that more fear results in more action (Arthur & Quester, 2004; LaTour & Tanner, 2003; Meijnders, Midden, & Wilke, 2001).

With these activists fear, anxiety, and sadness all played prominent roles in many of the participants' decisions to act. Lois recounted her impression of the world as "very scary… and it was just really frightening to me in the sense that the world seemed like a very destructive place." Jessica stated very directly the relationship between her activism and anxiety:

> So I think it's almost more like a way of dealing with anxiety. Like to me doing volunteer work and trying to make the world a little bit better from my behavior, it's like an anxiety-coping mechanism. Rather than an expression of some…hopefulness, I would say. There is something about the idea of resources dwindling that can make people really anxious. So I think that there are different levels of anxiety that fuel my different political things.

In addition to the role of anxiety and fear, sadness played a prominent role. Kate noted, "It really broke my heart to see all the destruction of the pristine wild land and animals and sloths and stuff like that." Trinity recalls being "quite upset" when she first heard about the proposed animal identification legislation, noting that her reaction turned into depression. Similarly, Valerie described her emotional reactions to learning about the abuses inherent in factory farming operations.

> …because once again it was just so, I mean, of course, you're in tears. You've learned this stuff, you've seen the videos, you've read the books, you've seen the animals themselves and you see where they came from. The veal calves were, you know, products of the dairy industry. We see the mothers who were products of the dairy industry. And you're just so moved, you're just kind of in tears and

> you're emotional and I don't think there's anything wrong with being emotional. If something touches your heart, it touches it for a reason. And when people say, well, you vegetarians, you vegans, you're just all emotion. You're just all about the animals. You don't care about feeding the world or people's livelihood... I was a physics major, very scientific minded. I was at a major university. I can think pretty well – I don't think there's anything wrong with bringing a little emotion into it.

Valerie makes an important point, noting that it can be difficult for activists to authentically express their feelings related to a cause, while maintaining credibility in the eyes of the public. Research on the role of emotions in animal rights activism reveals that activists have frequently been admonished by family members, friends, and co-workers for being irrationally and overly emotionally tied to their causes (Groves, 1995). These claims of sentimentality seem to reflect a gendered interpretation of emotions (Hercus, 1999), and accordingly the animal rights activists included in the Groves study (1995) took care to advance male activists into leadership and spokesperson roles, as well as using language pertaining to rights and justice, as opposed to care and compassion (Groves, 1995). Valerie, while retaining the right to bring emotion into her activism, first discusses her background firmly rooted in science, perhaps indicating that she reasoned long and hard about the political issues of emotion in addition to feeling strongly about her cause. Her reaction, thus, does not appear to be one based on sentimentality.

Dallas talked about the shock and anger that occurs when he learns about new abuses, as well as the desensitization that arises when one is around abusive situations on a regular basis.

> I think, of course, there's the gut reaction of when you see something that's really kind of shocking, and makes you mad, you know like animal abuse or dog fighting. Like cock fighting out where I live…And it's really upsetting and so I did what I could to help pass the cock-fighting legislation. I guess I sometimes am a little taken aback by things like that, but I think more often than not, since I've lived around it my entire life. When I come to that realization and it's shocking,

> but it's probably not as shocking as it should be to me because I've been around it so long. Down the road I've driven by a hundred times or whatever and one day I realized. It makes you kind of sad you didn't notice it the first time.

Dallas' emotional response was two-fold – first, shock at rediscovering an element of abuse he had become used to, and then sadness that he hadn't been primed to recognize it earlier. As he lives in a rural area of an agricultural state, witnessing the use of animals as commodities is no doubt a regular experience for Dallas. Yet seeing cockfighting roosters tied to domed plastic housing units, reawakened his shock, anger, and sadness at the realization of his own desensitization.

Jessica also mentions anger as having propelled her to action, although the action she describes is not within the animal or environmental protection domains. Throughout her interview she discussed her dislike of participating in "in-your-face" activism, or more political, strident forms of activism, such as rallies and protests. However, her emotions were so strong regarding the impending presidential election of 2004, she felt she had to do something.

> But again, it was like there's a balance – it's like, the level of my passionate hatred was so high that it had to come out somehow. And it was either going to come out doing those things or I was going to start cutting (laughs)...there was going to be some release of hateful energy, and so I did a little bit more of the in-your-face activism right around 2004.

Jessica discusses her activism as a way to let go of emotion that has built up, as a coping mechanism for her anger. Earlier she recounted engaging in environmental activism in order to cope with anxiety. It could be that the decision to take action itself served as coping mechanism to help these activists combat the fear, anxiety, sadness, and anger provoked by the threats they encountered. Clara had recounted actively avoiding material that had to do with nuclear power. Once she heard about the plans for a nuclear plant so

close to her house, the threat was such that she knew it was time to take action, which for her began with a significant period of study. Valerie discussed eating meat because "you just eat it like everybody else because you're not really thinking about it." Once she learned about the cruelty involved in the meat, dairy, and poultry industries, however, she was overwhelmed by grief and immediately ceased eating all meat products, and eventually eggs and dairy, as well.

Unlike the stories recalled above, Sam described feeling good when he became involved. His recollection focused on the positive aspects of joining with others.

> I think that it felt good to be a small spec trying to turn the tide. It felt good to be engaging. And what felt even better was that people who would show interest and curiosity in what was going on and they would come over and they would ask. And in the process it allowed dialog…It was gratifying.

For Sam, who is a self-described optimist, joining with the cause was not in reaction to painful personal emotions. He became involved and enjoyed the feelings of engaging and doing virtuous work. Not all of the activists recounted emotional responses at the beginning of their activist careers, although all noted the ongoing influence of a range of emotion over time. Robert, Ben, Lois, Jane, and Jennifer all noted a general desire to become involved, but did not specifically mention the role of emotions as a goad to action. Emotions play a significant role throughout the life course of an activist career. Learning to cope with these emotions seems to have been one of the critical skills required in order to sustain as an activist over time. Coping with the emotions inherent in an activist career will be discussed in much more depth in the following chapter.

Summary of the decision to act

Many of the activists described the circumstances surrounding the moment they decided to delve into activism, separate from the epiphany that led to this action. These

circumstances seemed to help prime activists for involvement, smoothing their transition into action. For some it was already being aware and inspired by political events, such as the Roe v. Wade decision and Libertarian politics. For others it was recognizing that there existed multiple ways of enacting activism and that one could effectively merge one's values with activism, without sacrificing either (e.g. being a conservative Christian and a an activist for traditionally liberal causes). Some decided to ignore the status quo and take action reflecting their values. For some these circumstances involved making a formal decision to allot weekly time to their involvement; for others it included a brief period of education (described in more detail below).

Emotions played a significant role in the beginning of each activist's experience. Many described feeling saddened, anxious, angry, and depressed at learning about abuse and injustice. Some discussed their attempts to manage these emotions in a way that allowed them to be authentically in touch with these feelings, drawing upon them, but in a way that retained credibility with a skeptical public. For others, becoming involved in activism served as an outlet for emotional release, and may function as a coping mechanism for the intense emotions originating at the outset of involvement. Emotion appears to play a pivotal role in initiating a sequence of events that leads an individual to engage in action. However, to mitigate paralyzing fear and anxiety, emotions must likely be moderated by education. Learning appears to serve multiple purposes in developing and sustaining activist commitment and will be discussed below.

Learning to be an activist

Upon becoming initially involved, the activists recalled a period of learning. They learned much more regarding their chosen activist subjects, the content of their causes. But they also learned significant amounts about how to *be* effective activists.

The activists' content knowledge related to their chosen area of effort was quite evident throughout the interviews. The interviewees frequently discussed details related to their focus, citing facts and figures, and generally indicating a significant body of knowledge related to their causes. One of the sources of this acquired knowledge stems from the role played by mentors and an activist community. In the transition from new recruit to knowledgeable, effective activist, mentors and fellow activists offered support, encouragement, and validation. Mentors will be discussed at the end of this section.

Learning about the issues – content knowledge

In terms of content knowledge, Sam notes the value of education on an issue for activists, saying "Learn as much as you can. Learn as much as you can, dive in with both feet..." Trinity described a discrete period of education similar to Clara's, "spending six weeks studying this. And you can see this is a couple of inches worth of documents (indicates stack of papers). And these are the official USDA documents that we've been able to get." In response to a question regarding advice to new activists, Trinity said:

> Research. Know your material. Don't rely on how you feel about it. I went through my depression stuff and I wrote it down and basically you kept those most tender emotions amongst ourselves. Of course, every now and then you basically get it thrown back in your face if you misquote something. But research is probably the most important thing you could ever do. So you know your facts and nobody can twist you around and manipulate you and make you look stupid. Just because, you're out there saying, "Well this is bad." Okay, well, *how* is this bad? If you don't know about brucellosis and encephalitis and avian flu and foot and mouth disease, if you don't know how those diseases work, then somebody

will really drag you through it.

Education for Sam and Trinity represents a bolstering of their positions. Trinity recognizes that her information will be called into question and she wants to be ready to refute implausible or wrong-headed arguments. Likewise, she wants her information to be correct in order to protect her credibility with the public. Jane expresses a similar desire to educate herself in order to be able to clarify her involvement to inquirers. She explains the process she went through in this way:

> There's a, you know you feel a need, or at least I did, to explain. Not really to defend the position, but to explain it. So I went through a period where I was collecting literature and gathering facts and learning a lot about these issues. Partly that's just my bent because my background is in academia and I was trained as a mathematician. Originally, that's what I did. So I learned. Automatically, when I decided, okay, I'm going to do these things, I need to learn about them.

For Jane it was a natural process to seek out information, to educate herself on the issues and background related to her cause. For people trained in academia like Jane, research is the next step in solidifying an opinion on a topic. Clara, who completed the coursework required for a master's degree in Nutrition, also naturally turned to education to bolster her position and inform herself on the status of the issues. Clara's period of self-education on nuclear power began in the following way:

> And I got every bit of material from every source I could find. The Atomic Energy Commission, which then became the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Sierra Club, every organization I could find that was opposed to nuclear power, or for nuclear power, anything that was for or against it, I wanted to know it. So I read for three months…and they started sending me reams of material every week, studies and everything.

It was also during her first period of intensive self-education on the issues that Clara learned what would become the key to defeating the proposed plans for the nuclear power plant.

> [I wanted to know] why are they so gung-ho for nuclear power?…So I did the research and I found that the [state regulating committee] allows a utility company to make a 16 percent return on their investments…During my studies I had learned that in every case a nuclear power plant was planned but the utility company at one time or another, they asked for rate increases.

This bit of information – that the utility company would request a rate hike – ended up being the undoing for the power plant's planners. Clara stuck with her litigation over the years, knowing that the utility company would eventually request this rate increase. When they did, she and several others petitioned the courts, stating that the rate hike would be too much for the general public to afford. The courts agreed and said the utility company could go ahead with their plans to build the plant, but could not expect to raise consumer costs in order to reimburse expenditures on the plant's construction. At this point, plans for the nuclear power plant were scrapped and Clara finally had her victory – after a nine year battle.

Education is important to Clara. It serves as a powerful tool in her activist toolbox. Many years after winning her suit against the proposed nuclear power plant, she returned to a period of education to inform herself on the current status of nuclear power.

> [A few weeks ago] I called the library to see how many books they had because I said to myself, "You are going to have to read, remember all these things, to talk to people." And they have a video that I haven't seen that I want to see. For the last week I have been reading books about Chernobyl and others and Three Mile Island to kind of renew my spirit about fighting because for the last few years I've just been promoting renewable energy. So now I'm not only going to promote, but fight the other, too, and educate.

Clara recognizes a need to be informed, but also views education as a way to pump herself up emotionally, "renew [her] spirit about fighting," as she had been focusing more on outreach over the past years. Education serves multiple functions for her, but both are

vital to providing her with the peace of mind and self-confidence she needs to feel like an effective activist.

Kate and Lois described learning about issues in a gradual way, through connecting with others and with particular projects that encouraged more learning and more growth. In discussing how she would advise new activists, Kate turned to education as a guiding tool.

> I think talking is really important. And just reading, and thinking and just figuring out what's the best outlet for me to put these ideas into practice…You can connect with people and they might be interested in something else and you learn about that and it's kind of like a snowball effect. You start accumulating all this information and knowledge and you realize that a lot of environmental problems are interrelated.

Kate's approach is similar to weaving a web of connections and information. She suggests connecting with others, while teaching and learning from one another. Lois describes a similar snowballing process of learning that has evolved into her current work to protect undeveloped open spaces in an urban area.

> And so I had children who were attending [an elementary school], which is a school near here where the neighborhood was declining for lots of different reasons and it looked like they might have to close the school. So I had gotten involved in how can we keep people staying in our neighborhood? And that got me interested in what happens to the urban core and so many times with development it becomes like a donut – nothing's in the middle. And that led to how do you create neighborhoods? And that led to walking trails and people walking instead of being in their cars. And then I got involved in trying to do recycling and water conservation as a way to help [this town].

Lois' account nicely captures Kate's definition of "snowball" learning. Lois became involved in an initial project, learning about neighborhood decline, which through a natural progression led her to problems related to urbanization. Each step, like a link in a chain, helped propel her to a new topic of interest. She's been working on the protection of urban green space since 2000. In describing her involvement with this project, she

attributes her participation as more related to happenstance than to passion, saying, "And it's not because it's a burning desire greater than any other burning interest. It's just that I believe people can only focus on one thing at a time and for whatever reason that's what fell into my lap so that's what I'm doing."

Ben found that the Catholic Church provided him with a way to organize his learning, providing a framework that supports his activism to this day.

> And then in the early 90s is when I had my conversion to the Catholic Church. And that's when I had gone back to school and I was taking philosophy and religion and I was sort of reading the social justice literature through the Catholic Church. Which you know really gave me vocabulary, I guess you might say, and a way of categorizing things… I guess just everything kind of a mish-mashing together began to kind of integrate itself into what I call the Little Way of Justice and Peace, which is kind of equal parts of what Gandhi said about being the change that you want to see and I see the Libertarianism in that. The personal responsibility.

Ben's faith provided his activism with a vocabulary and taxonomy, as well as a discipline and core group with whom to participate. Learning about Catholic values related to charity work with those in poverty, as well as Church doctrine helped organize Ben's work as an activist. Later in the interview he states, "So you know there's a vocabulary and a doctrine that helps, and there's a living discipline that helps, and there's the praxis [right living] to go with the doctrine." Ben's statements also include reference to the idea of incorporating one's personality into activist work. He wove together his own "Little Way of Justice and Peace" – his personal approach to living his activism – by incorporating his spiritual and political beliefs.

Jennifer described education as a natural component of activism which helped to reinforce her motivation to continue as an activist. She noted:

> …once I got back into [being active in the animal welfare community] I have not lacked motivation in a good five years. I think that may be thanks to maturing,

> also, and education. You're learning so much more about the laws and stuff like that. Just being so much more educated on my community about what the numbers are, like how many animals are put to sleep every year and stuff like that.

For Jennifer a deeper understanding of the issues helped her consolidate her desire to remain involved. Later in the interview Jennifer described what she sees as the responsibility people have to educate themselves on the issues.

> I guess some people are afraid of the truth and so it's that out-of-sight, out-of-mind concept. I mean, people who say, "Oh, don't tell me, I don't want to know, I don't want to know." Well, if you don't know about it, it still happens. If you don't know about it you can't be involved in it, and they like it that way. It's an easier life for them and they kind of live in this ignorance-is-bliss lifestyle, I think. The cold, hard truth is what makes the world go round. It may suck, but… For example, my boss invited me to go to the horse races and I told her exactly why I didn't want to go and what they do to the horses and she got mad at me. "Don't tell me that!" And I was like, well, you know, if you want to live in a fantasy world…She just put her hands over her face and was like, "Stop it. Stop it!"

Jennifer interprets people's desire to remain ignorant as a way to avoid culpability. If they do not know, they cannot be involved. Jessica extends this line of thinking to include the responsibility that she feels to take action once she has gained information on an issue.

> But I would so much rather not know about it – like if I could trade places with some yahoo who drives a Hummer, I'd seriously consider it, you know? Like, to live in that state of ignorance where you aren't tortured by images of Iraqi children who have no arms or – I don't know, I just feel like I get so tortured by stuff. By human behavior. So then I have to do something about it.

These two excerpts seem to demonstrate the role that education plays in leading people to become involved: once you know something, you are compelled by your conscience to do something about it. An investigation on becoming vegan captures this concept with a participant's straightforward rationale for adopting this strict lifestyle. He said, "Once

you know something, you can't not know it" (McDonald, 2000, p. 9). Thus, for these activists, receiving and having the information is in itself a moral imperative for action.

Jennifer and Jessica's accounts also highlight the determination and follow-through characteristic of all of the activists in this study. A very logical "if → then" relationship seems to exist for these people. In discussing how she initially approached her activism, Valerie described her need to become involved as contingent upon the information she received.

> Well, in the beginning, when I was 18, 19, 20, when I got my hands on videos, when I got my hands on the pamphlets, I thought "Oh my God! Nobody knows! Nobody knows this is happening! I have to tell them!" Because when I found out, I didn't do it any more, so when they know, they'll stop. And that was my entire basis of activism, was – people just don't know. If they know they'll stop.

Valerie notes that this is how she previously understood activism, referring to the growth she has experienced in understanding people, their motivation, and what works in terms of changing minds. However, for her, change was a simple process. She received information, then she made significant life changes based on that information.

If we back up and examine learning as a potential goad to action, we would find its role to be incidental. Learning, or more specifically, being provided with information related to a social or environmental problem, has not been shown to be an effective way to make people choose to be involved in social action (Durrenberger, 1997; Finger, 1994).

Durrenberger, for instance, (1997) found that change was not inspired by education on an issue, per se, and that it is more effective to "engage people in relevant action" (p. 392). Similarly, Finger (1994) found that people largely seek information on environmental problems in order to moderate levels of anxiety and fear, while a smaller

proportion (approximately 12%) seek information to inform and further their activism. Most, it seemed, viewed seeking out information as action in itself, enabling preparedness in an unsure world. In a second study Finger (1994) extended this line of inquiry by examining the source of the information – largely mass media messages or what he called "journalistic" knowledge (p. 158). Thus, Finger surmised that messages provided through journalism were shallow and superficial and did not provide the depth or breadth of information necessary to inspire action. Yet mass media messages nonetheless sensitized people to environmental problems and potential catastrophes, leading them to seek out more information to mitigate their fear and anxiety. He interpreted this as a sort of negative feedback loop inspiring a form of learned helplessness in the majority of the public (Finger, 1994).

If taken in conjunction with the research on fear-based appraisals, it may be that the fear inspired by mass media environmental sensitization was not significant enough to inspire action. Or it may be that the quality of the information is to blame, given as Finger said, its "superficial" quality (1994, p. 158). Perhaps, for activism to be inspired and then initiated, emotion (via epiphany) must be followed by a period of learning, rather than the other way around.

In Valerie's last excerpt, she described her initial "basis of activism" as being founded on the principle that she needed to increase people's awareness about the maltreatment of animals in the food industry. As this account is retrospective, her current approach, developed over the course of 15 years since her initial foray into activism, has become much more sophisticated and nuanced. This learning is related more to the

process of "how to do" activism, as opposed to the content learning described earlier, and will be explored below.

Learning "how to do" activism – process knowledge

Learning the process includes basic activist activities, such as how to organize volunteers, how to stage a rally, or how to write effective literature. In her interview, this process learning was an important variable that Valerie described as occurring during her undergraduate years. It was there, by doing the work and engaging in the process, that she began to learn how to be an effective activist.

> I would go to the animal rights meetings they held there every week on campus. And that's really where I blossomed in terms of activism – learning to be an activist and learning what works, what doesn't work, and gaining confidence and knowledge and learning to interact with the public. That was all honed during my undergraduate years.

Valerie was extensively involved in activism during her undergraduate years, becoming a vegetarian the summer before her freshman year and later that year becoming a vegan. She volunteered considerable amounts of time with an animal sanctuary and participated regularly with campus animal rights groups. She notes that part of her training was "gaining confidence" as well as knowledge, referring to the interpersonal aspects of activism that require people-skills.

In terms of what works and what does not, Dallas made a similar statement:

> Once I started to realize a lot of these things, I tried to learn as much as I could about those other aspects of vegetarianism, other than just the ethical perspective. I think the main thing is I want to learn more about the situation and what's going on. I'm a pretty avid reader and I like to know as much as I can about things. I'm kind of bad about that. I've had five different majors in college because I get so interested in something and, "Oh, yeah! I wanna do this." Sometimes it does become overwhelming because you can bury yourself in that, too... I guess it just progressed from there, trying to learn as much as I can about how to be an effective activist and trying to organize mainly community potlucks and that type of thing. But also pamphleting and recruiting people to help me go out and

> pamphlet at events at [my university] and that kind of thing…So you have to explore all the possibilities and learn as much as you can about whatever it is you're passionate about and you want to work to change.

Dallas' interest in education reflects his cognitive and personality style, indicating that he enjoys immersing himself in new, interesting material. But he recognizes the potentially paralyzing effects of too much information on ability to take action. His personal education includes education on the issues and education on how to be a successful activist, recalling Valerie's exploration of the process of becoming an activist. Both Valerie and Dallas note a desire to learn how to be "effective" – how to interact with the public in a convincing, persuasive way, leading to positive change. Both learned through direct involvement and trial and error, making use of those around them and their own tendencies to seek out more information.

While Valerie and Dallas learned in a hands-on, in-the-trenches manner, Kate learned quite a bit about how she wanted to proceed with her activism in a didactic, formalized way throughout high school, undergraduate, and her graduate training.

> [In middle school] I started to do research, and research papers on trash and the whole history of trash systems in America. And that kind of got me interested in waste management and then I did a paper on global warming my freshman year [which led to forming the group Take Action and a school-wide recycling program]…My graduate work, my degree is very much tailored towards being a professional and actually working whether it's public, private, or in the NGO sector. It's about getting in there and coming up with solutions and analyzing solutions on multiple levels to multiple environmental problems…So I've evolved a lot because I can work and analyze things on multiple levels, and speak multiple languages, whether it's science or policy management, or the social sciences. I think that's highly important for what I need to do.

Like Dallas and Valerie, Kate had considerable hands-on experience after forming her group, implementing the recycling program, and completing an internship with the city's recycling department. Throughout her undergraduate years she began participating in

rallies and recruiting and developing leadership in others. This process learning occurred well before her graduate years. In fact, it is this hands-on experience, as well as strong support and her success at an early age, which led her to choose this form of graduate training. And it is this training that allowed her to refine her skills, increase her knowledge of science and policy, and develop a thoughtful approach to professional, scientific activism delivery. For Kate, extensive and diverse knowledge promoted her confidence rather than overwhelming her volition.

Robert, who has yet to be included in this discussion on learning, did not discuss didactic or experiential learning. Rather, he spoke at great length about learning his approach to activism from two highly important mentors. For Robert, a social cognitive theory of learning (Bandura, 1997), based on observation and modeling of experienced figures, was of prime importance.

The role of mentors – collaborative learning

Mentors played a valuable role for many of the activists, teaching people how to be effective activists. Robert described his mentors as teaching him an unorthodox method of activist leadership. He characterizes his first mentor in the following manner:

> …his willingness to step outside the norm was really a model for me as to how to comport myself when faced with the bureaucracy, the wall of not so much opposition, as just, well "That's not in the rule book" or "Why are you doing this?" or "How do you justify that?" And all the rules and regs that tend to limit people's vision, if you will, of what's possible. And "Ted" [pseudonyms used] just stepped right out of that.

Robert's first mentor provided him with an example of how to be comfortable stepping "outside the norm" in order to mitigate the limiting aspects of bureaucracies. His second mentor taught him how to use a non-conforming style to cultivate innovation.

> And he was very innovative… And essentially, I think, taught by example that innovation could occur at every level. All you had to do is want to do it. And in doing it, you had to say "Leave me alone. Get away." All those strings and attachments that go along with the bureaucracies and the general methods of delivery, you have to somehow hold them at bay. And he was good at holding them at bay, as was "Ted," in a sense, [at providing] the umbrella. That let everybody else underneath that umbrella perform in ways which were out of the norm.

Robert's two mentors provided valuable personal examples, delivering the message that "it's okay to be different, it's okay to be outside the mainstream," as well as modeling innovative management practices. He credits both mentors with inspiring him to further his involvement in activism, calling them both a "powerful influence" in instructing him how to prevent entanglement in bureaucratic strings.

Ben described two role models with whom he never interacted, as serving as a mentor function.

> And though I never knew her, Dorothy Day, who started the Catholic Worker Houses, was very important. And then from the Bible, John the Baptist, he's kind of my patron saint.
>
> OH, YOU LIKE LOCUSTS?
>
> No, but I like his, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God before you guys!" (laughs)

John the Baptist also seems to serve as a role model for non-conformity, with Ben making special mention of his admiration for when the saint balked at what could conceivably be considered that century's bureaucracy. Lois, too, mentioned John the Baptist as a role model, and also described the inspirational role of two unique, non-conforming individuals.

> …a woman who had a big influence on me was "Anne." Who even then was very elderly, like in her 70s. She was just this feisty but sweet elderly woman who just did not think anything weird about hanging out with what in those days were hippies, essentially, to fight [the nuclear power plant]. And she was one of the

> religious people I was talking about. It just meant a lot to me. I looked at her and I thought that's the kind of lady I want to be in 60 years…and then I met up with a woman named "Sherry" and she and I did the animal welfare together. And she was a big inspiration to me. She was about four years older than me and she was one of the first women I met who was...I know this sounds crazy now but in those days it seemed really unusual, she wasn't interested in makeup and hair and clothes. She was interested in animals and gardening and sort of the earth and mother type person. And so she was a mentor through many years.

Lois, like Ben and Robert, was impressed and inspired by these free spirits, two women who lived their values and didn't feel a press to inhabit the mainstream. Lois was particularly drawn to "Anne" because she was a religious woman, as is Lois, and had not felt a need to sacrifice her personality or her beliefs in order to be involved in activist work. "Anne" demonstrated that she did not have to be circumscribed by the stereotypical political dimensions of their shared belief systems.

Lois belongs to what she describes as a conservative Evangelical Christian denomination, but learned from "Anne" that she can also incorporate her own unique, stereotypically liberal causes (i.e. environmentalism) within that worldview. In other words, she did not have to live in an artificial, socially constructed box. "Anne" provided Lois with her first example of how to marry her personality and her activism, without compromising either. In a similar vein, Lois noted her fascination with "Sherry" for not worrying about "makeup and hair and clothes," which at that time was somewhat unusual.

Jennifer also gained a lot from her mentor, including inspiration and sense of reinforcement for her efforts. Jennifer described the validation she received from her mentor that encouraged her development as an activist.

> **…**my boss from [the animal sanctuary], "Leslie" was really influential for me when I first worked for her…She was an influential person because was so quiet and but still so active. And there was something that is just so neat, neat about

> her, like when I grow up I want to be active or whatever. And she came back [the animal sanctuary], years later, and was more hands-on active as opposed to monetarily active, I guess. And one of the first things I said to her was, "Oh my gosh, I remember when you were here and I volunteered here when I was like 13." And she remembered me! The fact that she remembered me being involved and remembering my work ethic from 12 years before, really to me made me feel like I'd been doing a good job.

Jennifer's mentor inspired her to want to be active like "Leslie," in much the same way that Lois wanted to be like "Anne" when grew older. "Leslie" remembering Jennifer seemed to touch her deeply, providing a poignant example of how an individual becomes a mentor, rather than just a fellow activist. As Jennifer's example demonstrates, mentors provide encouragement, as well as inspiration. Similarly, Jessica credited her mother as a mentor, providing a model of behavior, as well as support and encouragement along the way.

The other activists did not specifically mention mentors, although some cited influential people in their lives. Kate and Dallas, for instance, noted the important role their parents played in shaping their beliefs and providing support, while Sam counted a high school teacher as having shaken him out of his apathy about involvement. Valerie described an animal sanctuary worker who helped open her eyes to veganism and Trinity noted the importance of her internet activist community. Lastly, Clara and Jane both cited the support of their husbands as being instrumental to their peace of mind.

Mentors seem to be distinct from influential people (e.g. family and friends) in that they provided models of behavior, taught or demonstrated skills, inspired involvement, and offered validation about being different. The mentors specifically mentioned by these activists were also from outside the activists' families, with the

exception of Jessica, who cited her mother. In terms of learning, mentors offered living, breathing examples of how to be an activist, and "how to do" activism.

Summary of learning activism

To conclude this section on learning activism, it appears that learning provides different things to different people. Sam, Trinity, Jane, Clara, and Dallas discussed conducting research at the beginning of their activist careers as a natural process reflecting their personality styles and training. This resembles Berzonsky's (1994) information orientation, or a personal cognitive identity development style characterized by seeking out information thought to be personally salient and relevant. For these activists, informing themselves deeply about their chosen cause helped solidify not only their understanding of it, but also likely helped tie them to it personally. Thus education for them may have more closely aligned them with their cause, helping them to begin to personally identify with the issues and eventually identify as "environmental activists" or "animal welfare activists."

Jennifer noted that education reinforced her drive to continue, and along similar lines, Clara discussed using education on the issues to renew her fighting spirit. For these two having a grasp on the facts and figures provided fuel for the fire of their beliefs. For each shelter pet put to sleep or every potential radiation fallout tragedy, they were inspired to get back to work, redoubling their commitment to their cause.

Ben described the structure of his faith as providing an organizational framework for his activism, teaching him both a vocabulary and a model of ethical and moral behavior. Valerie and Jessica also noted the ethical responsibility that comes from having learned information related to social problems. For them receiving information not only

inspired, but *required* action, perhaps alluding to the power that some people's conscience hold over their actions.

Lois and Kate described "snowball" learning and involvement, demonstrating how activists network across projects, using education as a link between them. Lastly, Valerie, Kate, and Dallas also discussed learning related to "the how" (process) as well as the "what" (content). For these individuals, the beginning of their involvement as activists was characterized by quite a bit of learning. They learned content, they learned process, and many were provided models of behavior by non-conforming and inspirational mentors. Clearly, education was a crucial element in creating successful activists who sustain over time.

In closing, Kate warns of the danger of not being educated on the issues:

> I'm really, *really* rebelling against this kind of, "Let me argue against this because this is kind of trendy." Those people I call fashion statement environmentalists because they're very surface and *very* vocal and, but when you really ask them, "Why are you against this?" And it's this, "Well, just because." There was this girl, when I went to [a training seminar], and she was just like, "Oh yeah, I stormed Monsanto," you know she's in camouflage, "I was protesting Frankenfoods." I asked, "So what is it about genetically modified organisms that you have a problem with?" Instead of, you know there are *a lot* of good arguments for why we should be concerned about them…and she was just like, "Well, they're just bad." (laughs) And I'm just thinking to myself, "Well, no wonder nobody listens." She doesn't know.

Growing pains

This last portion of this chapter will examine growing pains, the problems activists experienced once they became involved. These issues include being overly confrontational and strident with others, giving way to the development of an appropriate interpersonal style for activism. Activists also had to learn how to manage changing relationships with family and friends, as their activism began to change them as people,

defining their lives. Lastly, some activists experienced what I will characterize as "activist identity crises" that required a significant change or adjustment in order to continue involvement. Through learning to resolve these problems, the activists were able to move into more mature, thoughtful, reflexive identities as activists, which will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Overcoming stridency

Many of the activists described a softening in their approach to others, indicating that at one point they had been more strident or abrasive in their approach. Stridency typically occurred early in activists' development, most often coinciding with youth. From an identity development viewpoint, this initial stage of noisy, confrontational behavior seems to recall the militancy of Cross' Immersion-Emersion stage (Cross, 1978; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, & Cokley, 2001) and Downing and Roush's (1985) Embeddedness-Emanation stage. Both of these stages describe a deep cultural immersion within African American culture and feminist culture, respectively. During these stages, individuals experience strong emotions, such as deep sadness and rage. They develop close relationships with others in their culture and employ black-and-white thinking related to their ability to tolerate and appreciate out-group members (Cross, 1978; Downing & Roush, 1985).

The activists also experienced initial stages of anger and low tolerance for others. The learning curve was steep, however, as they soon discarded this strategy in order to learn more efficient interpersonal approaches to persuading and recruiting others. Valerie describes how she learned to control her emotions, even in the face of rude behavior from others.

> I used to be a lot more uh, noisy? When I used to table in college and you have somebody come up, or you're protesting on the street corner – and you get a heckler and they just either want to insult you or if you're tabling they just want to come up and try to they just want to catch you. …So, 10 years ago I would get a lot more irritated. I would argue back with people. You know, I'm not going to start it, but if they would come up to me and say you're wasting time, don't you know you never going to make a change, don't you know animals are tasty, don't you know you're supposed to and God put them here because we're supposed to eat them, don't you know…So, I used to argue with people and spend a lot of personal, internal energy trying to defend my point. And people on the street corner, if they're heckling you, I mean I was young 19, 20, 21, I would actually yell back at them! (Yells) I don't do that anymore. I just realized, hey, it makes you look worse and if it makes you look worse, it makes it worse for the animals. You're their only representative…But beyond that theme, it was just too mentally wearing. It was like, you don't deserve my energy. I'm not going to give you the satisfaction that you want, it's really not worth it. The same for the guy who wants to stand there and ask you 47,000 questions and not really want to hear your answer.

Valerie describes being more emotionally reactive as a late teen and early 20-something activist. Her reasons for moderating her approach were twofold – to be a more effective representative for the animals, and to protect her own energy levels.

Kate also remarks on these two elements in relation to being angry with others.

> You can get angry and vocal, but at the same time it drains you. It drains me when I do that. So I try to not wear my emotions on my sleeve. Of course you kind of like want to, I don't want to say lash out, but I'm very vocal…I definitely don't hold anything back especially when it comes to my environmental viewpoint. Especially when I fervently believe we can do these things it's just a matter of people listening and taking note. But I definitely think as environmental activists we need to take more ownership of our knowledge of the issues and not just point the finger, like this is bad!...And now I work on being more congenial and leading by example but being firm and out there but just not in a noisy kind of, I don't want to be obnoxious in any way.

For Kate, learning to moderate her anger protected her from the real harm of emotional exhaustion. Like Valerie, she also describes her desire to be effective – taking ownership rather than lecturing others – as mitigating her reactions.

Jennifer, too, discusses struggling to balance a neutral approach with her emotions.

> I am very vocal about it and it makes some people uncomfortable. And it makes some people uncomfortable to hear it, too, and some people don't care…There have been friends that I've lectured and co-workers, pretty much anywhere. (laughs) I try not to be too tacky or mean about it, but hey, put it in perspective. How about looking at it from this perspective, thinking about it this way. Food for thought kind of thing, rather than lecturing people. Then at least they're listening. If you try to lecture people they're just like, (waves hand, makes dismissive noise). And I'm sure it's impacted people negatively because I know that sometimes I can get kind of weird about it and know that it cuts people off. Like my dad went to the dog races when he was in Florida. And when he came back I explained to him why supporting the dog races was not a good idea…I'm not going to tell him, "you can't go to the dog races," it's not my place to do that. But I'll tell him how I feel because I'm a very opinionated and very mouthy person.

Jennifer's account seems slightly more nuanced, in that she recognizes that her tendency to be "mouthy" may have turned some people off, yet she earnestly attempts to present information neutrally to keep people listening. Unlike Kate and Valerie, she does not tie her use of emotion to her personal self-care as an activist.

In a similar way Dallas describes how being confrontational runs counter to his desire to be effective. His first activist growing pains centered on moving past his emotional experience in order to more effectively reach out to others.

> When I first started, I got so into it and I was so, kind of had almost a righteous type of feeling, you know? And then I realized that, hey, I'm doing the exact same thing that all these people that have been beating me up in high school [for being a vegetarian] were doing. You know, I'm right and you're wrong, it's my way or the highway and all that. And you know, whether you really feel that way deep down inside or not, that approach 99.9% of the time, isn't going to get you anywhere.

Dallas' initial zeal as an activist provided him with "almost a righteous" feeling, which he later described as a secular "mission from God." He felt the press to get out there and confront those perpetuating animal cruelty. But he also realized his own hypocrisy at

being inflexible and judgmental, becoming that which he disliked in the other. He also concluded that, despite what he may believe, his priority was to see progress, not argue or offend.

Similarly, Robert discussed the ramifications he experienced when he was not tactful, reacting emotionally without being as thoughtful as he would have liked.

> Thirty years ago I was much more impatient and much more strident… And sometimes I'm quite outspoken, which does not serve anybody. Least of all me. And that's gotten me in trouble with colleagues and other people I have to work with. And sometimes I do it even without realizing that I'm treading on thin ice. For example, there's been an occasion when I've been asked a professional opinion and I've given it. And I should have couched it into different terms than just (slaps table) there it is. And that's had repercussions which I would never have dreamed of, negative repercussions.

Robert, 63, notes that he has mellowed in the thirty years he's been doing his activism.

Sam, 28, describes a similar pattern, stating that he was at his stridency's peak when he was a sophomore in college.

> I think my stridency has mellowed a little bit. I think that is the best way to express that. I've become less likely to carry personal anger in association with what I feel like are the progenitors of the bad conduct. (laughs) The big SUV drivers in South [city] and suburbia. A lot of my contemporaries from high school. And conspicuous consumers. I think that I've learned to not harbor that anger and to try to work toward things that they will be drawn to that makes them want to change.

Like the other activists, Sam found a way to mitigate his anger, to avoid carrying it around with him. Instead, he tries to lead by example, providing alternatives the "progenitors of the bad conduct" might find appealing.

Jane also discusses her desire to lead by example and the fallout she's experienced when emotions run high in activism.

> [I found] I could do a better job of convincing people or demonstrating these ideas by living the way I do rather than by getting in their face about the issues. There are times when I've gotten in pretty good arguments with the other side, but it just

> isn't always productive if you don't have that kind of support mechanism [of a sizable activist community around you]. So I think just being what I am works better. And most of the people that I know in animal welfare in [this state] are like that. You can generate a lot of passion and a lot of hard work and you can get an awful lot done, but you can't be too kooky about it because you can do more damage than good by being too far over the edge. There are times when going a little too far is appropriate but you have to learn where/when those times are.

Jane's response fuses the need to lead by example with the understanding that there is a time and a place for "going a little too far." She also gets at the way being engaged in activism may differ in a rural, relatively conservative state vs. a more urban, liberal area. Jane has learned that direct aggressive confrontation, without the support of an activist community, can result in feeling isolated and imbalanced.

Jane's narrative captures her experience that it was necessary to adapt the expression of her activism to socially acceptable parameters due to geo-political pressures. This micro-change reflects a larger process of how activists refine their process over time. They've grown beyond their initial tendencies to be strident or abrasive and into a more reflective interpersonal process, with the aim always geared toward being effective, convincing people, and recruiting new helping hands.

Like the other activists, Lois, too, has worked to develop a better interpersonal approach for her activism. She ascribes her difficulty as having to do more with her personality, rather than her inability to rein in the fervor of her beliefs.

> I've always been a person who talked too much and talked too loudly…Just as a general personality thing, I think I've tried to tone down myself whenever, because I don't want to come on too strongly to people. Although, that has nothing to do with my activism. That just has to with the fact that I realize I come on too strongly…And work to try to keep some of that toned down because you don't want to make people feel uncomfortable…So you try to play it carefully, or at least I do. You know some don't. Some are out-and-about, in-your-face, and that's not my style. So I try to keep it toned down…because I'm the kind of person who doesn't like to get in-your-face, I get concerned. I probably spend an

inordinate amount of time thinking about "how can I share my thoughts?" Lois' excerpt evidences quite a bit of contemplation on how she can be more effective. She attributes her tendency to come off too strong to her personality, yet it may well be that this tendency is a characteristic common to activists. They feel passionately about something to devote considerable time and energy to it. Naturally, they feel a press to share their newfound commitment with anyone and everyone. Indeed, learning how to moderate that need to share, in order to maximize effectiveness, was a common concern among most of the activists.

Like Lois, Ben shares the tendency to speak his mind, and he, too, has thought about how to balance his words.

> I've always had a strong denunciation for those in power. "Tax collectors and prostitutes will inherit the kingdom of God before you guys! (laughs) That's because you guys are really evil and wicked and doing bad things!" And that preaching, so to speak, has always been a responsibility, as well. You know both in the Libertarian and now, I'm a Catholic, and they're both, I don't know. In church you learn a lot about love for the poor and preferential love for the poor and I guess basically if anything, I've learned to balance that over the years, the strong denunciation with the strong compassion for those who are victims.

"Strong denunciation" seems to be a fairly common feeling among the activists, as was learning how to balance that denunciation with tact and respect in order to be more effective. Age may be a factor, as well, as all of the activists discussed so far began their activism early in life. Thus, the tendency toward confrontation, or the militancy mentioned by Cross (1978) and the out-group intolerance mentioned by Downing and Roush (1985), at least in activists, may be more a function of their age when they learn about the issues, rather than a legitimate phase through which all activists pass.

Trinity and Clara both came to their activism later in life and neither noted stridency they had to overcome. Trinity, 41, only recently became involved in her work

protesting the animal identification system proposals, having been active approximately six months at the time of her interview. Clara was 55 when she began her fight to stop the nuclear power plant near her home. These two did not describe a time when they were "mouthy," "strident," or "noisy" to use some of the other activists' self-descriptive words. Rather, Trinity discussed falling into a depression, while Clara described her extreme discomfort with typical activist activities (e.g. demonstrations). Trinity's depression, which abated shortly after she began taking action, will be described in more detail in the section on activist identity crises. In terms of Trinity's interpersonal approach, perhaps her maturity and personality style endowed her with a tolerant style from the beginning.

> And I've been amazed at how many people I've met also with similar [homesteading] lifestyles, and we meet we're all kind of, "I don't want to say anything that will offend you because we might need to be friends even if we don't agree with each other." And so we're very careful for the first few times when we talk. And you put up this tentative thing like, "I believe this." "Well, I believe that." And then you find out, okay. Once you find common ground with the basic core values, you immediately become very protective. Like, "This is my little sister and you ain't gonna mess with my family." And it's amazing how quickly we get very protective of each other.

Trinity's account alludes to the close-knit communities that activists develop, but also gives a good description of how those bonds are formed – carefully, with identification, respect, tact, and deliberation, in order to stay "friends even if we don't agree."

Clara, too, felt uncomfortable being confrontational or aggressive. She describes her first demonstration experience as an ordeal she had to get through.

> The first time we had sort of a demonstration, someone told me, they said, "You are going to have to go down in front of [the utility company] and have some banners and walk up and down the street and pass out literature." Well I never have done anything like that in my life. My blood pressure was sky high that morning…I had to go to the doctor that morning. He said, "What's eating you?" I told him. He said, "You just be quiet. You just let other people carry the banners

> and talk to people. You just sit down and just rest." I said, "You know I have taught hundreds of students. If they see me out here doing this, they'll say, "What in the world happened to Clara Smith, my school teacher? She's not like she used to be." So one of my students, one of my former students came by, but it was all right with her. So I survived.

Clara describes her serious discomfort with public political demonstrations. In this respect, she is quite similar to Jessica who also finds it highly uncomfortable to protest.

Jessica, who does not consider herself an activist and was the only person interviewed who expressed positive, hopeful connotations associated with the word "activist," is also unique in that she was introduced to activism at a young age and did not report a problem with interpersonal confrontation. She spoke of having conflict with others, when getting to know new people who were different from her, but her response was to simply cease contact with those who do not share her values.

> But also I think there have been a lot of times where I've offended people or people have not liked me because we discovered early on that there were some – and I can be pretty tough on people. Not like I'll be mean to them to their face, but if somebody says something that, I don't know, sounds homophobic, then in my mind I'll be like, "I'm never talking to you again!" You know, so I just kind of cut people out – well, that's probably not so good, but, whatever.

Jessica's account might reflect one of the fundamental ways in which she differs from the other activists. She does not consider herself an activist, and takes action when she feels so compelled by her conscience that she does not feel a choice in the matter. So for Jessica, public outreach is not a top priority. She takes action, and lots of it – volunteering weekly, making conscious product choices, and sending emails. She also occasionally takes public political action, such as participating in demonstrations, even though she finds them intensely uncomfortable. However, for Jessica these are activities that represent her values and reflect her personality. She engages in public education through group activism – such as her occasional demonstrating and the door-to-door work she did

during the 2004 elections – lending her presence to demonstrate her values. Individual education, or sharing her values one-on-one, might be more difficult because of personal preferences regarding confrontation.

> I really hate confrontation, and I hate it when people attack me and argue at me and I'm not good at defending my views in a kind of a…logical, friendly way. Like I get very bitchy and uptight if people confront me and want to argue or challenge me. So I don't think people like me should be the kind of – I don't think I'm a good advocate for a lot of causes because I do get angry and defensive rather than, um, cheerful and friendly. Which I think is a really powerful way to be a good activist – to be the kind of person who can be friendly and respectful to the cops who are trying to prevent you from protesting.

As some of the other activists have described, Jessica has had to modify her activism to fit her cognitive and emotional style. Lois noted her delight when she met a woman who was an activist and a Christian. Clara described her dislike of public demonstrations, and her preference to share her vision one-on-one or in small groups. For Jessica, having assessed her strengths and weaknesses, opting out of situations where she might lose her cool was the best option.

The majority of these activists described personal struggles to be true to themselves and their beliefs, while also interacting successfully and tactfully with the public. Initially, most reported a stridency that they later learned to master, "toning it down," in order to be more effective. Stridency might be a developmental issue, given that the two late blooming activists in this study did not experience it. But stridency might also serve another function, hinted at by Sam in the following explanation.

> …in '97, '98…I was more willing then, my stridency was at an all time high. It was because it was a new feeling. It was a feeling of individuality and a feeling of relationship to the activism, so maybe it set you apart from others and maybe gave a sense of identity.

Perhaps the sense of identity, the newfound pride at belonging to something and having the courage to stand up for it, gradually becomes the stridency these activists described. Particularly as young people, the "us vs. them" quality of engaging in activism, coupled with the sense of urgency inherent in the need to combat environmental and animal abuse issues, would likely cause new activists to become angry. Valerie, Sam, and Dallas all recalled this sense of urgency, with Valerie voicing it as, "Most of the direct actioners [people who take radical action] just don't have the perspective to sit back and say 'They're just fouled up,' like we mostly are when we start, they think 'I have to do something *now*.'"

This impatience to see progress is likely also a product of naïveté and idealism. Since they are new activists, they are unaccustomed to the pace of social action. Affecting change takes time and learning to be more realistic about what's possible, in what timeframe, is a legitimate learning experience. But at first, when the passion is new and activists want to shout it from the mountaintops – very much like newly converted true believers – it might be inconceivable to share that information and not see their passion reflected in the faces of those they tell. It might be easy to be impatient, intolerant for other perspectives, and smug about one's own understanding of the facts.

Stridency might be the collective glue that binds some new members to the movement. They walk the talk, they share the talk, and those are difficult positions in which to be, which might naturally be a source of pride. In effect these early thought processes might be something like, "These issues are of dramatic importance. I care. I'm standing up. I'm taking action. I'm putting myself out there. I'm putting my reputation on the line for this. That's a big sacrifice. If you don't get it, that's your loss." Yet,

ironically, as mentioned above, stridency may also be closely linked to individuality, that which separates the activists from those who stay in line and do not question the status quo.

And with time activists realize that this position is unpopular and counterproductive to their goals, which are to win hearts and minds in a manner that causes significant change. So they tone it down. They learn to moderate their emotions, even in the face of provocative behavior, as described by Valerie. They are in it for something greater than themselves, whether that is animal protection or the greater good of the environment. They develop a perspective which sees the larger meaning and purpose of the movement, which is not related to securing respect for their firmness in position-taking.

Three of the activists did not mention overcoming stridency as a developmental task in their activist identity development. For Clara and Trinity, life experience and maturity likely played a role. For Jessica, it may be that her motivations are different. She takes action in order to cope with anxiety and assuage her conscience. She does not want to be culpable of inaction, but takes no responsibility for the action of others. It may be, too, that Jessica was more informed from the beginning about the realities of activism, as she had an active role model in her mother throughout her life. Jessica may have begun her activist career understanding the difficulties involved in effecting lasting social change and may have modified her goals from the beginning. If she knew how difficult it was to convince people, and that a strident tone was ineffective, why would she bother taking that route?

Another significant growing pain was learning how to manage close relationships after becoming an activist. New activists are excited about their new causes. They are newly passionate, learning how to manage their newly developed stridency. Not surprisingly, the most likely direction for first concerted change efforts would be directed at those who mean the most to them. If the "personal is political," the home-front would be a natural starting point.

Managing conflict in close relationships

Many of the activists recalled relationship conflict occurring early in their activist careers. Some recalled trying to convince family and loved ones the importance of their new learning, attempting to convey just how deeply their paradigms had changed with the hope that they could bring this change into their loved ones' lives. Others were blatantly targeted by family for being different, and some experienced affectionate teasing.

The most clear-cut examples of returning home to share the news soon after learning it, were provided by Valerie and Sam. Both recalled uncomfortable conversations that led to conflict and eventual resolution. Valerie described her early family encounters as follows:

> I would come home from college in the summer and at Christmas and say, "Oh you just have to watch this video tape." You just have read this pamphlet, you just have to read this book. And of course they would never read the book or the pamphlet and they'd watch like 2 minutes of the videotape and say, "This is horrible! I'm not going to watch this!" And I'd say, "See! It's horrible! Exactly, it's horrible! So stop…"… I used to try to convince my family, not even in an annoying way, not like every time we ate dinner I'd bring it up, but just, "Here's some information, here's some information, oh did you know?…" And I eventually realized they know enough, they don't care enough. So in dealing with my family I don't, at this point, I don't talk about it at family gatherings *ever*, unless somebody asks me a question. And then I'll answer, briefly…So I just try to enjoy meals the best I can, like Thanksgiving, those big animal-on-the-platter holidays. You know, I go with my children, and I bring my own dishes and I

> bring enough of my own dishes that everyone can enjoy it. It's not like "this is my little food and you can't have any." So I bring it and I try to lead by example.

Valerie's realization that her family would rather not watch the video and still continue with their unabashed meat-eating habits, prompted her to explore new ways of expressing her beliefs. She turned to leading by example, which was mentioned by Sam and Jane as a method that they used to tone down their stridency. Robert, too, mentioned how effective his mentors were, based on leading by example. It seems that this tack, which requires a lot of maturity and self-restraint, is a common method activists use to channel their energies.

Sam's discussion of bringing his new environmental beliefs home to his family are complicated by his father's profession.

> I think particularly of my father and our own relationship because he's been in oil and natural gas. I used to ask pretty barbed questions about how that development impacted the physical landscape. And he, it used to actually be pretty difficult. He would bristle. And rightfully so. And I think his bristling is actually indicative of the industry as a whole and how it responds. That's gotten better because I think he decided that it wasn't a phase…I'd been into it for 12, 15 years, it's been a long time…And not only that, but I think he started realizing that he was partially responsible for my land ethic and that was part of his own doing and teaching.

Sam understands his father's "rightful" bristling, but also equates it on a broader level to the reactions of the oil industry as a whole toward environmental protection. And in this recollection, it appears that both softened in their stance toward the other. Sam's stridency mellowed and he became more tactful in the manner in which he asked questions of his father. His father saw that his own actions had had an effect on Sam, taking Sam out to state parks and wild areas as a child to experience the beautiful ecosystem had an effect. They could hold different values related to action, but still share a reverence for nature together.

Two of the activists remembered being targeted by family regarding their beliefs. Clara and Jane each experienced the pain and discomfort of being singled out or ganged-up on. Clara remembers incidents occurring with her brother and a relative by marriage.

> …even my brother said, "Clara, you are doing the wrong thing. Your father was a very best friend of the man who founded [the utility company]. He would turn over in his grave if he knew you were fighting the company that his friend founded." Isn't that something? And I became the black sheep of some of my family. They really did not agree with how I did it. But I just had to go ahead. You know I just had to ignore the fact that they didn't believe in what I was doing. For instance, my husband's aunt, she was a member of almost every women's club in the area. She was very outgoing and she just thought I was crazy. And so one day she came by…and she said, "Do you know what people are saying about you?" And I said, "Well no, what are they saying?" Well I can't remember what she said, but it was something awful. And I just laughed. Well she said, "It's not funny. You are ruining our family's name." But you know before it was over with, she had realized that I was right and she came around. And even invited me to speak to her, to the groups that she was with which just proves it.

Jane was similarly misunderstood by her husband and mother. She recalls an incident during which she was pressured to eat meat while at a restaurant.

> We went on a big vacation, my husband and my mom and I. And I had actually been a vegetarian for a while…And we went to a restaurant that just had seafood and it was one of those times where I was going to have a salad and hush-puppies. And I was going to be perfectly happy with a salad and hush-puppies. And in a very unusual way, my husband was worried about whether or not I'd have enough to eat. He didn't usually go on about such things but he talked and talked about was I sure I was going to have enough to eat? To such an extent that then, of course, my mom got started and I finally ordered deviled crab and I ate some of it…we got in the car afterwards and I said, "Look, guys, that was horrible. I didn't even enjoy that. Don't *ever* do that to me again. (laughs) I will eat what I'm going to eat, just leave me alone. " And they were both very contrite and it has, fortunately, declined since then…

These two illustrations highlight the interactive effects becoming involved in activism will have on people. Not only do activists have to learn how to be and act around their family and friends, but family and friends have to do some learning and acclimating, as well. As with Sam's father, a softening stance will likely be necessary and

may affect whether or not activists are able to remain within a social network. For instance, Dallas recalled the interpersonal difficulty he experienced with his ex-wife and her family.

> I was married for about three years. Had a lot of problems in my relationship with my wife that I think had to do with our really divergent backgrounds. She came from a really conservative family and my in-laws just despised me from the moment they saw me just because of my appearance and that type of thing. It was even worse when they found out I was a vegetarian and all that. So I think that was a lot of stress. It wasn't, I'm not going to say that was the reason we broke up or anything like that, but I certainly have dated women where that's become an issue.

Downing and Roush (1985) speculated that some women in the Embeddedness-Emanation stage might end friendships or divorce due to the incongruence of their new beliefs within their old systems. While Dallas' activism may not have been the reason he and his ex-wife divorced, his beliefs and appearance (long hair, piercings, and a penchant for tie-dyed clothing) no doubt played a role in exacerbating the situation, particularly with her "really conservative family." Jane, too, has seen relationships end due to activism. In discussing a new activist friend consumed by his activism, she recalled, "It can be obsessive…He hasn't figured out that it can dominate his life. It can ruin his life in some sense, his relationships. I have known people who have done that. I have known people who have divorced over it."

Trinity, a new activist herself, has struggled to learn how to cope with many of the same issues. For her, learning how to balance her time has had a noticeable effect on her marriage.

> There has been a big impact. My husband was accustomed to being the center of my attention. He is a truck driver so he's gone most of the time. So I just made a policy that when he was home, he was my attention. Now if somebody calls and asks for information, he gets kind of shoved to the side. If I'm on the computer doing e-mails or research or something, he talks about how he used to have a

wife. So instead of me being a trucking widow, he's an animal ID widower.

Trinity points out the real costs of becoming involved in activism. It takes a lot of time that has to come from somewhere and the ramifications can be intense and personal. Learning balance, in order to avoid the "obsessive" quality spoken of by Jane, is an important developmental task faced by all the activists. Moderating their desire to do more, be more, and accomplish more will be discussed more in the next chapter on developing maturity as an activist.

Keeping the peace within one's family unit figures prominently in many of the activists' stories. Lois addressed the ongoing family problems she experienced, demonstrating that serious differences in values will continue to bring up conflict over time, necessitating understanding and compassion on the part of activists. For Lois, who strives to be as car-free as possible, these complicated relationship issues were thrown into high relief when her mother bought her oldest granddaughter a car.

> You know [my mother and I] do things frugally. But she still has a difficult time understanding some of the choices we make. When our oldest child, who is 20 now, graduated high school, she presented her with a car. Which I never would have done…it can cause family issues…and having been a mother for 20 years, it's hard for me to know where to draw the line sometimes with being affluent with your children. And my mother has always been way too generous. And she was generous with me as a child. But I still turned out this weird combination of sort of hippie and whatever. So my mother has been somewhat of conflict on that…when you're in a family, those kind of dynamics are very difficult.

Lois, a strong Christian, has struggled to find common ground between living her beliefs and the impact they have on those around her. Earlier, in discussing her interpersonal style while advocating for her beliefs, she noted that she "probably spends an inordinate amount of time" trying to figure out how to best present herself. Learning to negotiate

family dynamics, which have such high stakes, was also a fertile learning ground for Lois.

Jennifer also discussed ongoing problems that crop up with family. Most recently, at the news that her brother and her girlfriend wanted to buy a purebred puppy, Jennifer's attention has been funneled toward educating them as to why this might not be a good idea. Here she describes how personal and hurtful it can be to be misunderstood, or outright ignored, by one's family members.

> I yell at my little brother because he wants to adopt a purebred. You know, he wants to go to a breeder and adopt a purebred animal and it's really upsetting to me…Actually, I've gone over this with my brother and his girlfriend *multiple, multiple* times. I have lectured them, but they still don't care. I mean I've explained it to them and broken it down to them and they don't care. And that's so upsetting to me. I'm like at least go to a breed-specific rescue. And they want to get a puppy. And it just kills me. I feel like I put all this time and work into it and this is family. To me it's almost insulting like they don't even care…And I'm going to take it personally because it's family.

For Jennifer, it's even more upsetting because those who are not taking action or changing their ways are family. She has invested so much time, energy, and passion into her animal welfare work, yet it is those most closely related to her who are unwilling to change.

Rather than confrontation or disregard for their beliefs, two other activists described family members taking more of a bemused stance toward them. Kate, Ben, and again Jennifer – in discussing her parents, as opposed to her brother – noted a playful quality to their interactions. Kate described her family relationships as follows:

> I've had friends and family tell me I'm kind of intense. (laughs) And I think that's why they love me, but I think at times it wears them out because, like when we're at the dinner table, I'll be like, "I'm discontent!" and so when I'm discontent [with the way things are], I like to talk about it so other people will be like, "Oh yeah." Just think about it…Dad, he voted for Bush. It was like WW3 at the dinner

> table in 2000 debating…My dad and I, I tease my dad all the time and he teases me so we kind of have fun with it. It's a healthy family.

Ben describes his family interactions in a similar manner.

> …my family just sort of looks at me with bemused tolerance toward all of this. My dad I'm pretty sure votes Republican, my sister always worries that I'm going to end up in jail or something like that. But I don't know that there's been a negative effect on my relationships with them.

And lastly, Jennifer describes her other family members' reactions as being teasing and playful, as well.

> Sometimes they'll roll their eyes because my dog has a bandana for every day of the month (laughs) and she's got a seatbelt harness and you know I talk about my cats like they are my kids. But that's part of who I am, too. So… but yeah, they roll their eyes at me every once in a while, you know, say I'm freaking out.

Kate describes her home-life as a healthy family, noting that this allows room for teasing and disagreement. She refers to the back-and-forth required to accommodate this arrangement – having serious, WWIII debates about politics, coupled with good-natured ribbing. Ben, too, describes his family's "bemused tolerance," in addition to having serious differences in belief structures. Jennifer finds her parents' eye-rolling and teasing to be a playful comment on who she is, implying that her parents understand and appreciate this unique facet of her personality by teasing her. Despite the largely harmonious quality of the "bemused tolerance" described here, these activists' families nonetheless recognize and demarcate their difference. They just do it in a much friendlier way than others.

In celebrating "difference," it is important to point out that neither Jessica, our repeatedly unique example, nor Robert expressed conflict in close relationships. Robert stated that his family of origin as well as his wife and children have been supportive in his choices and decision-making. This sounds similar to Kate's experience, but Robert

did not mention any teasing or opposition as she did. Jessica, whose mother taught her activist values in childhood, obviously shared parental values at home and therefore did not have to learn how to renegotiate relationships. She did note that she made a point of limiting her circle of friends to include those who share her beliefs. For Jessica, her values are so important they compel her to avoid people who do not share them. This method allows her to control entry and participation within her social network over time, yet it may limit opportunities to learn, negotiate, forgive, and practice tolerance.

Summary of growing pains

Most of the activists described significant growing pains, as they adjusted to their new roles as activists. Most described a period of outspoken stridency from which they later backed away. This stridency can be interpreted in numerous ways, reflecting a sense of pride in having "insider-information" about real problems and being brave enough to stand up and take action. The act of being strident can also be seen as a form of collective glue that binds new members to a movement, by providing them with a sense of identity. However, an interesting result to emerge from this research is that the two activists who began later in life did not experience a period of stridency. Rather, these two both felt depression and anger turned inward.

Another significant developmental task for these activists was to learn how to manage close relationships through the lens of their newfound beliefs. Some tried to convince family to change, with greater and lesser degrees of success. Offering arguments to family members was quickly substituted with leading by example, although one activist, Jennifer, continues to educate her family members (i.e. her brother and his girlfriend) on the issues important to her. Some of the activists were openly confronted

by family members and had to learn how to stand their ground or wait for the tides to change. Some linked their beliefs to changing social network patterns, such as Dallas with his divorce and Jessica with her like-minded social network. Some of the activists were teased for their beliefs, but in a good-natured manner. Two of the twelve did not report having difficulty within close relationships.

Soon the activists will begin to transition into more solid, mature identities. They will have learned the basics of what it takes to be an activist and how to manage the initial stumbling blocks. The next chapter will examine this deepening understanding and the more thoughtful, reflective attitudes that emerge, as well as the coping mechanisms activists use to achieve those identities. Before we make this transition, however, one last, and quite serious, stumbling block remains. Three of the twelve activists reported a significant crisis that occurred early in their activist careers. The last stumbling block to a well-integrated activist identity is a paralyzing activist identity crisis.

The activist identity crisis

While only a quarter of the activists interviewed recalled an episode momentous enough to fall under the category of "activist identity crisis," the nature of these three episodes was such that they could literally stop an activist cold. It may well be that this moment of crisis, which for all three occurred early in their activist careers, represents a critical period when activists are highly vulnerable to burn out. These three managed to recover and have maintained their activism over time. But given the high rate of turnover in activist endeavors (Shields, 2002) it is worth examining these identity crises in some detail.

Valerie

Valerie described a period that occurred soon after she became a vegetarian and then a vegan. At that time she felt such a strong sense of urgency to inform others about animal abuses she displayed physical and emotional symptoms of depression.

> …often times couldn't sleep, had nightmares, I felt – well, over the years a lot of my activist friends, you feel overwhelmed, you feel exhausted, you feel like you're never going to be able to do it all. There's so much suffering in the world and I can only touch a drop of it. You just want to scream, you just want to go and, well not to sound like, there's a lot of fear these days about terrorists, but you just want to go and like knock down buildings. You just think, "I know there's horrible things going on in there and I just want to go knock it down!" But then you know that's your all emotional side and you do have rational, you know, "Well, it's just going to do more harm to my cause than good and they'll just build it back and keep on going." Um, but I don't know an activist alive who hasn't felt that way and so that was certainly true for me, you know, as much as to the point where, and I was a dedicated academic, I had goals I had for a long time of getting my Ph.D. and working in research and I was very much your perfectionist academic type, but even to the point that I was thinking "What is the point of all this?" I don't believe… there's too much suffering for me to take the luxury of going to school. For me to take the luxury of sitting here and reading a book I enjoy. It becomes difficult to enjoy things because how can I enjoy something when there's so much work to be done and so much suffering happening? And so I thought to myself, if people would stop eating animals today or experimenting on animals or wearing animals today, well then I could go on with my academic goals and do what interests me, but I can't. My conscience won't allow me to. My feeling of responsibility just won't allow me to. And so I was a junior in college and I went to the same friend at [at the animal sanctuary] who had explained to me the vegan reasons and I said to him, "I just need to drop out of college right now and go work at [the animal sanctuary]. That's what I just need to do." And so I went to him and I was like "I have to drop out of school. I have to come work here. There's too much to be done." And you know you're trying to be an activist. I was working with animal rights groups. I was editor of an animal rights publication on campus. I'm standing out at [exploitative animal events] at protests, holding signs. I was tabling every week and all the while I've got midterms, I've got papers, I've got finals. It's college! And you can't do it all and so when it's 3 a.m. and you're up doing your problem set, you think "Gee, what's more important? Figuring out what m equals or doing something to save that chicken I saw yesterday?" Well, the chicken always wins out. And so I went to him and I said "I just can't afford the time to go to school. I spend too much time and this takes all my time and I don't have enough left over to help." And he said to me, "[Valerie], we, the movement, the animal rights movement, we really have enough grunt workers. We've got people out there that have dedicated hearts

> and passionate souls but not enough credit behind them for intelligence or they're not in positions where they can affect change. They're high school dropouts, they're college aged, they're out shoveling the manure at [the sanctuary] because they want to make a change and that's great but we really need people in positions of respect and able to make a change within in the community in which you work." And so a lot of my friends were becoming doctors. Or becoming politically minded or something like that. You can go to places where people ask their doctors if they should be vegetarian and *of course* you should, and so I thought okay. It wasn't hard to bring me back around to that place because that's where my mind already was anyway. I just needed somebody really who just understood. Because of course your parents are going to say that, of course your professors are going to say that, but you need to know that that's okay for you from somebody that you respect from your point of understanding about activism and animal rights or veganism.

Valerie, at age19, almost decided to give up her long-held academic dreams because of the passion she felt to protect animals. Dedicating her life to this work at that time meant going full boar, full-time. She felt so strongly and deeply about the issues, and at the same time, so powerless – wanting to knock down buildings – that she was willing to give up her own dreams in order to more conscientiously apply her values. If she had sought guidance from the wrong individual, who knows what the outcome would have been? Valerie later went on to satisfy all the coursework for an advanced science post-graduate degree, so it's likely that her academic mind would have pulled her back to intellectual pursuits. But would she have dropped out for a period? Would her parents have convinced her to stay in school? Would she have regretted her decision or over-committed, resulting in burnout? Would she have learned to control the sense of urgency or the difficulty sleeping? She points out the importance of having a strong guide within the animal protection movement who helped her think through her decision rationally and justify it philosophically and emotionally. Thanks in part to this person's guidance, Valerie was able to move past this critical moment, to sustain as a long-term, highly effective and dedicated activist.

Clara

Clara also described a period of extremely high emotional costs. After her self-initiated study at the beginning of her activist career, Clara became physically ill with her anger. Learning how to cope would fundamentally change how she approached activism and, perhaps in part, contributed to the success she experienced.

> At the end of the three month reading and research time, I just became angrier by the minute. I have never been so angry in my life. I have always tried to keep an even keel and understand people's attitudes and understand why they had the attitudes they had. But let me tell you, I was so angry when I first learned about the government [burying information about potential nuclear disasters]. I was ill because I was so angry. And I knew it was affecting my liver, I could just feel where my liver was. If I could feel my liver and I needed to take my liver out, I knew exactly where it was. It was so… it was… I was *hurting* myself so I had to sit myself down and talk to myself, I said, "You are not harming the services of the government one iota. You are hurting yourself with your anger. You are going have to stop and think how you were raised. You were raised to forgive and forget and to love people and to love your neighbor as yourself." And I thought, "How could I love those people?" And then I decided that I would have to do it. I would have to make a complete turnaround. So I started treating [the utility company's] people like they were my brothers. And you know before it was over with, they would come over to a [court] hearing, sit down, and put their arm around me. They treated me like I was their grandmother or something. It was amazing. They didn't know that I was there for my own self-preservation! But it was interesting because I made really good friends. I realized that they were people who just had a wrong perception, a wrong idea of making money. It isn't only [the utility company] that has greed in their eyes. Lots of people have greed, people just like you and me. There are lots of people who have greed and don't think about the consequences of that greed can bring. So it was a real revelation to me how treating people kindly and understanding people can make a change in those people, in their attitudes. So I really believe that many of them were on my side ideally before it was over. I really believe that some of them were relieved that it was over. So who knows?

Clara's description brings to life many of the emotional costs activists feel. She began her activism later in life, at time where she likely had already developed a sophisticated method of interacting with people and managing her emotions. Perhaps her accumulated wisdom, coupled with her compassionate and Christian beliefs, protected

her from the vulnerability a younger person might have experienced. Instead of crumbling under her anger and burning out, or becoming cynical or offensively strident, she sat herself down, thoughtfully contemplating how she could love those who opposed her. Changing approaches allowed Clara to persevere and actually won her a great deal of sympathy from the other side, the very people she was litigating in court. Many activists would not have had the mindfulness or compassion to implement her method of kindness. But Clara did and it catapulted her into the next thirty years of her life as a solid, successful, well-respected activist.

Trinity

Lastly, Trinity also recounted a significant period of pain and stress beginning her activist career. For her the knowledge that proposed legislation to require animal tracking on all farm animals might endanger her way of life, sent her spiraling into a deep depression.

> So people who lived the homestead lifestyle, in the rural farms and stuff like that, we realized what an intrusion [the proposed animal identification system legislation] is going to be. We realized this is a big, major threat to our way of life. I mean how more intrusive can the government get than just to say you can't raise chickens unless we give you permission? And it's really going to make it against the law for us to raise our own food…I mean the big, the places that grow thousands of chickens, they get to have one single identification number for every animal they load up at bay. Or pig farms, every pig they put on a truck and ship out of the bay is one ship-out number with their premises ID and the date. But little people like me have to tag every single, individual animal. This will basically drive little people like me out of business. When I first heard about this, I actually got quite upset…Going from feeling hopelessness and despair, I became so depressed, I actually had to go to the doctor and get medication. I felt so distraught and so depressed as I was learning this stuff. And then it's like I came to a maturity about it and I realized that I'm not going to do it [cooperate with the animal I.D. regulations]. I mean, if they came here and dragged me off to jail then that's what will happen and I'll have to deal with that. But I don't want to think about that very often because it's too painful.

Trinity describes sinking into depression, seeking help, and then coming to a "maturity" in her beliefs. She was not conquered by her depression and during this critical period, she did not give up and burn out. Essentially, she moved from feeling powerless to reclaiming her power to have choice over her life, with the implication that in this case might include civil disobedience. Again, it seems that the power to take action – to become active – is in itself therapeutic, countering the threats activists face. Freedom, Trinity has said, is fundamental to homesteaders. Having that freedom challenged naturally caused her serious concern. Yet she reached her maturity by realizing she was still free – but her choices might have to be more radical than she had initially planned. The idea of being taken to jail, leaving her beloved farm, is still a very painful thought for her. Nonetheless, she remains prepared to make that decision, should the time come.

Summary of the activist identity crisis

These three women all described a critical juncture that caused serious emotional pain and soul-searching. All three paid emotional costs, yet were able to redirect their efforts and persevere. Had they not been able to do so, who knows if they would have able to remain activists? Their stories serve as a warning about the vulnerability activists face at the beginning of their careers. If activists are highly emotionally involved, as all three of these women were, it may well be that a high amount of emotion and a lesser amount of accumulated knowledge, perspective, and control can lead to serious burnout and attrition among activists. Both Trinity, 41, and Clara, 55 at the time, were able to reach within themselves to find a resolve, and come to a maturity about what they should do. Valerie sought outside advice, which proved valuable. Here, again, life experience

may be the distinguishing variable between coping method and internal vs. external decision-making. Further research is much needed in this area to examine if this early-career emotional vulnerability can be found in other activist samples, the role of life experience in relation to stridency and vulnerability, and appropriate protective measures activists can take.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, becoming different from the mainstream and receiving feedback that one is indeed different, will likely contribute to shaping a new identity insomuch that one will recognize that at the very least personal change has occurred. If a person recognizes that they now hold different beliefs, are doing different things, and are receiving messages of difference from their social support networks, it is not surprising they would begin to develop a different identity. In this case, the activist identity has begun to emerge, and with it our fledgling activists are developing opinions about the word "activist," they're experiencing intense emotions related to their causes leading them to take their first actions. They are realizing they can tailor their activism to be consistent with their personalities and values, including only that which is personally relevant to them. They are educating themselves on the issues, learning new skills including both the "what" and the "how" of activism. They are acquiring and emulating mentors, learning how to lead by example. They are learning how to modify ineffective strategies (i.e. stridency) and how to manage conflict in close relationships. Some will wrestle with this new identity intensely, facing critical emotional burnout early on. They are meeting all of these developmental tasks head-on, gaining expertise in how to

implement effective activism. This deepening wisdom will be examined more closely in the next chapter, which addresses the maturing activist identity.

Table 4 – New activist identity experiences

Name	Age	Notions of activism	High emotions early on	Content knowledge	Process knowledge	Mentors	Stridency	Conflict in close relationships	Activist identity crisis
Ben	54	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Clara	89		Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
Dallas	32		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Jane	50			Yes			Yes	Yes	
Jennifer	28	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Jessica	37	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			
Kate	27	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Lois	50		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Robert	63	Yes				Yes	Yes		
Sam	28	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Trinity	41		Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
Valerie	35		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
		6/12 = **50%**	8/12 = **66.6%**	11/12 = **91.6%**	3/12 = **25%**	5/12 = **41.6%**	9/12 = **75%**	10/12 = **83.3%**	3/12 = **25%**

* A blank field indicates that the topic was not directly discussed during the interview. This does not indicate that it is not a part of their experiences, but simply that it was not confirmed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MATURING ACTIVIST IDENTITY

This chapter will review results pertaining to a maturing activist identity. First, the activists' deepening commitment and dedication to their cause and work will be examined. From their narratives, it appears that when activists deepen their commitment to their cause, they align themselves more personally and fundamentally with it. This chapter will look at some of the costs activists incur, specifically the separation and isolation they feel due to their different belief systems. Deepening commitment is also evident through the efforts of activists to make personal adaptations required by a life of activism. These include coping with and using the many varied emotions inspired by their work, maintaining optimism, making cognitive changes related to interpersonal interactions, and connecting their work with spiritual or religious beliefs. The second major portion of this chapter will look at participants' self-recognized growth over time. This dimension includes changes in approach to and philosophy of activism along with developing a worldview of activism, personal growth, deepened relationships and the development of an activist community, and the broadening complexity that activists bring to their work. The next chapter will compare the activists' experience of identity

development with existing models of identity development, concluding with a summative analysis.

Deepening commitment and dedication

Having become involved in activism, "gotten their feet wet" and made some beginner's mistakes, activists appear to transition to a more broad-minded, mature activist identity. The "knee-jerk" response, the vitriolic and righteous quality of new involvement, begins to tone down as the activists become more reflective and learn how to be more effective. Over the course of time they also begin to experience some of the costs that a heavily engaged life of activism incurs. As they hold different beliefs than the mainstream, and take different behaviors than the mainstream, they begin to see this difference reflected back to them by others, realizing that, for good or bad, they really *are* different from the mainstream. In the previous chapter intimate relationship conflict was examined in the context of activist growing pains. In this chapter a broader range of relationship difficulties and the painful social consequences activists experience emerges. Yet these costs, uncomfortable though they may be, also bring a deepening commitment and dedication to the work – and contribute to a maturing activist identity.

Separation and isolation

As stated above, this section examines some of the costs activists must pay as part of their involvement in their work. The price of passion appears to be indicative of activists' deepening commitment, as they remain involved despite the difficulty of doing so. This price varied for each of the activists, but all reported a sense of separation or isolation from the mainstream, reinforced through real physical, mental, and emotional altercations.

Tangible, physical costs of involvement

Some of the activists described physical, tangible costs of being involved in activism. Activists dealt with being physically accosted, damaged reputations, lost relationships, and lost job opportunities as part of the price of their activism. Dallas described growing up as a vegetarian in a rural, predominantly agricultural area as precipitating physical violence.

> I guess it's kind of weird because I was always made fun of in school for being vegetarian. I mean me and my sister, she was three years younger than me, but we were both raised vegetarian in a real small town in [this state]. Like [our town's] AG, FFA was real big and every year they won lots of awards for livestock and that type of thing. So I got ridiculed a lot, got beat up a lot, just for my beliefs. I had to sit in the lunch room everyday and smell the pork cooking and eat my peanut butter and jelly sandwich or whatever I brought to school that day since I always packed my lunch. And so I was kind of used to the environment of being around people that looked down on my beliefs or my morals in that department.

Rather than becoming embittered by the physical abuse and condemnation, however, Dallas interprets this difficult experience as playing into his development as a patient activist, who is now slow to take offense when working with the public. He continued, saying:

> But as I got older, I guess those types of things didn't bother me as much, and I think it prepared me a little more of being a little bit more capable at discussing those types of things with people…And I don't know, I guess getting to where I don't really take offense because I've heard every type of thing they could imagine to throw at me that would be offensive, you know, growing up. So I was used to that. It didn't make me run away or anything like that.

Valerie, too, noted being physically accosted early on in her experiences as an activist, while demonstrating at an event that was abusive to donkeys. As she was standing outside handing out literature, a large man who enjoyed the spectacle approached her.

> …and he walks over to me and he just rams himself right into me, just like kind of "excuse me!" but he was walking by at such a clip that it really knocked me over and it was obviously meant to be aggressive and it just made my blood boil.

She later describes the humiliation she felt when she lost her cool and began yelling back at the man, but also counts this experience as a pivotal one that taught her increased imperturbability in the face of aggression from others. Jessica, too, described aggressive bypassers "flipping the bird" while she's been at rallies. Many of the other activists described being coldly criticized by the public.

Both Robert and Sam specifically use terminology related to "price" and "cost" to describe the downside of their involvement in activism. Robert emphasized how his activism has resulted in alienation and ridicule, but he persists because of principle.

> [It's been] Very lonely. And, um, very much ostracized. Pushed away. Or trivialized…I've paid a price, particularly on this campus. I've been a pariah for almost ten years now because of standing up for certain things that I've felt should have been brought to the attention of deans, presidents, provosts, that sort of thing. And because of the people involved it was not a very popular position to take, although I still maintain that it was the appropriate thing. But I paid the price for it…In fact I get a lot of criticism; that's the other side. I get a lot of criticism as an architect for working with production home builders. You know, we built the "ticky-tackys" that go across the countryside. That's the usual response. And that criticism drifts over into what I do here at the University.

Robert described speaking up for his beliefs and the criticism and damage to his reputation that his beliefs have incurred. He notes that his involvement has led him to be "very lonely, very much ostracized…trivialized." Here Robert describes the painful emotions many activists experience as they lead a life outside of the mainstream. He is different, he speaks his mind, and he pays the "price" – both within his workplace community and personally, as painful emotions.

Sam, too, notes the emotions involved, as friendships began to drift.

> …it came at a cost, too, you know. Here, in particular, where everyone is kind of like, "Whoa, he's really out there! We don't know how to relate to him anymore. He doesn't care about high school football anymore!" (laughs) And that was tough. You know, "He's talking about what's going on in Taiwan…"

Sam makes light of his estrangement from his friends. He noted earlier in the interview that his activism has highlighted how much he has grown away from his high school friends and beliefs. But he also notes, "It was tough" and calls his participation as coming "at a cost." For him, the criticism and isolation from others has cost him relationships with old high school buddies.

Valerie also describes a real, physical cost. Due to expected reactions from an indifferent public and her strong beliefs about animal protection and how animals should be treated, she did not want her daughter growing up in public daycare. She decided instead to forgo completing the final research that would be the capstone of her master's degree and stay at home to raise her daughter.

> And the minute she was born, I was committed to never putting my children in daycare or institutionalized parenting situations. Because I don't have a lot of beliefs that other people do, so I don't want somebody else raising my kids and beyond that I just didn't want to put them in daycare.

Valerie had had lifelong dreams of becoming an academic, wanting to pursue a science Ph.D. from the time she was in high school. Her love for her daughter and her passion in her beliefs outweighed that desire and she made what many would consider to be a difficult decision. She felt the potential negative influences on her child would be too great. Thus she was willing to sacrifice her own goals.

Trinity, in discussing personal costs she's experienced, also mentioned family. She wondered if her youngest son decided to move in with his father due to her involvement in activism, saying, "And I wonder is it because I didn't pay him enough

attention, so I have all these questions." Clearly, she wonders if her involvement has come at a very high price, as well.

Criticism and confrontation

Several of the other activists reported criticism from the public or non-intimate others. Clara recalled being dismissed outright by those who even agreed with her, as well as being called out quite publicly by the editor of a local newspaper.

> I would meet people in the library or the post office and I would give them my literature and say, "I need help, we have to stop this." And people would say, "Well I'm behind you 100% but I'm not going to put my money down a rat hole like you are." Boy, if you think that didn't cut to the quick…Oh another problem I had…When I read three months and I told my husband we had to stop that plant, then one day I said, "I've got to start talking to people…I went to the [local newspaper] office and talked to the editor. I'm sure the [utility company] had been there before I was. And he started writing the most awful editorials about me. Every week he had an editorial and he never said Mrs. "Smith," he said that little old woman from [town] who is fighting [the proposed nuclear power plant]. And he used to say everything under the sun about me. And so when we won you'd think he would congratulate us. Well, he wrote a full-length column and about this much [indicates four inches with fingers] on the next page. And the last sentence was, "and future generations will say [Clara Smith] caused them to freeze in the dark." He couldn't say, "Well she won. Congratulations."

Clara, too, recalls the personal pain of being rejected and denounced as a fool both by the individuals who said they wouldn't "put [their] money down a rat hole," and by the editor of a local newspaper. Like Robert, she experienced the ramifications personally, in terms of emotions experienced, but also related to her reputation. She went on to say, "A lot of people just thought I was really crazy. They thought that I was crazy to fight the government and big business." Those people obviously did not have the faith or the tenacity, not to mention generosity of spirit and personal finances, that Clara had. Despite them, she persevered.

Lois and Jennifer mentioned a strong dislike of confrontation, in general. For them, criticism strikes a very personal chord. Lois said:

> Seriously, I think it affects [all activists]. Although I think some people use it as a catalyst. I take criticism very personally. I really do. I have a problem. I've always been this way…I want to satisfy people and I want to make them happy. And I hate conflict. I *hate* it.

In much the same manner, Jessica expresses the same idea:

> Oh, I hate [confrontation]. (laughs) I really hate it! That's why I really hate doing the in-your-face activism. I really hate confrontation, and I hate it when people attack me and argue at me and, um, I'm not good at defending my views in a kind of a (pause) logical, friendly way.

It seems both Lois and Jessica share a common dislike for the confrontation inherent in some forms of activism. They have both handled it different ways, with Jessica limiting her involvement in "in-your-face" activism and Lois spending what she believes to be an inordinate amount of time considering and refining her interpersonal approach to activism. Jane also mentioned dealing with criticism. Her approach to managing it was to do research to support her position and trying to be understanding of those who did not understand her. Similarly, Jennifer experienced criticism from others, although she states that it's not common. Like Jane, she recognizes the incomprehension she feels toward people who are so fundamentally different from her, as well as an empathic sadness:

> Well, if someone said I did a crappy job planning an event, it would hurt my feelings, but I wouldn't give up on it…I haven't really gotten much negative from people, though. That's pretty jacked up telling someone who's helping save animals' lives that they're doing a crappy job. (laughs) …No, it rolls right off my back, I think those people are nuts. I think that it's child abuse to let your child grow up in a petless home. I think that's just amazing that you would let your child grow up without pets… I mean I feel like they're missing out on something. To me, that's the way I look at it. If you don't have that kind of relationship and you don't have pets then *I'm really sorry.* That's *really sad* to me that you're missing out on something so satisfying.

While she jokes about children growing up in a home without pets as child abuse, Jennifer feels strongly about the importance of sharing one's life with animals. She uses those feelings to find empathy for those who may insult her, in the same way that Jane and Clara tried to be more understanding of those criticizing her. Having compassion for non-activists is a common coping strategy for activists and will be examined in more detail in the next section on activist adaptations.

Kate also related how difficult it is to manage criticism, particularly within what she sees as sexist conditions.

> It's never stopped me. It's frustrated me. And you almost roll your eyes and it's like "Here is where the ego comes in," I guess. I mean, I don't know, maybe it's my ego being like, "Oh, well. They don't know what they're talking about!" I try not to do that, but I noticed in particular with male figures that seem to be somewhat sexist, even though they would die if you even try to say that. It's just, I don't become intimidated. I become almost unrelenting in making a point. And that can frustrate a lot of people, I think. Not a lot. But a few guys that I've worked with, who are *very* strong and opinionated, get frustrated with me because I'm pretty much the same way. And I think it's kind of like two rams butting heads sometimes. And I need to – I'm *still* working on like figuring out how to approach that. Because it's hard. It's *hard*.

Interestingly, Kate's description of criticism refers to problems within the activist movement, which she noted in her interview is "very fragmented movement because there's a lot of in-fighting and fundraising and stuff like that." She is especially frustrated with men who find it difficult to interact with her because she is assertive. She shares Lois' and Jessica's experience of it being hard to manage criticism, but her reaction is to become all the more relentless. Kate was not alone in mentioning difficulties with other activists. Jane, too, noted the critical importance of finding the right group of people with whom to become involved and Lois spoke about the unique combination of her liberal and conservative beliefs making it difficult for her to find a place to fit in.

Like the other activists, Sam also recalled a difficult period during which he felt strongly and purposefully relegated to a minority status, and the implications of losing mainstream privilege.

> I think the most frustrating experience I've had to date was being a part of the [a statewide planning initiative] two years ago. And being the minority in the room from the environmental perspective, and getting beat up on in there in terms of ideas, and not being *heard*. And not having others in the room be able to say, "Yeah, that's a good idea," and "Yeah, that is the right way." And to acknowledge the points that were being made. And uh, it was *tough*. And it lingered with me. It stayed with me for a while, actually.

For Sam, being isolated in a room full of non-environmentalists as the sole champion of the green perspective was a difficult place to be. He describes the frustration he felt at "not being *heard*," not having anyone support his ideas, and contemplatively notes that this incident lingered with him for quite a while.

Dallas, too, talked about holding minority status, in terms of his beliefs.

> I guess an example I've already discussed would be my experiences growing up here in [this state] as a vegetarian and being such a minority. Not being able to walk into a restaurant and order something to eat. Or worry about whether or not it was cooked in lard or if they're going to melt a bunch of cheese on top of it or whatever. Or have them look at you weird when you order pizza without cheese on it, you know, that type of thing.

Dallas describes his difference from the mainstream as being highlighted by constantly having to explain himself, or the looks he gets when he requests foods be prepared a certain way. People plainly do not seem to understand him or afford him the respect they might if her were more "normal." He categorizes his experience as being "such a minority," which indicates the separation he feels.

The descriptions of separation and isolation provided thus far seem to point to a real "line-drawing" experience for the activists. They are told, in multiple ways, "You're not us. We're different. We don't believe like you. We don't do things the way you do."

There are real prices to be paid when becoming involved in activism, real physical and emotional costs.

One way to interpret this sense of separation from the mainstream, the isolation as the minority, is that it also serves to reinforce growing activist identities. Activists are being told they are different, not only by friends and family, but also by the random public. If they are being alienated, what are they being alienated from, and why? It may be that each time they experience a divisive event, their subconscious sense that "Oh yeah, I am different. I'm an activist and I stand for X," is repeatedly tried and tested, strengthening how they see themselves, shaping their distinct sense of self. Criticism, separation, and isolation may in fact contribute to a stronger activist identity for those who value, at a deeper level, uniqueness.

Ben's take on criticism is quite different from the others described so far. Rather than internalizing the critique or seeing it as a line of demarcation between himself and "the other," Ben interprets criticism concretely, as a tool to improve his effectiveness as an activist.

> Well, it doesn't affect the level of my involvement. If it's a critique of something I'm going to do, that I'm doing, I definitely look at it to see if there's something I could change in the way I'm doing it or whatever…So that kind of stuff is very important, and you hope that it keeps coming and it doesn't stop…one reason that I'm a very good cook is because [my roommate] is a very ruthless critic of my cooking. I mean he's never unkind, but he never says, "Oh yeah, that was okay," if he thought it was terrible. He tells me, "'Ben,' that was *not* very good."…And so I hope that in social justice, the tendency of some people to follow my actions and offer me criticism continues because that's part of the process of getting better at it…I guess it's that we should never have such an exalted opinion of our own whatever, that we can't take criticism. And if you do then I think your effectiveness will go down.

For Ben, the criticism serves as a tool to refine his expertise. In the interview, he also refers to the criticism he received from his music teachers as contributing to him being a

"reasonably accomplished musician," in much the same way that he would like to be an accomplished activist.

Trinity also reacted positively to criticism.

> Being different for me, (trails off) I think somewhere in childhood too many people told me that "You're not any different from anybody else." And my reaction was, "Oh *yeah*?" So I endeavored to be different. One of the most wonderful comments I ever got was, because I home school, was at the home school meeting. And one of the ladies was introducing a new person to other people, "Well, this is her and she does this." And they point at me and they go, "Well, that's 'Trinity' and she's different." And then she realized how it sounded. And I go, "That's a great compliment for me."

For both Trinity and Ben, criticism serves a different role than it does for the other activists included in this study. They use criticism to improve their performance and to bolster their sense of uniqueness. Rather than feeling explicitly isolated from the mainstream, Ben funnels this feedback into self-improvement while Trinity revels in being different.

Summary of separation and isolation

To conclude this section on separation, all of the activists reported some form of isolation or criticism from others as a part of their activism. Dallas and Valerie reported being physically accosted because of their beliefs. Robert and Clara mentioned damage to their reputations, while Sam spoke of losing relationships. Because of her strong beliefs, Valerie decided to raise her daughter rather than putting her in daycare, forgoing the advanced science degree she had nearly completed. Lois and Jessica noted their strong dislike for confrontation and doing what they could to minimize it in their activism. Jane and Jennifer discussed using empathy to manage criticism. Kate, Jane, and Lois talked about problems within their respective activist communities. For Sam and Dallas, being an activist has highlighted their minority status in terms of relating to the mainstream.

Lastly, Ben and Trinity are distinctive in their experience of criticism and difference. Both discussed receiving criticism, however Ben uses it as a tool to refine his skill, while Trinity enjoys the experience of standing out and being different.

Many of the above accounts discussed the emotions involved in managing separation and isolation. For Robert, it was feeling lonely, ostracized, and trivialized. For Sam it was "tough" losing relationships and "not being *heard*." Kate described the frustration she felt over conflict. Activists have to learn how to manage their changing environments, interpersonal relationships, and the shape-shifting sense of self that occurs with a significant commitment to something new. They need to be flexible and adaptable in order to manage the new experiences affecting them. Essentially, they have to learn how to "roll with the punches." Adapting over the course of the activist career, and more specifically, learning to cope with the emotions produced by activism, was another common and crucial skill the activists had to learn in order to sustain their careers over time.

Adaptation over the activist career

As activists begin to develop their activist identity, change and flexibility are necessary. Activists must learn how to navigate the difficult first steps of becoming an activist, and they must also continue to make gains and strides along the way. Activists adapt their lives to fit their activism in various ways. In the previous chapter we saw how some of the activists were more readily able to embrace activism if they could modify their involvement to match their personality style. Other adaptations include numerous cognitive strategies employed with the aim to achieve a sustainable balance, protecting the activist identity over time. These strategic adaptations included self-comforting in

order to manage the emotions inspired by their activism, choosing optimism, limiting personal responsibility for change, changing how they interpret non-activists by becoming more compassionate and less rigid toward them, and linking activism with spiritual and religious beliefs. With time, and whether or not they purposefully adopted these cognitive strategies, activists adapted to the requirements of a life of activism.

Coping with activism-inspired emotions

Becoming an activist involves a life trajectory that is bound to be fraught with emotion. The contentment at completing a successful initiative, the satisfaction of living one's values, the frustration with the slow pace of progress, the rare but delicious joy at seeing significant change, the sadness at the implications of apathy, the anger directed toward "the system" which perpetuates a need for activism – activists must learn how to cope with all of the trials their involvement will have to shoulder. They must be adaptable to intense emotions and emotionally resilient to these ups and downs. If they do not learn how to cope, or if they are not resilient and adaptable, they will almost certainly burnout.

Robert and Jane both warned of this possibility and both mention seeing it firsthand. In discussing activists who have not learned how to pace themselves or cope with the emotions, Robert noted, "There is such a thing as exhaustion, and varied physical trauma that lands people in the hospital, lose their memory, can't get out of bed, depression, all that – I've seen that too." Quite similarly Jane said, "You never see them again or they either disappear or there's some kind of breakdown. I've seen organizations schism over people like that." Their warnings get at the disastrous effects personal burnout can have on organizations, echoing Shields' (2002) report regarding the danger

of high activist turnover within activist groups. Both Robert's and Jane's statements reflect the real peril of losing balance and burning out. Obviously, the risks are real.

Adapting to a life of activism seems to support an overall goal of achieving a balanced approach to their work. Many of the activists referred to finding that balance as a developmental task. Jane noted, "You have to deliberately pull back and it's hard. It is *very* hard" while Kate said, "You know, keep a balance. There are a lot of issues to tackle and kind of try to step back before you just dive in directly."

Clara, too, mentioned the need to find a balance. She noted that she would give the following advice to new activists:

> To keep their cool. To not let it make them yell. Because you can. You can't let it take you over. It's hard to do but you can, you must. I had to tell myself that I'm not, until I get myself well and stay well, I can't be successful in my endeavors to stop that plant. So you can't let it destroy your health and the health of your family.

Clara refers to when her anger was over-powering her at the beginning of her involvement in activism. She felt that her anger was affecting her health and knew that it could also disrupt her family's emotional health. Valerie also mentioned the need for balance. In the discussion of Valerie's "activist identity crisis" she described trying to manage her heavy involvement in activism on top of a difficult undergraduate major. The emotions were intense, but she learned how to balance her own desire to be deeply engaged with the real world demands she experienced, and did this without burning out.

Many of the activists began their activism fueled by feelings of fear, sadness, or anxiety. For many these feelings pushed them to become involved, to try to stem the tides of large scale problems. Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, simply taking action might be one way to manage those emotions, funneling them into activist work.

For some activists, upon involvement these emotions changed form, becoming a blatant anger, or a strong discontent or frustration. A sampling of some of the activists' experience with frustration and anger is listed below.

> Kate: And it's very *infuriating* when you see the *huge* disconnect between politics and science and this whole oil thing… And I think we should always have [the right to peacefully assemble] in our – I don't want to sound militant or anything – arsenal. That's the problem. I think it's kind of construed as a militant approach to things and in this day and age especially after September 11, that kind of endangers the whole movement.
>
> Lois: And I get so *frustrated*. At what point are we going to stop? One more little piece of green and one more little piece of green and sell out? But at the same time it's a compromise.
>
> Jane: I see a lot of people in the movement [here] getting bogged down in procedure. It's not so much their positions as the concern over having everything look right. And the concern over who gets credit for things. And that has *never* mattered to me and that's when I have trouble sitting in a meeting and keeping my mouth shut. And we have gotten to a point where we have so many meetings. *Meeting, meeting, meeting*. And so little actual action…
>
> Sam: They can smell the fear and it's very *frustrating*. I think other people in there are maybe sitting there quiet and they might agree with me but they're waiting for that sense of courage or confidence to come and they would get on board. It's just a matter of turning a couple of them and then all of a sudden the odds start changing.
>
> Jennifer: You want to take that energy and channel it toward the people who did the abuse but that doesn't get you anywhere except jail. (laughs) You know that's the immediate reaction. You want to get *so angry* at the people who did it, but all you can do, really, legally, is to be out there educating people.
>
> Ben: 'Cause in the 80s I was getting pretty angry and frustrated and I didn't have the vocabulary to think about faithfulness versus success then. And I think I was majorly developing some bitterness, too.
>
> Valerie: You just want to scream, you just want to go and, well not to sound like, there's a lot of fear these days about terrorists, but you just want to go and knock down buildings. You just think, "I know there's horrible things going on in there and I just want to go knock it down." But then you know that's your all emotional side and you do have rational thoughts: you know, it's just going to do more harm to my cause than good and they'll just build it back and keep on going.

Many of the activists reported frustration as a common emotion shared among activists. In the last chapter Clara reported her anger as affecting her liver while Jessica openly discussed the intense anger that led her to participate in activism. Robert and Trinity did not specifically mention anger or frustration, although both discussed deep sadness and coping with burnout.

Many expressed intense anger and frustration in response to what they perceive as dishonesty, ongoing callousness, encroachment on natural space, the loneliness of fighting against the powers that be, abuse, irrationality, delays, the bureaucracy of the movement itself, the emphasis on appearances over truth, and selfishness. Yet interestingly, both Kate and Valerie use qualified language to describe their feelings. Kate said, "I don't want to sound militant or anything," while Valerie noted "there's a lot of fear these days about terrorists, but you just want to go and knock down buildings." Later in Jane's interview, she stated something similar, saying, "…some of the battles we fought – I hate to use that terminology but it's the best analogy – the battles we fought in the 80s, we're coming up on those issues again." These activists seem to feel some conflict between expressing their true feelings while presenting them in a rational and non-threatening manner. Valerie felt the urgency to "knock down buildings" but knew that she couldn't, and moreover, wouldn't. Dallas also reported an initial interest in direct (radical) action and Sam found himself questioning the extreme tactics of some of the "very aggressive" young activists he associated with during his early 20s. The activists recognized that these tactics were temporary solutions that were ultimately counter-productive. Plus, an understanding of the current state of the world – what is acceptable for activists to say and what must be carefully qualified – is readily apparent, as well.

Having methods of coping with these feelings is important. The activists described different coping methods and using emotion in different ways. These included using self-comforting strategies, celebrating the small wins, and redirecting emotion. When asked about coping Robert stated that he comforts himself by attempting to retain his perspective about what is morally right.

> AND HOW HAVE YOU DEALT WITH THAT?
>
> (Pause) They're all *sick*. (laughs) There was a quote the other day on TV. Said – oh, it was Einstein – supposedly, well, I don't know whether it was true, but supposedly said, "Am I the crazy one, or is it all of them?" Because he was *so* ahead of his time, or thinking in ways that nobody else understood or appreciated. So, sometimes I feel that way. "Am I crazy, or is it all of them?" (laughs)

Robert's comment again demonstrates the sense of isolation activists feel, finding their opinions firmly on the sidelines of society. Yet he is able to stop to reconsider his feelings and use humor to help him cope – is it me or is it them? Deciding it is indeed them is one way Robert can bolster his sense of purpose, allowing him to reconnect with his reasons for participating in the first place and cope with the painful isolation he experiences.

Trinity discussed an idea that brings her comfort in the face of seeing little progress:

> And if nothing else, if the only reason we are fighting this is so that God will write it down on a list somewhere that we were against it, then that's good enough. And that makes me feel better.

Trinity uses her belief in God to soothe the difficult feelings she has experienced in trying to implement her activism. For her, this belief allows her to cope with the frustration of not seeing change. It is not the fruit of her labor that validates her activities but it is ultimately truth and justice.

Ben, too, discusses the lack of progress he sees and uses his faith, as well, to sustain himself.

> Um, another common theme, I think, has been a lack of success. (laughs) Because you know, I think things have just pretty much gone from bad to worse in the world and no one really seems to be paying that much attention to things that we're saying. But that's okay because I don't think I have to be successful. I think that what I have to be is faithful. And I'm satisfied with being faithful. And if success comes too, then that's fine, too, but in the meantime and I think that this is something that Catholicism brings – a certain sense of mystery to all this that we don't necessarily know what all's going on and all the details and we don't have to know, but we all have our little part to play and I'm pretty confident that I have my part and I can be thankful for that. And really that's the measure of my success, my faithfulness…And I think also that the religious practice kind of unites me with a world wide community of believers and it gives me structures and rituals when times are rough, and things to do that don't necessarily have an apparent meaning. Like praying the rosary. It's not necessarily apparent how that solves anything. But it can be a very useful thing, you know, if there's a very strong trouble or something bad going on.

Ben's moving description of how he has pushed himself to persevere points out a new measure of success, and it is not worldly change. Rather, Ben feels his success is measured by his faithfulness. He copes with a lack of progress, and the ensuing feelings that no doubt accompany the realization that things have "gone from bad to worse," by remaining faithful. And his faith is comforting, providing "a certain sense of mystery to all this that we don't necessarily know what all's going on." There is no doubt that seeing a lack of success is a trying and difficult problem for many activists. Adapting Ben's yardstick might be a powerful coping mechanism for other activists, as well.

Jane recalls similar feelings in the face of seeing little progress or even regression over the years.

> The [Canadian pup] seal hunts were reinstated a couple of years ago. Japan is lobbying the International Whaling Commission to start commercial whaling again. It's like a (trails off) you have a feeling, "We've done that already, why do we have to do it again?" Those things took a lot of effort, a lot of lobbying, and demonstrations…Good things happened and here we are doing them again. That's

> discouraging, I mean to make progress and then, it's like, who forgot about all that? And now we're going back and having to fight those things again… You whittle away and it's two steps forward and one step back. As I said we are fighting the same battles that we fought before but maybe it'll be a bit easier this time. Maybe this time we can say, "Well, remember back when?" And we won't have to start from scratch. So you just dig in and you do it again. You just keep going.

In the face of actually losing ground, Jane comforts herself by telling herself it might be easier this time, she will not have to start from the beginning, and that perseverance is required to see success over the long-term. "You just dig in and you do it again," she said. Similarly, many of the activists described taking comfort where they could, congratulating themselves on the small wins they do accomplish, rather than needing to see the whole problem solved quickly.

> For Valerie, this is bringing her vegan dishes to family gatherings.
>
> Every dish I ever bring everybody's always "Oh, this is so good!" and they want to know what's in it and they can't believe that it's vegan. And I think, well, for least at this meal, they didn't eat as many animals because my food was here and they ate my food instead of eating more of the other meal.

Valerie is able to take encouragement in the relatively small win of having others appreciate her vegan food and thereby eating less animal-based food. She congratulates herself, because even if it is a minute success, it's a success nonetheless. Jennifer also celebrates small wins and similarly discussed the importance of recognizing her achievements, no matter how small.

> Just to keep, you know, you almost have to be patting yourself on the back to keep motivated. To keep yourself knowing that you're doing good things. And sometimes it's a matter of looking at the numbers, like, "Hey, we've adopted, you know, 38 pets this month. That's more than one animal a day. *Good job*!" Sometimes you have to do that. Sometimes you have to make it about yourself for a minute so you don't lose that motivation to keep doing it because remember the animals can't do it themselves.

Jennifer recognizes how important it is to keep herself pumped up by "patting yourself on the back" and the need to "make it about yourself for a minute." She tends to herself, making sure to nurture her own activist spirit, in order to maintain her motivation. Perhaps in contrast to the cultural norm, Jennifer has learned to be kind to herself.

Dallas also takes encouragement where he can. Here he discusses incorporating activism into his daily routine to counteract the periods in his life when he may not have time to take action.

> And I think when I've gotten a couple of times to that point where I've gotten really absorbed in something else going on in my life, I've found solace in the fact that I can now still do that and just hand out a few flyers here and there or hang up something on a bulletin board instead of...(trails off) And realize that it's not feasible right now in my life because I have to do this and this, than to go, say, to the KFC protest, or do this or do that, or help organize this or that. Maybe I can do that when I've got a little bit more time at the end of the semester, or whatever.
>
> AND SO THE GUILT DOESN'T PUSH YOU IN THE WAY IT MIGHT HAVE BEFORE?
>
> Right, right. I just don't let it bother me that much. Because I think…even little things can make a difference sometimes, so if that's all you can do that's okay, you know?

It sounds as if Dallas has his own version of faithfulness to his activism, although it is not as explicitly stated as Ben's rationale. Dallas notes that he can do several small, daily things that can sometimes be just as effective as the large things, such as attending a KFC protest, and so long as he returns to his activism, he's on the right path. Lois also addresses the idea of guilt related to a desire to do more. She said:

> And I've known people who have been, they're calling in life has been to be crazy about activism. Once again, being a Christian, I tie it to John the Baptist. You know, he was the crazy one who lived out in the desert and ate locusts. You know he was the weird one. And, so there are people like that and I think we need people like that who inspire us. But most of us, I think can't be [radical] and I think you have to be realistic and not beat yourself up and feel guilty.

Realistically, Lois recognizes that most of us will probably not be able to maintain radical lives of protest, and yet that those examples can be inspiring. Valerie, too, noted guilt feelings she's had to learn to manage, saying that once she had her children she felt considerable guilt if she chose either her children over her activism or vice versa. Learning how to manage guilt and not feel a relentless drive to be constantly, continually, and ever more deeply involved is an important task for activists.

In two paper presentations on activist burnout, Mary Gomes and Christina Maslach (1991a, 1991b) describe the difference between flexible commitment and driven commitment. Their study examined two groups of activists – those still deeply involved and those who had left activism after burning out. They found that the major distinction between these two groups was that the still-engaged activists held a flexible commitment to their involvement. If they felt close to burnout or highly stressed, they took time off, knowing they could return to their former level of involvement at a later date. The group that had burned out subscribed to more of a driven commitment model, meaning that they felt forced to continue at all costs, digging in deeper (Gomes & Maslach, 1991a; Gomes & Maslach, 1991b). A quote from a former 11-year-veteran activist who had burned out was found on a web-summary of the study. The individual said, "You keep pushing yourself. There's no limit. It's like an anorexic getting thin; you're never quite thin enough. When you're an activist you're never working hard enough. So you're exhausted and feel like you've got nothing to give." (Gomes, no date).

For the activists in this study, adapting to the new requirements of a life of activism means learning to get over the guilt or adopting other positive strategies such as Dallas' incorporation of activism into his daily routine. Another proactively positive

measure taken by activists was to redirect negative energy back into their activism. Kate and Jennifer used remarkably similar language to describe one of their coping methods. Kate said:

> I guess channeling it towards positive kinds of things. I find anger, for me at least, has done nothing but stifle, creates [burnout]. Because you almost, at least for me, I start to see things in a tunnel view point. And then almost you can fall into depression, because you see all these problems. You can get angry and vocal, but at the same time it drains you. It drains me when I do that. So I try to not wear my emotions-on-my-sleeve type of thing. And always maintain that passion because that's what drives me. But I try to channel it towards, "Well, okay, this is huge, what can we do about it?"

Quite similarly, Jennifer said:

> So I guess, I mean, it may be frustrating and I don't know specifically what I do when I get frustrated. I shake my fist at the sky and go outside and yell or whatever but in the end the best thing to do is to take all that energy and channel it back into getting it done because there's no one else to do it…

These two *use* their emotions. They know that being angry or frustrated will only drain them and limit their perspectives, which – like radical action – is counter-productive to remaining effective activists. Earlier Jennifer said that "You want to take that energy and channel it toward the people who did the abuse but that doesn't get you anywhere except jail. (laughs)" So redirecting that energy, harnessing it and funneling it back into action, is the best way for them to make positive use of the intense emotions, sustaining their passion.

For activists, learning how to manage the high and low emotions inspired by their activism was a serious developmental issue. Many mentioned being infuriated, deeply frustrated, angry, sad, and guilty. Yet they had also developed coping mechanisms in order to help manage these emotional costs. They used self-comforting strategies, some

used their faith in God, they celebrated all accomplishments, no matter how small, and they redirected emotion back into their activism.

These adaptive techniques helped sustain the activists in their emotionally grueling work. In terms of identity work, the activists learned to protect themselves from issues that might detract from their activism, enabling them to keep up with the heavy demands of being deeply engaged. Yet they also knew when to "deliberately pull back," establishing balance and self-comforting in the face of little progress or actual loss of progress. Another adaptation activists made was to be optimistic, or as some put it, choosing optimism.

Choosing optimism?

Optimism seems to be a fairly common trait for activists. Nine of the twelve activists interviewed for this study said they were optimists. Trinity and Jessica claimed pessimism with Trinity saying she was "jaded about people a long time ago" and Jessica referring to herself as a "defeatist." Ben, falling somewhere in the middle, claimed he was a pessimist in the short run but an optimist in the "long, long run" due to his faith and his trust in the earth to heal itself.

With these exceptions, however, all of the other activists stated they are optimistic, perhaps indicating that optimism is an advantageous trait for activists to possess. Yet interestingly, while some referred to being optimists, a few noted that you "have to be" an optimist, implying that thinking optimistically is a choice they must choose. Kate, for instance, noted her optimism in this manner:

SO YOU SOUND MORE LIKE AN OPTIMIST YOURSELF.

> Yeah, yeah, I mean there are times where it's hard to maintain that. There's a lot out there, so many complex environmental problems that make it seem a little daunting. But yeah, I'm optimistic. I mean, you have to be.

She notes that one *has* to be an optimist, inferring that perhaps it is a choice or that perhaps pessimistic people would have a difficult time being activists. Jennifer's description is quite similar, making the same points.

> [The good has to outweigh the bad] or it would be the most depressing job ever. I mean, you *have* to be an optimist or it will just kill you. So many people have sad, "Oh my God, I can't believe you can do that, it's so depressing…wouldn't it be so depressing?" It could be if you wanted to let it be depressing. But if you focus on the positive stuff, that makes it a more gratifying thing to do. You focus on not "that animal has a gunshot wound," but "that animal has a gunshot wound, we got it to the vet, and we made sure it didn't get infected so the dog didn't lose it's legs and that dog is now healthy and learning how to interact with other people and we adopted him to another home and the dog is just in heaven."

For Jennifer it's a question of deliberate focus. She, too, echoes "you *have* to be an optimist," and she goes on to demonstrate how she can choose to be optimistic – in this case, it is by envisioning a positive future for the pet that has been injured, rather than focusing on the pet's sad history. Dallas also links optimism and activism saying, "I think you have to be an optimist or have at least somewhat of an optimistic attitude in order to be an activist, too." Later he goes on to explain how he optimistically envisions the future.

> And I guess I'm an optimist…I mean there's a lot of inhumanity and horrible things in the world, but I think for every horrible thing there's also a lot of good out there, you know, and people willing to help a stranger and that type of thing. You know, I'd like to think that that side will eventually win out. If I keep doing what I'm doing and try to, I don't know, try to influence the world whether it be in little ways or big ways, you know, every day by my actions and or by what I do or don't do, I guess.

Dallas uses a similar strategy to Jennifer, hoping that the right side will eventually win out and that he can influence that by taking right actions. He has faith in humanity,

despite his realization that there are a lot of "horrible things in the world." For Dallas it appears that simply being on the right side is sometimes as potent as accomplishing change and this also seems to reflect Ben's notion of faithfulness vs. success. Dallas is faithful to his activism. He always returns to his activism even if he becomes caught up in something else, or has to take a break due to his poor health. And he also has faith that positive change will happen. He is a true optimist.

Sam also mentioned optimism, but he referred to it more as an inborn trait rather than a choice he makes.

> …my own personality is more geared toward optimism, generally speaking. I try to wake up in the morning with a smile on my face. And I think helps with being involved with this stuff, because, and it's also, I think, it's knowing when to celebrate your accomplishments. I think that's a big part of it, to go even though this is a small little to thing, to see that and to celebrate. And tell others about it and tell yourself that you've done a good job and feel like a sense of recognition.

Sam states that his "personality is more geared toward optimism" and yet he also describes how he tries to use that, infusing each day with his up-beat spirit started by waking up with a smile. Perhaps Sam sees his personality as leaning toward more optimistic interpretations of life events, supplemented by specifically trying to cultivate optimism in his life, as well.

It is interesting that of the two activists who claim to be pessimists, Jessica does not identify as an activist, due in part to her interpretation of activists as hopeful people. Trinity – at the time of the interview – had only been engaged in activism for a little over six months, thus her long term future as an activist is unsure. Optimism may play a key role in sustaining activists over the years.

Robert also mentioned being optimist, saying "On the other hand, I have to come back to being an optimist. I am an optimist. I believe we can all do our little, bitty part."

His idea about each person having a role to play, even if "little, bitty," was another common theme for activists and served as one more way to adapt their lives to activism.

Limiting responsibility for change

Activists made their work more manageable by narrowing their focus. After learning how to manage the emotional costs of activism, learning how to strike a balance and assuage guilt was important. One way to do this is to limit the responsibility one is willing to personally take for change. Activists realize they cannot do it all; there is simply no way. Lois described this sentiment in the following manner:

> I think for one's own sanity there are certain things you must overt your eyes from or you will go crazy....For me [activism] comes out of an overarching world view of what needs to be done to make the place better and realizing I can't do it all. I have to do the little piece that fits right here…And so you just need to try to remember that every day is a journey and we're getting a little bit closer. You don't have to do it all at once. Every day just do your bit and then try to go on to the next because you have to be here for the long haul.

Lois specifically mentions being "here for the long haul," connecting her willingness to realistically limit her responsibility for change with sustaining her efforts over time.

Jane's account was quite similar:

> You can never do everything and the sooner you realize that, the easier it is to try to live as an activist and actually get something done…You have to let go of some things or you can't do anything. And it's *really hard to do,* but just tell yourself when you get started that you can't do everything, but you can find something that you can do.

She, too, relates having to narrowly define one's limits with sustaining over time, and mentions that once an activist has done this they can be more effective. Once an activist is realistic about what they can accomplish – and does not try to take on the whole world – they can dig in and get some real work done. Sam discussed limiting his role in terms of being part of a team.

> Well, it's hard and I think what's changed in the course of time over the last 10 years, is I've learned to not take as much responsibility for the project myself and we put more emphasis on the team. The crucial team. And the team-building aspect is critical. Because individually we can do a lot but it's a lot more effective to have a strong coalition. And I go back to the team. I see look, how can we make changes here with the team to relieve the frustrations? (laughs)

For Sam the team provides logistical, as well as emotional, support. Being part of a team also necessitates that Sam relinquish some control and responsibility for what might be accomplished.

Robert discussed narrowing his responsibility to what he can physically manage. In discussing how the knowledge of the impending destruction of the environment, lack of progress, and public apathy used to weigh on him he said:

> Um, that used to happen. All the time. It doesn't happen anymore. Part of it is, some of the issues are so big that I can't wrap my arms around them. But I can wrap my arms around, 600, 800 houses…

Robert refers to the six-hundred to eight-hundred sustainably-designed houses he helps develop and build each year, and this solid, tangible goal allows him to forgo the problems he "can't wrap [his] arms around." He can limit his responsibility to what he is physically capable of and does not have to be consumed with worry regarding the rest.

Ben described a highly similar philosophy, saying:

> Yeah, but I avoid [depression] by, I limit my ability to take responsibility. You know I take responsibility for a lot of things, but I do not take responsibility for solving the whole situation of poverty, or changing all those structures and stuff like that. I take personal responsibility for what I can do and if that's not enough, then it's not enough. You know, it's like one of my things is "do what you can, with what you can, where you are." And if that's not enough, well then that's just not enough…

Ben's description seems to most clearly capture the activist's need to limit responsibility for what they can and can't change. He recognizes that he can only do so much, like Lois and Jane. His efforts count and likely make some sort of difference, but he does not

attempt to effect grand, large-scale change. To do so would almost surely end in disappointment, exhaustion, and burnout. But so long as Ben is "faithful," he's measured himself a success.

Activists use multiple cognitive strategies to adapt their thinking in order to self-protect, self-comfort, and avoid burnout. They have learned numerous ways to cope, stay positive, and abate their guilt in order to maintain balance, relinquishing the need to control and recognizing their limitations. Another cognitive strategy used was to soften their opinions of others, gaining more compassion for non-activists.

Moderating beliefs about others

In the previous chapter a common activist growing pain was being too strident with non-activists. In earlier stages of identity development, those who did not share the activists' beliefs were seen as perpetrators or, in Sam's words, "the progenitors of the bad conduct." It would seem that to maintain this "us against them" view would be socially alienating if carried over time. Becoming more and more socially alienated would become increasingly taxing on the activist, ending in loneliness and frustration. Whether or not activists consciously consider this, most reported adapting their views of others, developing more compassion and a more relative understanding of "the other" as they became more mature activists. This softening seems to be a self-protective cognitive structure, designed to help maintain relatively harmonious social interactions and guard against burnout.

In describing this phenomenon, Clara said:

> I was the one who had studied. I could have been very upset with people but I had to stop and think that "They don't know what you do." I tried to teach them but they didn't do the intensive study that I did. So I had to realize that was par for the course, that I just had to accept it and move on. (*Later when talking about*

> *being rebuffed by family)* They [were] just not a part of my activity so they ignored me. And it was *so hard* but I wouldn't let it cause hard feelings. I just had to say, "This is they way it is," and I just had to accept it. I feel like the family is a very important institution and you have to look past the differences and love each other anyway.

Clara embraces acceptance of others, even after painful rejection by those closest to her. Like Jessica and Jane in the previous section, she uses empathy to understand people who were not invested in helping her cause. Clara's comments throughout her interview were remarkable for the explicit manner in which she described talking to herself. Through her self-talk we hear her process of becoming a wise, effective activist.

Dallas also described trying to be more accepting of others. He tries to take a cultural view of others, accepting them for their differences rather than judging others for them.

> I try to accept people for whatever their quirks, whether I think what they're doing is right or wrong. You know, I think a lot of people don't like, don't think that my morals are in line with what our society may say. I don't think someone's immoral just because they eat meat or that type of thing anymore. You know, people are raised differently in different cultures and different things like that. I try to always keep all that in mind and coexist as well as I can, but at the same time make changes where I can. Put my foot in the door here and there and, you know, sometimes people change their minds pretty quickly and sometimes it takes a lot longer …

For Dallas, acquiring compassion has been a change he's noticed, when he says, "I don't think someone's immoral just because they eat meat or that type of thing *anymore*." Rather, Dallas tries to be understanding of them, which likely helps enable him to peacefully coexist with others.

Lois, too, described her process of developing compassion and understanding. Of the activists interviewed, she seems to have devoted the most time to refining her

interpersonal approach, so that when she speaks and when she listens, she does so in a genuine, open, non-confrontational manner. She said:

> I've really worked hard on trying to stop taking offense at whatever people might have about any of my beliefs…So one of the things I've learned to try to work on is to try to feel love toward a person even when they present that negativity to me. And once again trying to be open to the fact that their experiences are different than mine. And what they're reacting to is really not me, but some previous experience they've had. I do have some difficulties with that, but I try not to take it personally…And I think in the activist world, whatever cause that you take up, I think it would do better if you try to think of your opponent as having much better motives than you're trying to assign to them. That's not the way it always is. But I think we do too much demonizing in that.

Clara discussed a time of crisis early on in her activist career when she had to sit herself down, "And I thought, 'How could I love those people?'" Here Lois describes the same phenomenon. Instead of approaching people combatively, she wants to understand. They both want to feel love for the people whose minds and hearts they hope to change. She also specifically addresses her desire to be more generous regarding the motives of others. In doing so, it is likely that she becomes even more open and accepting, her defenses lowering, allowing her to be even more effective with others. Later in the interview, Lois discussed trying to find a place of worship that accepts her many differing beliefs (e.g. Christian, socially conservative, pro-environment, pro-life, anti-death penalty, anti-war). In describing what she learned during this process, Lois said:

> Then you're in a small church and so you start talking to people and you realize they're not the monolith. They're just like every other group. You get in there and you talk to people and we all have different beliefs. It's not like we all believe the same thing. And so that sort of leaves me thinking, people just need to do more talking…

Lois connects this learning to her activism by recognizing that people are people, "not the monolith." When we see people as groups, we tend to see them as more rigid and more easily categorized than they actually are as individuals. Similarly, Valerie and Jane

discuss their softening stance toward others as a growing process of understanding how trying life can be, in general, even without engaging in activist pursuits. Valerie described her view in this way:

> Good people, of course, they're good people. Lots of people are still good people and they know [why vegan practices are needed] but they don't make the changes for whatever reasons they have. So they're not bad people, they just have unchanged behaviors…So that's what I try to hope is that people that I meet have just not made it to that point in their evolution, once they know…So I give people the benefit of the doubt until I'm convinced that they really do understand the gravity of the situation and they still choose to do nothing…And apathy is rampant. Everybody is overwhelmed with their own lives. And to make a change is an effort to a lot of people and they don't have the time or the energy for that effort. And I understand that but I'm out there to try to reach the people who can make that effort.

Valerie recognizes that people are "overwhelmed with their own lives." She understands that some people feel so wiped out by trying to work full-time jobs, take care of full-time families, meet the bills, and still have some time to unwind, that making more changes might be a considerably difficult task. And she notes that these aren't "bad people, they just have unchanged behaviors." If she did see them as bad people, her desire to help them make changes would likely plummet.

Similarly, Jane noted this same sort of compassion and understanding for the targets of her activism.

> …when you have people who are just struggling through a day, it doesn't do any good to just start suddenly start screaming at them about boycotting Gillette or something like that. I think that what we need to do, in terms of our activism, is pay attention to what people are struggling with and to fit our activism into that struggle…What I realized when I left academia and as I volunteered more and more – that the old saw about the Ivory Towers was true. I mean we're very isolated from what the real world is like…and my husband said to me once, and it's absolutely true, "Honey, how do you expect people to take care of their animals when they can't even be nice to each other?" And, well, he had a point, but I didn't quite see it until I don't know how many cruelty complaints I went on when it was clear the wife was also being beaten and the children were

malnourished.

Jane's account is rich with compassion. She doesn't want to "start screaming" at people "who are just struggling through the day;" she realized that her academia-inspired view of the world was limited and naïve; she witnessed animal abuse cases that mimicked the sad home-life of the humans who lived there as well. Jane's tender-heartedness was one of the things that drew her into a life of activism. She desperately wanted to dedicate her life to something meaningful and took steps to make that dream a reality. In doing so, her passion to help animals grew and she struggled to control her stridency and contain the frustration she felt with the lack of progress ("*Meeting, meeting, meeting*!"). Yet here we see that it was also her growing body of experience over time that saved her and helped her moderate her beliefs about others. Jane's tender-heartedness extended to the people around her, allowing her to have compassion for and be more effective with those she works with, rather than remaining angry and frustrated.

Ben described his compassion for others as stemming from a developmental perspective of activist evolution. He said, "They're very much still at the baby, taking baby steps at the very beginning, and I just support them and say, 'Oh, that's fine. I didn't get to where I am overnight.'" Valerie echoes this sentiment saying, "Certainly there was a time when I wasn't a vegetarian and I wasn't a vegan." By viewing their growth over time longitudinally, Ben and Valerie are able to remember their own histories as non-activists and gain insight and compassion for those who are not as far along as themselves.

Trinity makes a similar statement, noting how she tries to be understanding and compassionate toward those who believe differently than she does.

> I may not agree with it and I may not like it and we've had some pretty juicy arguments. But I can still respect the person and love a person and value a person and totally disagree with them. But I'm not going to agree with them just to get along with them. And where do these people all come from? So many people, if you don't agree with them, they take it like you're saying they are wrong. And I could say, "No. You're right. I just don't see it the same way. You know, I have a different set of values so I can't, I can't do it the way you do it." And it's only taken me 30 something years to arrive there. (laughs)

With time, with their own growth and accumulating experiences, activists' understanding of others deepens. The black-and-white, us vs. them perspective gives way to shades of gray. They realize non-activists aren't bad people and that the motives of others aren't evil. As activists become more personally congruent – having developed more mature activist identities – they can afford more understanding and compassion for those who do not fulfill their beliefs of what's right and wrong. It seems that these realizations likely protect the maturing activist spirit from burnout, allowing them to live more socially healthy lives within a society that views them as decidedly different. By adapting their views of others and moderating how they think of them, activists prevent social alienation, which leads back to the goal of becoming ever more effective.

Connecting activism and faith

The last cognitive strategy activists used to adapt their activist identities is linking their spiritual faith with their activism. This was a common strategy used by the activists, with only three of the twelve reporting no spiritual or religious beliefs (Valerie, Jessica, and Jennifer). The other nine activists all pointed to a direct link between their belief system and why they do the work they do. These nine were fairly evenly split between having more freeform spiritual beliefs and structured, religious beliefs. Robert, Kate, Dallas, Jane, and Sam all described a spiritual tie to their work. Ben, Clara, Lois, and Trinity linked theirs' to religious doctrine.

In describing his beliefs, Robert mentioned his "guardian angel" and the mystery of synchronicity providing a path.

> And it goes way back into my history. I call it my guardian angel, looking out, who pushes me here and pushes me there. I don't know why, but when it happens, it's the right thing to do…So, I can't, uh, I can't very much turn my back and say, "Oh, well."…I mean, I can't explain the coincidences unless there is something happening here, you know, that gets me…I tend to see the spiritual in, for example, nature. I think everybody who's somehow environmentally focused sees a lot of that…So the spiritual is something that, to me, is a very positive force and that positive force guides me in making decisions…So that's how I kind of see it. It's the impulse and it's that, or in me, the response to the greater good.

This seems to capture the somewhat serendipitous entrée Robert experienced into the world of activism. He described two pivotal moments that seemed to happen almost by chance – being asked to design a house which led to his interest in sustainable building, and later becoming involved in the building work that now allows him a direct outlet for this interest. Robert seems to be in touch with an intuitive, spiritual sense of direction in his life, which he follows.

Jane also describes a connection to her beliefs and her activism.

> Definitely not a religious person. In fact, I've become less and less so. I … (pause) I would like to think that I have some sense of spirituality. But it's something that I've struggled with for most of my adult life…[I do connect my activism with spirituality because] I recognize that there is some value inherent in these creatures. I don't see how anyone especially can live with an animal and not see that. I have three cats now, for instance, and those cats look at me and they say something. You know, they're *communicating*. And I may not know what it is, but they're saying something. And there's something behind those eyes. They're not machines like Descartes said they were…But I think that connection is important. That's why I do what I do.

Like Robert, Jane attributes her activism to a felt sense of spiritual connection. It is why she does what she does. Jane, seeing value and soul in animals, feels driven to protect them, endowing her mission of animal protection with spiritual support.

Kate, Dallas, and Sam's beliefs are more directed to finding the spiritual in nature, which helps renew and inform their work. Kate described her beliefs as follows:

> Yeah, I think it's, um, I believe in evolution and all that stuff, but I definitely believe in a higher power, of whatever form that might be. And I see when I'm out in nature and stuff, you know communing with nature makes me connect a lot more with the Earth and is very therapeutic component being found in nature and it's spiritual for me. You know, it's almost like I *worship* nature, in a sense, because I see it as God's creation. And I see it kind of like Taoism – God's in every living being. So, yeah, there is that spiritual component. It, I think with my scientific background, that's my *personal* relationship with nature. My professional relationship, I keep the spiritual aspects out of it because I think that becomes too contentious and I think in environmental problem solving you have to just be like, "Here's the science, this is what we know."

Dallas, too, described his reverence for nature:

> I think that within the past few years I've always entertained the possibilities of, the idea of, that in order to co-exist with everything else on this planet, and obviously we've evolved over a millennia, you know, in unison with all these other organisms and realizing that. From a young age I've always had a wonder of nature and that's what keeps me going, you know. I wake up and look out and see a bird or the wind in the trees and that type of thing…and I feel like, kind of that, I guess, life force or people call it an aura or whatever. I feel there is something to that. And I think that empathy, that's why we have empathy and that type of thing. It's like a tool to help us realize and be cognizant of the fact that we have to co-exist with everything else on the planet, animals, plants, whatever.

Sam described his spiritual connection in this way:

> Oh, without a doubt. I'm speaking next week to [a group] on sustainability as it relates to Indian tribes and [my wife and I are] enrolled members of the Choctaw tribe. And I think that that's a big part of the interest in activism, is a, whether it's acknowledged or not, is a spiritual relationship to a land ethic. And the notion that that ethic is your physical manifestation of the love you have for yourself and your fellow beings as it relates to your higher power, be it God or your creator, or whatever you want to call it. My wife and I we refer to it as Spirit. We think that it's a personal relationship that we have. We also feel that it's the same life-force that sort of drives the color of the trees that are outside, and that sort of thing.

Each of these three sees nature as embodying some form of spiritual entity or energy. Kate describes a Taoist view, finding God in everything, which she describes as therapeutic. Retaining her professional commitment to environmental science, she

specifically notes how she keeps her spiritual views private. Dallas, too, sees the spiritual in nature, referring to "aura," or some form of natural energy. He sees the symbiotic relationship humans have with nature, having evolved within it over many millions of years, giving rise to a self-protective sense of empathy which allows us to co-exist. Lastly, Sam describes a loving connection to a sense of place. He draws on his American Indian belief system to define his "land ethic," which is the physical symbol of one's love and connection to all others. For these three activists, their awe and veneration for nature helps keep them committed to the activism they undertake.

Clara, Ben, Trinity, and Lois subscribe to structured, organized religion; all four are Christians of varying denominations. Ben and Lois see their activism as a direct outgrowth of their religious beliefs. Ben described his activism as an attempt to put his faith into practice.

> I think that you know there's kind of an orthodoxy, which means "right teaching," and I think that's an important thing. But I think that orthopraxis, which is "right living," is also important. And that goes back to the Gandhi thing, about "be the change that you want to see." If you know, if I want Christians to understand more about restraining their appetite for material goods and living light on the land, and being more socially just, then I really think the first step to that is the way I live my own life. And so I think of that as like an integral aspect of my religious practice, is my living practice, so to speak. Because if you just talk but don't walk, then we're hypocrites and I think in religion that's a really dangerous and deadly thing to be. And in social justice work it is equally deadly and dangerous…you have to have a spirit of authenticity about you or there's just no point…I don't think that everybody needs to become a Catholic, but I think that having a spiritual life helps manage your activist life.

Ben describes his need to be authentic not only to more genuinely live his faith, but also to avoid hypocrisy. He notes that having a spiritual inclination helps maintain one's activism, noting later that in the interview that he believes this connection can help activists maintain balance.

Lois also talked about how her faith and her activism intersect, as well as how that affects her witness.

> In my world, in my world, gosh, using too many resources to me is a sin. That enters into your whole salvation thing and all that which we won't go into here, but so I have to be very careful in my church world of being able to share my witness, so to speak, about environmental choices and not come off as sounding judgmental and saying, "You're not right with God because you're making these kinds of stupid choices." But at the same time I think it's important to say to them, "You need to be thinking about the resources you're using that you're taking away from other people, other children of God" kind of thing.

Again we hear Lois struggling over how to present her beliefs to others in a way that feels authentic to her, without alienating others. She has intimately interwoven her activist beliefs and her Christian faith, seeing the need for simple, humble living as a form of the Golden Rule. It was in this context that Lois poignantly described her attempts to find a place of worship that accommodated both her environmental ideas and her conservative Christian beliefs. Each part represents a facet of Lois' identity that is fundamental to who she is.

Clara mentioned her faith in relation to her activism in a similar manner to Robert. She sees the Holy Spirit as having protected and guided her throughout her battle to stop the nuclear power plant.

> I really felt that the hand of God was on my shoulders all the way through that nine year battle. The attorneys would have meetings with our group and they would say, "Now you've got to realize that you're not going to win your battle. You are not going to stop that plant from being built. The only thing you can do is to make that plant the cleanest, safest nuclear power plant that's ever been built." And I would just be in the back with my eyes closed, praying to God. And I said, "God, there is no chance that a nuclear power plant could ever be clean or safe. And so we can't allow it to be built. Just don't listen to that man" – and this is our *attorney*! – "because we have to stop it." (laughs)

This account really demonstrates the strong determination and faith Clara had in the face of huge obstacles. Throughout the interview she emphasized how alone she felt in her

belief that the plant could be stopped; even her husband doubted it could be done, although he allowed her to spend their life-savings in the court battle against it. But Clara believed it could and she prayed and sought spiritual guidance and strength in her journey to end the proposed plans.

She also used her faith as a resource. When she and her husband ran out of money, she prayed to God asking if she had a talent she could use to help fundraising efforts. That night she dreamed of a beautiful sunburst quilt pattern, which she roused herself to sketch. Clara later raised over $60,000 making these quilts, attributing her creativity to God and her skill to her grandmother.

Lastly, Trinity also described the intersection of her faith and her activism. In an earlier section Trinity described one of her motivations for being involved as the knowledge that "God will write it down somewhere." Additionally, her belief system provides a rubric to interpret what's happening around her.

> It actually says in the [proposed animal identification laws], one animal, one number. It actually says that. And another thing it says, that it will become the sole numbering system for animals. So of course those are the people who are very devout, religious Christians who are going, "It's the mark of the beast. It's the mark of the beast." And I'm going, "You know, technically it is. They are marking the beasts" (laughs)…Those who are Christians and feel real devout about that, get caught between, "Well, the Bible says this is supposed to happen, anyway. Why are we fighting it? But then this is evil. I can't do this." And we actually have some real strong emotions that go in this.

Trinity describes the ambivalence that using a religious lens can bring, leading to strong and conflicting emotions as to how to handle one's beliefs. She also subscribes to a more moderate view than some of her homesteading contemporaries, who interpret the plans for the animal identification system as the "mark of the beast." Later in the interview, she describes drawing on her faith as a Christian for strength in her fight. Trinity stated that

having a non-Christian background makes her more adept with and empathetic to people who do not share her religious views, which helps contribute to her skill as a moderator between believers and non-believers.

In this section on connecting spirituality and activism, we saw how Robert and Clara interpreted a "guardian angel" or the Holy Spirit as being a directive and guiding force in their activism. Kate, Dallas, and Sam found the spiritual in nature, undergirding their desire to protect it. Jane describes the emotional connection she feels with animals as leading to a spiritual devotion to act on their behalf. Ben and Lois see their activism as a religious imperative and Trinity uses her religious views to give her strength and provide understanding. Jessica, Jennifer, and Valerie did not report religious or spiritual belief systems.

By linking their convictions with their activism, the activists' connection to their work likely intensifies. This cognitive strategy reinforces the power behind the rationale for their work, allowing them to become more congruent, having all their major belief structures aligned. This adaptation is likely also self-protective, providing needed strength and comfort in times of distress.

Summary of adaptations

To conclude this section on adaptations we see how activists have evolved through the years, picking up strategies and connecting beliefs in order to achieve balance and avoid burnout. These adaptations link up the important elements in their lives. For example, in order to prevent social alienation, activists become more compassionate toward others over time, which helps protect their relationships and likely their peace of mind, as well. In order to prevent burnout, they also learned how to comfort themselves,

taking pride in small accomplishments and remaining optimistic, which allows them to sustain their hope in what they're doing.

Activists adopt many strategies, whether consciously or not, to adapt to the demands of a life of activism. They become emotionally resilient, learning to manage the high and low emotions inspired by activism, which appears to be a developmental issue for activists. Learning how to cope with the dramatically fluctuating emotions is a crucial task to protect against burnout. These coping methods included self-comforting strategies, recognizing and celebrating small wins, funneling intense feelings back into their work, and drawing on their faith in a higher power.

Another adaptive strategy was to choose optimism. Activists tend to interpret events optimistically rather than pessimistically, and many state that they do this deliberately, in order to turn their attention away from overwhelming feelings. Activists stated that they "have to be" optimists, and some referred to it as personal trait that they cultivate. Some have almost a mystical capacity to transcend the moment when things seem hopeless, to transcend logic, reason, and their own despair, to a place of "knowing" that things will work out and that their actions are meaningful in the larger scheme of things.

Activists have also adapted by becoming more realistic about the slow pace of change and consequently limit their responsibility for it. They relinquish personal control by recognizing the need for a "team" and group work. They also realize that it is counterproductive to worry about larger issues that are beyond their control, and that they need to focus on what they can legitimately, realistically accomplish.

Activists also make cognitive changes allowing them to soften their views of others. They described gaining empathy for non-activists, learning to understand that other people are "overwhelmed with their own lives," bogged down by their own day-to-day struggles. They recognize that others' backgrounds, personalities, internal conflicts, and developmental level all contribute to whether or not an individual will engage in activism, and if so, to what degree. By moderating their beliefs about others, they are protecting their ability to stay embedded in important relationships and maintain social contacts with non-activists. Maintaining these relationships no doubt contributes to safe-guarding their mental health and protecting against burnout. It is also demonstrative of how activists move away from black-and-white thinking and into a more nuanced understanding of the problems and people involved, which includes many shades of gray.

Lastly, all of the activists professing some sort of religious or spiritual belief system noted connecting their activism with their beliefs. By seeing their activism as a form of faithfulness, or by returning to nature for spiritual rejuvenation, activists were able to further protect their sense of well-being. Faith provided a deeper perspective of the meaning related to their actions.

Summary of deepening commitment and dedication

This section has examined strategies that activists may or may not have adopted in order to better fit their lives around their activism, sustaining their health, peace of mind, and involvement. Activists pay real costs for their involvement, and must therefore take strategies to safeguard their mental health and peace of mind. All of these adaptations allow activists to deepen their commitment and confirm, both to themselves and to others, their established activist identities. Another important variable to consider

is what the activists themselves recognize as having changed in their lives. When asked to reflect on the personal changes they see as having occurred over time, the activists pointed to several areas of development. This will be discussed in the following section.

Self-estimations of change over time

To return to the words of William E. Cross, developer of the Cross Racial Identity Model, examinations of identity change must include individuals' perceptions of how they see themselves as having changed. In proposing his theory, he said:

> In the analysis of any identity transformation, researchers are interested in (b) how a person perceives change in himself/herself, and (b) an objective analysis of the person's personality, attitudes, ideology and behavior in order to determine the extent to which the person actually has changed. (Cross, 1978, p. 96)

This section will present how the activists believe they have changed over time. Their responses could be categorized into four domains – changes in approach or philosophy of activism, deepened personal growth, new or improved relationships with other activists and close others, and an understanding of the complexity involved in the desire for change. That is, after years of experience, the activists have seen and heard much more about why people do not change or which social structures prevent change from occurring. Their understanding is not oversimplified, but conversely becomes more and more complex.

Changes in approach, philosophy, and worldview

Activists noted considerable changes in their approach to activism. The major area of early change in this domain was becoming less strident and more interpersonally neutral when doing their work. They also described other changes in their approach, which unfolded more slowly over time. Sam noted that he became more aware of how to

interact with the power structures that affect true change. In discussing how he has modified his behaviors, he said:

> The first thing that I think of is my appearance. I, for the recorder that doesn't have eyes, you'll see that my hair is really short now. It's been short since 2002, but from high school in '96 until 2001 I wore it long. And that felt good to have it long, it was part of my open personality. But I started seeing that some of the channels of government, some of the channels of upper-tier private sector where I wanted to start making some of the change, they were instantly closing doors based on my appearance. And as much as I loved that independence, I realized that I would have to give that up for the sake of the overall efforts to want to make a difference….And I felt the need to try to look more like a professional to make that step…you can access that 2-5% whose making all those decisions relatively easily, if you're willing to conform to certain rules of the game. Like your hair or even the type of work you do. And once you get inside of it, provided you're allowed through the door, that's where you have to make the change. It's not with the 95-98%. It's in that 2-5% because they're the opinion-shapers. They're making the decisions in the board rooms. They're making the final decision in project management as to whether to go with alternative energy or nuclear.

Sam came to believe that if he wanted to see real change happen, he would need to make certain personal sacrifices, such as conforming to more conservative rules of personal appearance, in order to access key decision makers within the power structure. This excerpt also gets at Sam's ideas about change. Whereas some activists work as outside agents against the powers that be, Sam wants to work from the inside out. By playing "the game" he gains access, and it is with that access that he hopes to make significant change.

Over the course of his interview Ben described his conversion to Catholicism as having a vast influence on his activism. He noted that his conversion gave him "a vocabulary" and taxonomy for his social justice work. It provided him with a different framework for measuring progress, teaching him that being faithful was the best indicator of his success. Becoming a Catholic also helped Ben with the bitterness and anger he had been feeling prior to his conversion. However, when asked if his approach to activism

changed over time he said, "No, because I've always thought of myself as an activist first. Every job I've had really until I began this music work, has really been something to do to earn money so that I could just do my other things…And I always have seen myself really first and foremost as an activist." However, he went on to note that his beliefs about activism are more clearly spelled out and explicit than they were when he was younger, which provides him a better understanding about his own expectations both for himself and for others.

In demonstrating her characteristic thoughtfulness, Lois offered a reflection on how she has developed her worldview over time.

> The other thing to remember is once again it's an overarching world view, like this gradual thing…and remember this is hind sight. It's not going to be like she woke up one day and said [urban green space protection]. It's more looking back. At the time you don't realize these things as you're going along, and it's only because you're looking back. We view ourselves and we come up with our own stories on why we are the way we are, so who knows what the truth really is in regard to my background. But to me it's so much a part of me from the very beginning and a gradual thing that I can't ever really see it like that, as this really obvious thing…where suddenly they go from being one way to suddenly being another. Obviously though, if you look over the course of my life it's obviously a real big change from where people thought I might of started off.

In looking back, Lois does not believe there to be a conversion experience for herself during which time she goes "from being one way to suddenly being another." Rather, she sees a gradual change over time, with many influences converging to bring her to where she is now. She goes on to describe how her approach has changed and how she strives to remain open to ongoing change on a regular basis.

> Now about the activism itself. I guess I learned that for me, I have to take the slow road. You know, there's a part of me that says if I was really doing this right I would sell everything and live out of a trailer or something and do things right. But I know that's just not going to work. So it is a compromise…So I've tried to be more open about where I come from. Not because I'm trying to say "I've got it right, and you've got it wrong," but to try to remind everyone that we all do

> approach it from a different viewpoint…And, this is important I believe, not only share my thoughts, but hear what other people have to say back. 'Cause I think that's just as important. Because I need to be open to change also. To change the way I think. Because I wouldn't be in my exalted great place that I think I'm in if I hadn't been open to change about other people's thoughts, like car freedom and that kind of thing.

Lois describes her need to "take the slow road" and her commitment to remaining thoughtful and flexible, making room for adaptation and growth over time. She does not see her development as static, nor does she see her beliefs as carved in stone. Lois' openness to change allows her to keeping informing herself and deepening her commitment to her core values.

Dallas, too, noted several changes he's experienced in how he approaches activism.

> And I think possibly just being, over the years, becoming more relaxed and open-minded about hearing what other people have to say and not being so (pause) I don't know the word I'm looking for (pause) I guess if someone's willing to have a discussion with me, willing to entertain their ideas to a certain extent, that type of thing. Instead of letting it get me flustered or, you know, just backing off and approaching from another angle. It's not something that I want to fight about or anything like that. And when I first started, I wasn't sure how to approach it… I feel like I'm a lot more laid-back about it now and I'm more peaceful towards everybody…So I have to adapt and try to change it in the most effective ways that I think I can. I've found over the years I think the best way is just to try to talk to as many people as you can…

> Very similarly, Robert said:

> Over the years I've learned that the harder I push, the more the resistance, so if I push less, there's less resistance. But I'm still pushing, but more gently. For example, at [the building company] now, it takes two years between the time we start thinking about making a change that will have an impact on how we build our houses to actually implementing it in the product line…Twenty five years ago, I'd have thought, "Let's do it right now! It's going to be great! It's obvious! So, let's do it!" But these days I'm much more mellow, more laid back about it. It'll get there eventually …And I have a back door. I'm teaching students what I know and what I believe to be the future, and so my legacy is them. They're going to go out there and eventually, one way or another, do more of what I do. And so, if I don't get it done right now, they'll get it done in the next generation. And

> hopefully, the generation after that and some of them will become teachers. So it's changed a lot over thirty years. And it's not just with age, although that's part of it, certainly, but it's also with experience, a desire to see it happen without as much pushback. Without as much turmoil. Slip it in as opposed to pounding it in….

For these two, involvement through the years has taught them to be more patient, more accepting, and more relaxed about the process. Like Lois, Dallas notes that he is more "willing to entertain [others'] ideas," which helps him refrain from becoming flustered and likely deepens the conversation. Robert sees himself as becoming more patient with the time frame that real change requires. He also has the "back door" provided by his work with students. This, too, refers to his understanding that real change can take generations. And so he's become more patient, ready to take the "slow road," like Lois, to be there for the long haul.

Jane, too, spoke about changes in her approach. Here her views make her the exception. Whereas most of the other people interviewed described becoming more moderate, more patient, and less radical over time, Jane feels directed toward more radical change now than at any other time in her life.

> …while I have said that I don't think in-your-face works, I have found that I have much less patience and that it isn't as easy one-on-one, to keep my mouth shut. My tolerance level for the differing views, if you will, is not as high as it used to be. And there are times when I found it very difficult, more so than really I think at any period before now, not to just to do something and really be aggressive on certain issues. And it may be because the same issues [e.g. whaling, the seal hunts] are coming up again.

At the same time, Jane's experience gives her wisdom about how to direct her efforts on a broad, human scale.

> We need to pay more attention to the people, certainly in [this state], I think. We need to pay attention to the people that we're targeting. Not just the animals. Because there's a huge need for animals rescue [here]. There really is. I mean, hands-on, going out, jumping over fences, rescuing animals. I mean there is still

> more need for that than I would like to see, but we're not going to change anything, really, in the big picture, until we change the people. And I think that's something that we're really missing.

In her interview Jane stated that she has always avoided dangerous direct action because of her commitment to her relatives. Because of her relationship with them, she wouldn't want to worry them or put herself at serious risk of harm. However, she recalled being drawn to the work of the activists who stood on the ice filming the Canadian seal pup clubbings and to the Greenpeace activists who maneuvered boats in front of whaling ships. For her, seeing the same problems come up again twenty-five years later draws her nearer to the idea of being more radical. Jane expresses her fierce passion and willingness to take radical action, noting that her patience with certain issues has decreased with time, particularly those problems that recur. Yet she also realizes that the best place to direct her non-radical activities is toward other humans; probably the slowest course of action, but also the most effective given "the big picture."

In discussing how they see their worldviews as having changed, the activists mentioned becoming more professional while attempting to gain access to the inner sanctum of power structures, using religion to inform and define their activism, being reflective and flexible, and last, targeting humans in order to help animals. These statements also reflect what the activists see as being effective and how they target their activism, the way in which they think they can get the most "bang for their buck." Again, they are on the quest to refine their skill and effectiveness as activists and they make changes that allow progress toward this goal. Their involvement also brought them direct personal change with their activism experience over time.

Changes in personal growth and emotional reactions

Many of the activists noted seeing personal change over the course of their involvement. They mentioned changes in personality traits, skills gained, or deepened understanding. Dallas, Robert, Kate, and Jane all reported growing as people due to their activism. Dallas spoke about his transformation in terms of becoming more outgoing due to his involvement.

> I had, I don't know, I've always been kind of a loner and I didn't date really in high school. It took me a while. I used to be real introverted. After I got to college, I kind of came out of that somewhat. And I think the activism actually helped me with that because I had to, you know, it forced me, it was something that forced me to go up and say hi to people.

Activism allowed Dallas to more fully develop his interpersonal skills, teaching him how to approach people and likely giving him more self-efficacy about doing so. He credits his involvement with bringing him out of his shell.

Jennifer also reported seeing change over time related to a deepened understanding of the issues and her own growing maturity.

> I think that as I've gotten older, because I was able to start as a teenager and work in through my mid-20s, I am able to look back and see a maturing and an understanding…I've always done it because I've enjoyed it and I understood that I was saving lives but I understand so much more about how I'm saving the lives and about what I'm saving them from. Before it was like, "Oh we're saving them from being killed." Now it's like I understand actual abuse cases and what the animals are being taken away from. But I think I've had more of an understanding of what I'm doing and why I'm doing it which is why I want to keep doing it.

Jennifer has the vantage point of looking back over her mid- and early-twenties as well as her teens, when reflecting on her many years of involvement. During this time she grew and matured as a person and her ideas and understanding of activism did, too. She credits this deeper understanding as providing her with motivation to continue, noting this is "why I want to keep doing it." As her understanding grew, so did her commitment.

Robert, too, noticed personal change due to being an activist. He said:

> So it's moved away from this sort of narcissistic view [of getting recognition and awards for his work], if you can say that, I guess, to looking at, you know, how much time is this going to take? What would the result actually be? Is the impact sufficient, on and on and on. So I evaluate these things very much differently than I would have 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago.

Robert notes change in how he approaches taking on new projects. In this excerpt he describes being more cautious about committing to new building projects that might take too much time away from what he is passionate about. He sees this as moving away from a "narcissistic view" that might have previously allowed him to take on custom jobs for the financial reward, prestige, and potential for awards he could win.

In a similar vein, Kate talks about how activism has made her more compassionate.

> And I think I became a much more compassionate person after that, a better person. It made me think outside the bubble. It really helped me shut these um, not insecurities, I think those are a natural part of the growing up process, but it really helped me fit like, pettiness, into context and not focus on things that I felt that are not important. But the environment, it helped me grow as an individual and feel more strong and secure and I found my niche…

By becoming involved in something that is meaningful to her, Kate feels that her life has more richness – she is more compassionate, focuses on what is important, and feels stronger, like she's "found [her] niche."

Jane also describes how her involvement has enriched her life, leading her to be more comfortable with herself.

> But after a while it's partly the aging process, I hate to put it that way, but it's also just feeling a little more comfortable in your skin and feeling more comfortable with what you're doing and the way you think about things. I realized it didn't matter so much but that it made more of a difference that I was comfortable with the way I was living myself and that I could do a better job of convincing people or demonstrating these ideas by living the way I do rather than by getting in their face about the issues…In a lot of ways, I'm more comfortable with myself and

my own positions…

Jane looks back over her many years of involvement and sees a growing comfort with herself, her positions, and the actions she takes. Although she recognizes she is different from the mainstream, her time invested has allowed her to feel comfortable holding the marginalized opinion and taking the non-conforming action.

All of the activists just cited attribute personal growth to their involvement in activism. For Dallas it meant developing better people skills, while for Jennifer it meant deepened understanding and commitment to the issues. Robert believes that he has become less narcissistic and Kate sees her beliefs as having given her life real meaning and direction. Jane sees herself as having become more comfortable with herself overall, in terms of her activism.

In the previous chapter, one of the growing pains discussed was contentious relationships with family and close others. Thus these relationships can also be seen as a point of growth, allowing activists to differentiate change in this domain, as well. This will be discussed in the next section.

Relational changes – improving relationships with close others and the activist community

One of the changes recalled by the activists is a sense of deepened relationships with family and other intimates. While this was only specifically mentioned by two of the activists, most noted developing an activist community with whom they felt connection and solidarity. These relationships with other activists allowed the sharing of common interests and values, offering support and encouragement.

Kate and Dallas noted improved relationships due to their involvement. Kate recalled, "I don't think [being involved has] significantly affected my relationships. It's actually helped me establish more real relationships…I mean, I think I feel like my relationships have become better in a sense since I've become an environmental activist."

Similarly, Dallas echoed this idea.

> I guess, I think for the most part, as far as my family is concerned it's made for stronger family bonds. My parents have been real supportive and seemingly proud of what I've done in activist circles, I guess…it's been more of a unifying thing for me with friends and people I've met that have similar ideas, whether they put them into action to the degree that I do or not. You know, it's been more of a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood with people. It's more something in common than something different and you know, brought us closer together.

Dallas notes the kinship he feels with others when they share similar ideas. He describes this as a "unifying thing" that provides him more meaningful connections with others. Dallas' account seems to get at the idea of the activist community, although he does not name it specifically as such. The "people [he has] met that have similar ideas" form this activist community and it is with them that he feels kinship which he describes as a "brotherhood or sisterhood."

The activist community emerged as a prominent theme for activists. Eleven of the 12 activists interviewed mentioned their connections with others who believe similarly. Only Jennifer, one of the two who does not consider herself an activist, did not specifically note involvement with a like-minded community. She did talk about recruiting young volunteers as an important and rejuvenating experience for herself, however, saying,

> And the kids that I see now that volunteer…part of the motivation for them is that we just had fun together. I recruited them when I first started…And they knew what they were doing and part of it is that they have fun, we had fun, the humans had fun doing it together. But they understood why and what they were doing and

> why it was important. And I would look at them and just think, "Man, if they could stay involved for the next five years, it would just make so much of a difference and so much more sense then." It's almost like preparing a plant and putting it in the sun, you know. They're going to be so good one day. I feel like I'm just nursing them along to be wonderful.

While Jennifer does not talk about making use of an activist community for herself, she does note seeing one develop and the sense of satisfaction she feels at her role in this.

Of the other activists, all mentioned belonging to an activist group or sharing friendships with other activists. Some mentioned this as a natural shift that occurred once they began refining their beliefs. Ben, for instance, said, "Well, anybody whose known me for any length of time knows all about my causes, and has been involved with them to a greater or lesser extent or they just haven't kept up a relationship with me." Likewise, Jessica noted repeatedly that her values are of such importance to her that she feels compelled to discontinue relationships if people do not share them.

Clara, too, noted a shifting friendship base, saying, "Yes, there were changes here but I made new friendships." And similarly, Sam said, "You end up hanging out with people who are serious, or more serious about this stuff…more like-minded." Robert described being embedded within a group of people who are "seeing the handwriting on the wall," noting that this sort of network has changed members but remained consistent over time. Kate focused more on the need to have others around who share your beliefs. She said, "You *need* people. You need people to get involved. You can't take the burden all on your shoulders."

Valerie framed her view on developing an activist community as a reflection of shared interests.

> I have friends from high school and people I used to hang out with before I was vegetarian who I still remains friends with on a certain level, but there will always

> be that lack of connection that I have with my vegan activist friends. And I have friends who are activists, but they're not vegan. And I have friends who are vegan but are not activists. And I don't share a strong connection to other people who are not vegan activists. It's just similarities. You know, your friends tend to think like you.

Valerie puts into words the idea of how people naturally come together through shared values and beliefs. She notes the "strong connection" she feels to people who share her values and are as passionate about them as she is. Her description is similar to Ben and Sam's, who noted that their friendship circles have organically shifted to include people with whom they share values.

Lois echoed this idea, noting that she found a circle of like-minded individuals through the internet.

> And then through the miracle of the internet I have met people via many chat rooms, not chat rooms, but listservs. People I have never met and probably will never meet, but we've talked for several years about these issues that I've told you about and they've been a big influence on my way of thinking, because it's so difficult to go out and find people to talk to especially when you're talking about really important issues that relate to the deepest core of who people are. And, so it's hard to go up and say "Heidi, tell me about these great important issues to you." I mean you have to get to a level of comfort there and it's, we don't have time to do that. And on the internet you often *do* have time because people come to it with that expectation that they're going to bare all right there and you know you don't have to go through all the niceties, "Come over for supper," they just get right to it.

Here Lois noted that the internet has provided her with people who share her values and influence her "way of thinking." She also described that the internet milieu provides a framework to expedite the sharing of deeply personal information relevant to "the deepest core of who people are." Via this technology, she doesn't have to wade through "the niceties," but can easily move to more important material.

Trinity also discussed meeting an activist community through the internet, saying:

> Just in my close network of friends and we can be honest with each other. I go to visit them and they say, "Oh, [Trinity's] coming, I don't have to clean!" You know it's like we're family already, and we've only known each other for a year, maybe two years. And we met over the Internet. You have to be leery of people you meet over the internet. You have to be careful. But now these are some of the closest people in my life. They're closer than my mother, my sister, my parents.

For Trinity, who lives on a rural homestead, the internet provided her with a group of people who share her values and who have become "some of the closest people" in her life. This group provides her with familial support, demonstrating how powerful like-minded communities can be for activists.

Jane talked about needing support from an activist community in order to carry out "in-your-face activism." She noted that it's much easier to take direct action if one is backed up by a group that supports this form of action. She also described how difficult it can be to develop an activist community.

> You can locally get a very good working group. Sometimes you can do things that feel very good. But it's really hard to get cohesiveness in animal welfare…It's hard to get a large group of people to come together and share the same ideas and work productively together. There are all the issues of control, and who does what first, and who does it best and who should get the funding and that sort of thing. All the natural human issues come into play. But some of those things happen everywhere just because, in the animal welfare movement there are so many people who think that (trails off). They don't like people. They can't get along with people. But they love animals, and they get along with animals. And they think, "Oh, I'll work at this sanctuary, I'll volunteer for this organization because I won't have to deal with people." And then they find out that the only way they can get anything done is to deal with people. (laughs) And that just becomes a, a chaos, because you have all of these kinds of dysfunctional people trying to function together. (laughs)

Jane describes the difficult position activists may be in, in terms of needing people and yet not having access to a well-developed, healthy community. Poor social skills and interpersonal difficulties on the part of some people within the animal rights community may lead to control issues within the activist community, particularly if community

members have internalized an ethic of being more devoted to animals than to other people.

This theme of frustration with the activist community was heartily supported by Kate, who shares Jane's disillusionment in regards to what she sees as a fractured, dysfunctional environmental movement. Thus, it seems that activist communities can be both a source of support and stress. This appears to be born out by the research. In a study of 75 peace activists Gomes (1992) cited the activist community as "the most rewarding and the most stressful aspect of being a peace activist" (p. 143). Clearly, activist communities play an important role in activists' lives. While they likely offer a buffer to the message that activists are decidedly different from the mainstream, they can also be a source of stress.

Again, activist communities can be interpreted as a means through which activists become more and more congruent in terms of their beliefs. Whether purposeful or not, they begin to be surrounded by people who share their values, reinforcing their beliefs and offering support (and stress) in the face of a dismissive mainstream society. The organic growth of an activist circle is readily apparent for most activists, yet many activists maintain friendships with non-activists, as well. This tolerance and understanding seems to reflect the last area of growth which is the recognition and understanding of complexity regarding activist issues.

Changes in understanding - seeing the complexity

One of the most striking changes to occur in some of the activists is that they begin to understand the issues on a much deeper level. No doubt they are regularly confronted with difficult questions and key arguments from "the other side" which forces

them to think more deeply and complexly, as well. This leads to greater depth of information processing and less surface, gut reacting. While only a handful of the activists made statements that reflected this theme, those who did were quite illuminating in terms of the depth of thinking activists undertake.

For Sam, his thinking became more complex as he hung out with some radical environmental activists and had a realization.

> A lot of the kids that I was hanging out with were doing tree-spikings and were very aggressive about their approach. And I think what kind of hit home is that my family has always done oil and gas. It's what put bread on the butter, excuse me, butter on the bread (laughs) – my espresso, I haven't woken up yet. And I was finding myself, surprisingly enough, as one who was more willing to do diplomacy, to work with the problem, the perceived problem causers, versus working against them. And there was automatically sort of a different sort of approach there.

Tree-spikings are a form of environmental sabotage whereby an individual lodges a piece of metal into a tree. When this tree is logged, the spike disables the saw, but in doing so can cause the injury and death of the logger. Sam realized he was associating with a group of aggressive and potentially dangerous environmental radicals. His own self-discovery related to his family's livelihood likely brought him more internal congruence; as an environmental activist, it seems important for him to recognize and emotionally confront the means by which his family makes their money. Yet this realization also led him to a deeper understanding of the issues. Sam recognized that many people in the oil and gas industry are trying to make a living and are not purposefully exploitative, just as many people in the forestry industry do that work because that's what their family has always done. For Sam this understanding helped forge a sense of identity and direction as he became more diplomatic and broad-based in his approach.

Robert, too, discussed wrestling with complexity, which he names outright:

> And I see the complexity – I was in Bolivia three or four years ago and went to the Amazonas, right on the border with Brazil. The governor of the province was taking us around and showing us development issues and ideas, and we watched a man clear a tiny tract of land, the old slash-and-burn, that every environmentalist says, "Ahhhhhh!!!" This guy had nothing more than a machete and he is in a rainforest setting, and he is clearing that little bit of land for him, his wife, and a couple kids, who are essentially living in a lean-to. And I thought to myself, "My goodness, the energy he's putting into clearing enough land where he can plant some skimpy little crop that will just barely get them to subsistence, and I want to sit in America comfortably drinking my coffee and say, 'You shouldn't be doing that, bad boy!'?" No, nah. Slash and burn, go ahead…So I guess I know too much. So I go back and forth.

It is interesting that Robert describes this complexity as knowing "too much." He recognizes that there are larger issues, such as subsistence survival, that go into declaring something right or wrong. In this case, he sees slash-and-burn as a necessary evil as a small family depends on this method in order to live.

Similarly, Lois describes feeling torn between wanting to protect undeveloped land and the need for affordable housing.

> I understand why [a developer] wants to put houses there and I understand why people want to live in [this town], which is a great place to live. And I've never wanted to be the person that says, "the door is shut in [this town]." Because when you do that I think then my children won't be able to live here. But I still think…can we not find somewhere else? Is there not another way than to take this really crucial patch that's next to an urban wilderness and cemetery that's, you know, basically undeveloped with a riparian corridor through it? Then I think if I had tons of money I could buy it and keep it open. Then in order to get tons of money, what kind of person and what kind of businesses do I have to do in order to get that? And would I be selling my soul to the devil, figuratively and literally? And I get so *frustrated*... But at the same time it's a compromise. I grew up in a town, the town that I mentioned, of 850 people and county seat. It's been 850 for a hundred years, stopped growing economically. You got 10% of people there living on welfare. Young people leave. You know you've got to have some economic development or people, your family, can't stay there. So it's just very frustrating to try to figure out what can I compromise on? How do I play by the rules?

In this excerpt we can hear Lois mentally wrestling with the issues, trying to decide *how* to decide. Where is the line between land protection and economic viability? How does one decide?

Many of the activists demonstrated this complexity in terms of their understanding and compassion for others. Both Jane and Valerie discussed their realization that many people are "overwhelmed with their own lives," causing apathy and resistance to change. Kate noted that key factors in environmental problems have to do with poverty in developing countries, such as India and China, which lead to population explosion and the ever-growing demand for more goods and raw materials. Kate, Lois, and Sam all talked about identifying common ground, solution building, and providing alternatives, rather than simply pointing out environmental problems and blaming others.

It seems that this deepening understanding of the issues, and of the distinctly human elements involved, reflects a sympathy activists feel. They recognize that the issues are not black-and-white and that there are real, legitimate reasons for why people take action that may harm animals or the environment. Again, in Lois' words, they see that these people are individuals struggling to survive and do not necessarily make up "the monolith." At this stage, activists' frustration and anger appear to be directed more at broken systems or larger social constructs, such as poverty or corporatism, rather than at individuals.

Summary of self-estimations of change

In describing how they believe they have changed over the course of their activist careers, four main themes emerged. These included changes in approach, philosophy, and worldview; changes in personal growth and emotional reactions; relational changes and

the development of an activist community; and changes in deeper and more complex understanding.

In terms of changes in approach, activists made personal style and appearance changes. They developed a clearer understanding and direction related to their life's mission and purpose. They learned what they think works and how to target their actions more precisely and strategically toward those initiatives. Activists learned how to protect themselves from burnout by adapting their behaviors in order to take "the slow road." "Overarching worldviews" were developed with time, and activists became more realistic about what the realties of their lives would support in term of their activist work. For example, both Lois and Jane spoke of a desire to be more radical (e.g. living in a trailer and "doing things right" or going onto the ice to protest the seal clubbings) yet refrained due to familial obligations. Activists also became more realistic about the timeframe required for significant change. They sought to be respectful of others and create dialog, avoiding arguments and remaining personally open to ongoing change, as well. They do not see themselves as static or finished growing.

Personally, some of the activists reported becoming more self-confident, developing better people-skills. Some reported becoming more mature, more compassionate, less narcissistic and petty. With time they become "more comfortable in [their] skin," feeling more confident holding non-mainstream beliefs in a mainstream society.

In terms of relationships and community, activists reported deepening relationships due to their involvement, and a natural progression toward having a like-minded circle of friends. This community appears to grow through a combination of

attrition of old friends and new friendships made through activist involvement. The internet was also cited as providing a source and a forum for this sort of community development. Yet with the support they bring, activist communities also serve as a source of stress.

A last personal change evident in the activists' narratives was a deepening understanding of the complexity of the world. They have had to confront personal incongruities and hypocrisy. They have had to be thoughtful about why some people take action that harms the environment or wildlife, acknowledging the role that larger social constructs such as poverty play. Yet they have also become more empathic, acknowledging that people are "overwhelmed with their own lives." With complexity, attention turns toward solution-building and providing alternatives, rather than pointing fingers and casting blame.

Chapter Summary

To conclude this chapter on the maturing activist identity, a strongly emerging theme is the activists' quest for values congruence across domains. They have developed adaptive strategies to protect their peace of mind and sustain their involvement over time. They have become more emotionally resilient and choose optimism. They are realistic about change and limit what they are willing to take responsibility for in terms of large-scale change. They have cognitively adapted how they see others, moderating their views of non-activists (e.g. not "bad people" just unchanged). They have connected their activist beliefs about what is ethical and just with their spiritual and religious beliefs, providing more meaning to their work.

And through these strategies they have become more congruent. Their beliefs more closely match their actions. Their philosophy and approach more closely match their values. The bulk of their friendships and commitments reflect their causes. With time they have become more dedicated and committed, refining their effectiveness by adapting to the demands of an emotionally turbulent field. Stridency and conflict have been replaced with more moderate, compassionate views of non-activists. The sense of urgency to "make it stop now" has been subsumed by a long-range, balanced approach, allowing the activists to experience less driving guilt to commit more deeply and heavily. Activists carefully consider which projects to take on and are realistic about what change is likely to occur and in what time frame. They are careful to limit their own responsibility for change, replacing naïveté with realistic but hopeful optimism. Their values and actions have been connected to spiritual and religious leanings, providing a framework of meaning, a source of replenishment, and a powerful rationale for engagement. They see many shades of gray making up social problems, refraining from the simplistic thinking that may define earlier stages of identity development. Activists have realized they do not have to be ascetic radicals or pious hermits to accomplish positive change. Like small boulders that emerge from a creek, the rushing waters of conformity flowing around them, these activists provide a footpath across the mainstream, connecting with one another in activist communities.

In sum, the mature activist identity appears to be flexible, open-minded, understanding, compassionate, and well-versed in coping methods and life-balance strategies. Congruence between their beliefs and their lives is likely an unconscious goal, while effectiveness and meaningful engagement is the explicit goal. Wandering the

borders between idealism and cynicism, activists remain firmly realistic and hopeful. The next chapter will summarize activist identity development as a theoretical whole and a model will be presented.

Table 5 – Maturing activist identity experiences

Name	Age	Costs/ Criticism	Adaptive coping methods	Optimism	Limiting responsibility	Moderating views of others	Spiritual connection	Personal recognition of change
Ben	54	Yes	Yes	Pessimist (short run) Optimist (long run)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clara	89	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Dallas	32	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jane	50	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jennifer	28	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		No	Yes
Jessica	37	Yes		Pessimist			No	Yes
Kate	27	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Lois	50	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Robert	63	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Sam	28	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Trinity	41	Yes	Yes	Pessimist		Yes	Yes	Yes
Valerie	35	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	No	Yes
		12/12 = **100%**	11/12 = **91.6%**	9.5/12 = **79.1%**	7/12 = **58.3%**	7/12 = **58.3%**	9/12 = **75%**	12/12 = **100%**

* A blank field indicates that the topic was not directly discussed during the interview. This does not indicate that it is not a part of their experiences, but simply that it was not confirmed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A MODEL OF ACTIVIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

This chapter will summarize results pertaining to activist identity development, presenting an exploratory and tentative model of the major themes to emerge from this research. The model will be contrasted with existing models (e.g. the Cross Racial Identity Model, etc.), with a discussion of the similarities and differences between them. I will also examine findings through the lens of the traditional religious conversion experience and as functional religion. A section on prototypical stories and foregrounding difference between the activists will conclude this chapter, in order to present the essence of activist identity development without minimizing real differences that distinguish them. The next and concluding chapter will include limitations of this study and ideas for future research.

A Model of Activist Identity Development

This research began in pursuit of answering the question, "Are there prototypical identity development processes for social activism?" Do patterns exist? Are they similar to other processes of identity development?

Broadly, yes, similar patterns and processes are apparent. Admittedly, any theorizing based on the experiences of twelve geographically restricted individuals needs to be exploratory in nature. Further inquiry into other activist contexts and in other

locations is necessary. Nonetheless, activist identity development results emerging in this study largely mirror those found in other identity development models, lending strength to the validity of this model.

What most clearly emerges in terms of activist identity development is an initial tendency toward stridency, a process of overcoming it and at the same time adapting to the real mental and emotional difficulties inherent in a life of activism, and a quest for effective action and personal congruence across domains. Activist identity development appears to occur in a chronological, developmental way, unfolding as a process of learning and maturing over the years. Among this group of activists, the most diversity emerged in their early life experiences. Upon becoming activists they became remarkably similar in terms of what they experienced and how they changed. The following paragraphs will provide a summary of activists' change over time.

Pre-activist life

Many of these activists participated in some form of volunteer or activist activity in their youth and were supported by their parents, both emotionally and instrumentally, for doing so. Being encouraged and reinforced to participate by respected authorities, as well as meeting with success early in life, both contributed to activists' desires to sustain participation. A few were socialized to activism by their parents, but most were not. Parents, rather, embedded many values in their soon-to-be activist children, such as values related to living frugally, working hard, and helping others.

Conforming to the results of recent research on environmental activists' early lives (e.g. Wells & Lekies, 2006), many of the activists were exposed to "wild nature" as children, growing up on farms or going camping or hiking on family vacations during

their youth. Some younger activists were exposed to an integrated school curriculum related to environmental awareness or protection. Older activists reported inspiration or personal change due to participation in or witnessing of significant historical events (e.g. desegregation, Vietnam War).

Activists appear to be intuitive and responsive to the sort of transformational change predicated by epiphanies. When they experienced profound realizations or sudden insight, they paid attention to their gut reactions and changed their own lives in response. Epiphanies served as moments of contact, bridging the activists to something new, causing a breakthrough in terms of understanding, empathy, and personal power. Interestingly, the two participants who do not identify as activists did not report epiphanies or sudden turning points in their personal histories.

Decision to act

The decision to act was the moment of departure for many activists. The epiphany may have been powerful, but they followed it up by carrying through. Deciding to take action initiates two common themes for these activists: single-minded resolve and the role of emotion. In describing their initial forays into activism, participants used words like "had to," "no choice," and "got to do something." For many, becoming involved was a moral imperative, not something they could choose to do or not. By taking action, they were taking the first steps in becoming more congruent, beginning to align their beliefs and their actions. The idealized self and the actual self begins to draw more closely together.

The second theme concerning emotion is particularly salient at this stage for activists. Upon "contact" with the new information or insights, activists described a range

of emotions. A few commented on the positive feelings they experienced at "joining up," and coming into communion with other activists. Most, however, mentioned sadness, grief, depression, anger, rage, despair, and anxiety. While all of those included in this study have obviously sustained as activists over the years, this could be a critical moment for potential activists. Coping with painful emotions at the outset of involvement requires emotional resilience and hope. For those without reserves of energy, availability to become involved, or emotional resilience, responding in a helpless or cynical way might be an easier course of action than confronting a difficult reality.

Prior to involvement, one participant reported actively avoiding threatening stimuli related to her cause as it was simply too overwhelming for her to think about. Yet she later went on to become its larger-than-life champion, making great personal sacrifices to achieve her goals. In this light, taking action might also be seen as a very real and effective coping mechanism for activists, helping to alleviate the emotions inspired by their new knowledge.

It is also as they are first taking action that activists began to realize they can adapt their activism to their personalities and do not have to embody cookie-cutter stereotypes projected by media or propaganda. By merging their existing beliefs, religious, spiritual, political, or otherwise, with their new involvement in activism, they became more authentic and more true to who they want to be. This extends to their decision to label what they do as activism or not. Some identify with terms such as "community organizer" or "environmental scientist" rather than activist, in part due to the political and anarchic connotations of the word. Again, it is interesting that only one

participant associated positive, hopeful connotations with the word "activist" and she is one of the two who does not identify as an activist.

The budding activist identity

After the decision to act, activists plunge into their work and begin learning the "what" and "how" of activism. All of the activists were noticeably well-informed about the issues in which they participate, able to cite facts, legal precedents, studies, and statistics. Most described a discrete education period at the beginning of their involvement, during which time they read extensively on their subjects of interest. This, coupled with on-the-job learning, provided the content knowledge related to environmental and animal protection work, or the "what" of their activism. Education on the issues was used to bolster positions, cement credibility, and renew "fighting spirit[s]." Knowledge about an issue was also connected by some to a sense of responsibility to take action: once you know something and can no longer claim ignorance, you are culpable if you do not take action. Possessing the knowledge requires action. This line of reasoning also reflects the single-minded resolve and determination that characterize activists.

Seeking out information on their causes may well reflect the information orientation described by Berzonsky (1994). In researching Marcia's (1966) identity development stages, Berzonsky (1989, 1992, 1994; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992) examined cognitive styles associated with each stage. Individuals in a moratorium (identity questioning) and achievement (comfort with identity) stage tend to hold an information orientation, characterized by seeking out self-salient information (Berzonsky, 1992, 1994). These individuals were more likely to show a need for cognition, openness to new experiences, introspection, and active coping (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992).

These traits can easily be applied to activists. They desire information on issues they see as important and issues they see as reflecting their values. They are open to change, ready to explore their values, growing emotionally and mentally rather than remaining static. They are also largely thoughtful as a group. They describe the time they have spent thinking about how to present themselves and how to be effective. They have adapted new strategies to better cope with the difficulties of activism. Further research on the cognitive styles of activists presents a ripe field for future inquiry.

Trial and error, experience over time, and modeling the behaviors of respected mentors taught activists the "how" of activism, or what to do in order to be effective. Learning was frequently collaborative and occurred in tandem with other activists and/or mentors. These important role models also helped reinforce the point that activists could adapt their work to their personalities. They could be socially non-conforming, or integrate their Christianity with their "counter-culture" activism. In short, they could do it however was comfortable for them, in whatever way they chose to authentically represent their personalities, so long as that expression furthered the goal of being effective. Here again the quest for personal congruence and effective action are paramount.

Nowhere is this more apparent than when activists described grappling with the growing pains inherent in beginning involvement. Most of the activists described an initial period of stridency towards others when sharing their beliefs. For some the strong emotions they had felt leading them to take action crystallized into anger and rage, which came out when activists were provoked or upset. For others, this stridency may have been more of an elitist, "insider-outsider" phenomenon, given that the new activists were now in possession of knowledge and selflessly taking action on serious issues. It is difficult to

put one's self into a public position of speaking out and taking criticism, which might naturally inspire personal pride and a "sense of identity" (per Sam) for doing so. Stridency may well be the collective glue that binds some new members to the movement.

One interesting result to emerge from this sample is that two of the three who did not recall a period of stridency began their activism in their 40's and 50's, while the rest of the activists began in their youth or 20's. The two taking up activism later in life did not report being overly strident with others, but both recalled distinct feelings of anger. It could be that when individuals come to activism at a more mature age they are able to resist the urge to become obnoxiously vocal with others. That is, stridency may be a developmental issue, rather than an identity issue. This, too, is a fruitful area for further research.

It seems logical enough that activists, having recently experienced a significant transformative life change, would want to share that awesome experience with significant others. When they did so, many of the activists cited relationship trouble occurring after their involvement began. Relationships with family members, friends, and co-workers became strained due to the activists' increased stridency and sudden preoccupation with their cause. Some of the activists were teased by family members and many got into arguments and confrontations with intimate others.

It is within this context that we see a strong parallel to Rambo's (1993) model of conversion. Like new religious converts or "born again" Christians, they are filled with zeal and want to preach. They want to share their gospel with others and make new

converts. The term "convert" was used by a couple of activists to refer to changing others and another participant referred to activists as equal parts "evangelists and agitators."

This time also appears to present activists with a critical period of development. They begin to realize the tenuous nature of their socially marginalized position. That is, it is a lonely place to be, and while ideologically they will most likely remain outside the mainstream, actively reinforcing their own alienation by being obnoxiously strident and provoking or participating in conflict with family members will only serve to make matters worse. Leading by example becomes a viable and frequently used method of staying true to one's values without added provocation.

Three activists described intense "identity crises" occurring within the first few months of their participation. It was during this personal evolution that they had to consciously sort through their values and their goals, in order to remain active. Whether or not undertaken in as explicit a manner, the other activists, too, began to adopt new behaviors. Because if, as it appears, an activist's main goals are to become personally congruent and professionally effective, they have to adapt new strategies. If they do not, continued social alienation, resulting in burnout or perhaps affiliation with radical fringe groups, is likely to occur. Further research on the tangle of emotion and stridency occurring early in activists' careers is needed as this appears to be a particularly vulnerable and critical moment in their development.

The maturing activist identity

Activists are constantly receiving the message that they are different from others. Whether reflected through teasing from family and friends, being silenced in a meeting, or being flipped "the bird" by passer-bys at demonstrations, they are told in numerous

ways that their beliefs are not those of the norm. These accumulating messages, combined with the real costs activists pay, provide more rationale and opportunity for activists to adapt themselves and their lives to their activism. With more time and deeper personal, ideological, and in some cases financial commitments to their causes, activists now have more to lose if they burn out. They need close, supportive relationships to help them sustain. They need to remain positive and upbeat. They need to take encouragement and recognize victory wherever they can, no matter how small the accomplishment.

With time activists also become more firm in their beliefs, more sure and unshakeable in terms of what they believe and why. Becoming comfortable with a unique set of beliefs, while operating within a mainstream society, helps activists learn to defuse the defensiveness and isolation that may harm them early on in their development. Making changes appears to help smooth the transition from vocal, emotional activism to firm, professional activism. Whether consciously or not, activists began to make strategic adaptations, such as self-soothing to increase their emotional resilience; "choosing" optimism to surmount the depressing nature of the work or the slow pace of progress; limiting personal responsibility for change; softening their approach to non-activists by becoming more compassionate and less rigid ("bad people" vs. "people with unchanged behaviors"); and more deeply imbuing their activism with meaning by connecting it with spiritual and religious beliefs.

These sustaining activists seem to possess a flexible, as opposed to driven, commitment to their activism (Gomes & Maslach, 1991a; Gomes & Maslach, 1991b). That is, they did not, as implied by Jamison and Wenk's (2000) analysis of activism as functional religion, continually redouble their efforts in order to sustain their passion.

Gomes and Maslach found that this emotionally exhausting strategy, which they described as a *driven commitment*, led to greater burnout than a *flexible commitment* (Gomes & Maslach, 1991a; Gomes & Maslach, 1991b). The activists included in this study learned to nurture themselves and take time off if they needed it, in order to prevent burnout and sustain over the long term.

In looking back over their own development as activists, the participants offer a glimpse into how this process is personally experienced. They described a series of learning tasks and personal growth over the years. Activists described changes in worldview, approach, and philosophy of activism, learning to be more patient with the pace of change and learning how to have more interpersonal finesse. They described seeing changes in their personal growth, developing more confidence and people skills, and changes in their emotional reactions, learning greater unflappability in the face of provocation. Relational changes also occurred, deepening relationships with intimate others and with fellow activists. Lastly, they noted changes in their understanding of their work and the issues, seeing problems in a more complex way based on many different viewpoints and realties.

This group of activists was quite clear on what they believe is effective action, as well as how to go about achieving that end. Over the years they have refined their skill and added to their store of knowledge regarding the problems, no doubt through much question and answer with proponents, as well as with antagonists. Their skin has thickened, but they have also learned greater patience and many developed more empathy for the "other" who makes up the opposition.

Activists have consciously explored their values, contrasting them with those of mainstream society. Maintaining their positions and sustaining their beliefs seem to hint at the depth of activists' deep subscription in them. Similarly, in terms of activists' remarkable openness to new experiences, values exploration, and intuitiveness, they appear to have progressed smoothly through Habermas' Universalistic stage of ego development (Habermas, 1979). Not content to remain within a normative framework, these people question the mainstream. They ask why things have to be a certain way and are ready for and adaptable to change. Habermas' final stage of ego development postulates that individuals will have thoughtfully and skeptically explored traditional social norms, arriving at a consistent, comfortable identity reflecting their own personal belief system (Habermas, 1979). These individuals appear to have done just that.

An exploratory model

In examining these activists' narratives, a five stage Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID) appears to emerge: Contact, Commitment to Action, Stridency, Adaptation, and Deepened Understanding. Broadly, these stages resemble those of the Cross Model (Cross, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and its derivatives. Differences and similarities will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

The first stage, Contact, occurs when potential activists receive information regarding injustice, abuse, or potential personal threat that leads to significant concern and personal dissonance. Some individuals realize the role they play in furthering abuse or injustice ("You just eat [meat] like everybody else because you're not really thinking about it"). Some recognize that the magnitude of a perceived threat requires life-changing action ("What's the point in being a vet if there's not a planet for animals to thrive on?").

Contact with new information initiates an emotional response of varying degrees, which leads individuals to a decision to take action. Not all individuals will experience a Contact stage as some will be more socialized to activist issues by parents, school curricula, media, and propaganda.

The decision to take action initiates the next stage, Commitment to Action, during which a common first task is to seek out more information. For some this may be a discrete research period, whereas for others it may be more informal and on-the-"job." During the Commitment to Action stage, new activists are learning more information related to their chosen causes, which serves to deepen their emotional responses. Emotions may include anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, empathic sadness, or even the deep warmth that comes with the meaningfulness of committing to something one believes in. Taking action helps mitigate these intense emotions and begins the process of deepening personal congruence that unfolds over the activists' development. The sense of belonging to a new movement, coupled with a growing understanding of the injustice, abuse, or threat leads to the next stage, Stridency.

During this period of Stridency, activists are vocal and openly provocative, sometimes even aggressive, in sharing information related to their causes. Confrontation and conflict are common in this stage with concomitant emotions such as outrage, disdain, and superiority at having "insider information" and selflessly taking action. This stage likely intersects with general developmental processes, so older activist initiates may experience this stage as one of anger or depression (anger turned inward) requiring introspection and adjustment. With time, committed activists realize the unsustainable nature of this position, recognizing the need to make adaptations to their approach for the

sake of their own peace of mind, as well as for their continued effectiveness within the movement. This may be the most vulnerable period for activists, when the passion may be so consuming they burn up and burnout, leaving the movement, or become radicalized.

During the Adaptation stage, activists begin to consciously and unconsciously take actions to help ensure their "staying power" and continued effectiveness. This period sees a softening in their stance toward non-activists and a loosening of the rigid, black-and-white thinking characteristic of the Stridency period. They become interested in more deeply understanding their opposition, sometimes leading to an empathic compassion. They come to realize "You can never do everything and the sooner you realize that, the easier it is to try to live as an activist and actually get something done," (per Jane) which affords them greater productivity with less emotional turmoil. They experience less guilt if they take time off from their activist endeavors and become more realistic about what is possible and in what timeframe. Activist activities are more fluidly woven into daily activities and their activist ethics become more firmly entrenched in who they are. Activists become more personally congruent as their lives grow to reflect these changes – they have developed more friendships with people who share their values, they are members of an activist community, they have connected their spiritual and religious beliefs with their activism, they live their values.

The final stage, Deepened Understanding, sees the activist as having more fully matured as both a person and as someone who takes action for causes in which they believe. During this stage activists become even more nuanced in their views on the issues. They have accumulated a vast store of knowledge from multiple perspectives

regarding the problems and they have carefully reflected on these perspectives, affording respect for others' opinions. While this does not imply they agree with their opposition, they have tried as honestly and authentically as they can to understand them ("I realized that they were people who just had a wrong perception, a wrong idea of making money. It isn't only [that company who] has greed in their eyes. Lots of people have greed, just people like you and me"). They recognize the multitude of larger, cultural structures and political institutions that keep issues from being resolved. They see the complexity of the situation and seek complex answers, avoiding the false comfort of reductionistic oversimplification.

It may be that not all activists reach this stage of development, as recognizing complexity may be related to Kohlberg's higher stages of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg's Post-Conventional stage of moral reasoning confers more importance to impartiality, perspective-taking, and introspection related to what contributes to a healthy society (Kohlberg, 1973; Kohlberg & Higgins, 1984). Kohlberg postulates that advancement in moral reasoning is not related to maturation or socialization, but rather to *introspection* on the issues (Kohlberg, 1981). For some activists, impartiality on such emotion-laden issues may be difficult if not impossible.

The next section will contrast this model of activist identity development with existing models of identity development.

Comparison of models

Cross initially proposed a five-stage, sequential model describing African American identity change as they become more aware of their own racial identity within the context of modern American life (Cross, 1978; Cross 1995). The model postulated

five stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment, with the fifth stage being optional. This model was later revised to collapse the fourth and fifth stages together (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and much more complexity and detail was added.

The Cross model was later adapted by Downing and Roush (1985) to describe feminist identity development, and Helms (1990a; 1990b) to describe "womanist" development. These models share a common course. All begin with an introducing event, wherein the individual experiences discrimination or personal dissonance. This pushes the individual into a period of "readiness," allowing them to be open to significant personal change (Downing & Roush, 1985, p. 698). At this point the person engages with others in a movement that counteracts discrimination, often becoming deeply and militantly involved. Later individuals attain a deeper understanding of the movement's ethic and incorporate more balanced views toward non-movement others. Lastly, these models predict some individuals will go on to engage in further activism, dedicating their lives to the reduction of discrimination (Cross, 1978; Downing & Roush, 1985; Helms, 1990a; 1990b).

In this proposed Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID), the Contact stage refers to being given new information or having some sort of profound experience that leads to dramatic change. Thus, this stage specifically refers to change and therefore subsumes the need for a pre-change stage (e.g. Cross' (1995) Pre-Encounter, Downing and Roush's (1985) Passive Acceptance, and Helms' (1990a; 1990b) Pre-Encounter). Again not everyone will experience a Contact stage due to parental socialization and the availability of media on the television and internet.

The Contact stage does appear to closely mirror the next stages of the aforementioned models: Cross' (1995) Encounter, Downing and Roush's (1985) Revelation, and Helms' (1990b) Encounter. In addition, the MAID Contact stage bears similarity to the first stage of Janet Helms' (1984) White Racial Identity Development Model (WRID), which is also called the Contact stage.

The models of racial, feminist, and womanist identity development were specifically chosen as comparison models due to their predication of identity change on the experience of discrimination and oppression. Helms (1984) based her work on culture shock research, describing how White individuals gradually become aware of their racial identity and their culpability in perpetuating racism, whether intentional or not. She proposed six stages: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy (Sue, Carter, Casas, Fouad, Ivey, Jensen, LaFramboise, Manese, Ponterotto, & Vazquez-Nutall, 1998). This model has received numerous criticisms (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994; Sue & Sue, 2003). Concerns include the model's conceptualization of identity development in White individuals as a similar process to that of non-dominant culture individuals, as well as the idea that the model actually describes White individuals reactions and changing views of other racial groups as opposed to "White identity development" itself (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994).

Helms' WRID model bears similarity to activist identity development in its first stage, Contact (and this name was chosen for the first stage of the MAID to reflect this), and it is also quite similar to the initial stages of the other models described (e.g. an individual experiences an action that jolts them out of complacency and forces them to

examine an issue or problem from a different perspective). However, the rest of Helms' (1984) WRID stages deal largely with how White people acknowledge racism, retreat from it, acknowledge it again in a superficial manner, then in a deeper, more guilt-laden manner, and finally emerge as multicultural individuals who confront racism on multiple levels. While some similarities may exist, the WRID focuses more on change based upon guilt and the experience of culpability, as opposed to the experience of discrimination and oppression. It may well be, however, that for some activists in certain contexts, identity change is based on guilt and culpability (e.g. omnivores who want to become vegetarian but struggle to make the transition or Jessica's assertion that once you have certain information you must act on it or you are complicit). Yet it seems that most of the activists in this sample acted in response to what is felt personally as the experience of injustice, abuse, or threat (e.g. it's immoral to torture animals for food consumption; it's wrong to build a nuclear power plant that can harm or kill people). For this reason, it appears that overall the MAID bears more resemblance to the racial, feminist, and womanist models.

The second stage of the MAID, Commitment to Action, departs from the aforementioned models. They received new information (Contact). Then they decided to act on it (Commitment to Action). The decision to act, and the way in which that was approached, seemed to embody its own distinct period. Many people receive information pertaining to a cause. Deciding to act on it separates the activists from the non-activists. Activists decided to dedicate themselves to their cause and went about educating themselves on it.

The third MAID stage, however, Stridency, again closely mirrors other identity development models (e.g. Cross' (1995) Immersion/Emersion, Downing and Roush's (1985) Embeddedness/Emanation, Helms (1990b) Immersion/Emersion). These stages see the individuals becoming more militant, more vocal, and more embedded within a community of like-minded individuals. There is a backlash in attitudes toward the opponent, thinking becomes oversimplified and polarized. Beliefs are held in a rigid and stubborn manner. Confrontation with others and conflict in relationships is common. Downing and Roush (1985) speculated that women in the Embeddedness/Emanation stage may get divorced. Some of the activists interviewed mentioned this possibility, as well, stating that they had seen the lack of balance in new activists' lives and the difference in values leading to relational conflict.

The MAID's Adaptation stage seems to reflect the Emanation portion of Downing and Roush's (1985) Embeddedness/Emanation stage as well as their Synthesis stage. It is within the Emanation period that the authors proposed women soften their stance toward males, becoming more reflective and less rigid in their thinking, which allows them to move into the Synthesis stage. In Downing and Roush's (1985) Synthesis stage, the woman "returns to herself" in the sense that she experiences a reintegration of her identity, melding her new feminist beliefs with who she was before the identity change. In her Womanist identity model Helms (1990b) noted that women move into the Internalization stage as they begin to craft their own personal definition of what it means to be a woman. This clearly reflects some of the work the activists did trying to merge their personalities and their activism, deciding what being an activist means personally to them. Activists in the Adaptation stage begin to move away from rigid thinking, soften

their stance toward non-activist others, and become more congruent in who they are and how they live their beliefs.

Cross (1978) initially proposed separate Internalization and Internalization-Commitment stages, after which Downing and Roush (1985) based their model of feminist identity development. Both Cross and Downing and Roush postulated that the fifth and final stage (Internalization-Commitment and Active Commitment, respectively) would be characterized by a dedication of one's life to activism aimed at reducing the experience of discrimination and oppression. Downing and Roush (1985) speculated that few women actually entered the fifth stage.

Later Cross (1991) revised his model, collapsing Internalization and Internalization-Commitment into one stage (Internalization), and concluding that activism was an optional activity some individuals undertook. In the revised model, the defining characteristic of the Internalization stage is that individuals no longer use stereotypic thinking when conceptualizing race (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). This might reflect the acknowledging of complexity that is seen in the MAID's Deepened Understanding stage. Activists here are no longer oversimplifying their understanding of opponents or the issues, just as the African Americans in the Internalization stage are no longer employing stereotypic thinking related to their own racial identity or to that of others. Another obvious difference is that Cross' Internalization stage and Downing and Roush's Active Commitment stage refer to the optional engagement in activism, while activists are, by definition, engaged in activism from the beginning.

Models of gay and lesbian identity development also describe identity change based on the perception of discrimination and injustice. Here we see less similarity than

with the models of African American racial identity, feminist, and womanist identity. The Cass model (1984) of Homosexual Identity Formation describes the gradual realization of difference from others in terms of sexual orientation (Identity confusion); a struggle with a sense of duplicity and isolation while others continue to believe they are heterosexual (Identity Comparison); exploring one's acceptance of one's orientation (Identity Tolerance); coming out (Identity Acceptance); intense association with GLBTQ individuals and political efforts (Identity Pride); and lastly developing a balanced sense of comfort and self-respect based on an integrated, well-rounded gay identity (Identity Synthesis) (Cass, 1984). What appears to be most similar between this model and the MAID are the Identity Acceptance (Commitment), Identity Pride (Stridency), and Identity Synthesis (Adaptation) stages. Activists seem to spend time coming to grips with their own decision to commit to activism, taking time to educate themselves on the issues. The intense affiliation seen in the Identity Pride stage seems to reflect the Stridency period and the balanced aspects of the Identity Synthesis stage resemble the many cognitive strategies employed to help activists become more balanced and secure in their roles.

One considerable difference between all of these models and the MAID is that those other models address identity change based on a personal exposure to discrimination, injustice, or prejudice. The Cross model is based on an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions related to his or her Reference Group Orientation (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), which are the socially ascribed aspects of one's identity (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation). Being an activist is an adopted identity, and an activist can be visually indistinguishable from any other member of society.

Activists do report experiencing discrimination, injustice, and prejudice, but not until *after* they have become involved. Yet the participants in this study reported a motivation to become involved because of what they perceived to be discrimination and injustice being enacted on other beings (i.e. animals, nature). Once they become activists, they report feeling different from other people, isolated from the mainstream. They are repeatedly given the message that they are different. They are made to pay costs in order to maintain their activist identity. Their experience of difference relates to their deepest, most cherished values, which is the core of their being. Thus, it may be that the fulcrum for change is the *recognition* of injustice, in general. That is, Cross' model may describe a broader process of change than one limited to African Americans and their recognition of racial discrimination. Downing and Roush's model and Helms' Womanist model may describe more than the change in women as they become aware of sexism and inequality. The process of change described by the MAID may not be unique to the experience of activists.

Rather, it seems that all of these models describe a similar phenomenon. People see injustice. They cannot deny it. They feel compelled to do something about it. Their identities change because of this awareness. It may be that the essence of what is captured across models is the awakening of a social conscience in relation to a particular phenomenon (e.g. racism, sexism, genocide, animal abuse, ecocide). People are called awake, and by waking up – they change.

Summary of the model and comparisons

In this section a five stage Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID) was proposed. The MAID appears to be constructed of the following five stages: Contact,

Commitment to Action, Stridency, Adaptation, and Deepened Understanding. This model is similar to existing models of identity development with the exception of not having a pre-change stage and that it is concerned with people who *are* activists, while activism is an optional course of action occurring in the final stages of existing models. It was also proposed that these models all reflect an awakening to injustice, rather than specifically pertaining to a particular group's change over time.

Conversion and functional religion

It is also possible to interpret identity change through a different lens. Rambo (1993) offered a six-stage model of religious conversion, hypothesizing a crisis, a quest, an encounter, an interaction, a commitment, and consequences. Converts may experience a life crisis, which might initiate a quest for "something more" (Kahn & Greene, 2004, p. 235). Few of the activists described a life crisis leading to their involvement, although most described epiphanies. Most described a personality style inclined to seek "something more" from life, to find meaning and purpose for their existences. Thus, these activists might be pursuing the active approach to transformation described by Rambo as a precipitating event leading to conversion (Rambo, 1993).

In Rambo's model the quest is followed by the encounter stage between the convert and the converter, and during this time the convert is endowed with a new belief system and new rituals and symbols designed to reinforce and consecrate daily religious life. They may experience emotional relief and are granted access to religious power through prayer, healing, etc. (Kahn & Greene, 2004). Activists also gain a new belief system and lots of new knowledge about their particular cause. There are new rituals, such as participating in demonstrations and writing letters and emails to key decision-

makers. Engaging in activism may help activists cope with the powerful feelings that inspired them to engage, which might provide some emotional relief.

Returning to Rambo's model, the convert then enters the interaction stage, which embeds the individual within a new culture. This may involve varying degrees of isolation and more intensive education regarding the new religion. During this stage, the convert develops new relationships and a new shared vocabulary with individuals already embedded within the religion. The convert may experience changes in roles and expected behaviors (Kahn & Greene, 2004). Activists are also newly embedded within a culture. They may experience some isolation (alienation) from the mainstream and many reported public criticism and ridicule due to their involvement. They make new friendships and develop an activist community, which brings with it new lingo, a shared vocabulary of activism. They definitely take on new roles and will be expected to take (or refrain from taking) certain behaviors.

Converts in Rambo's model are purported to then develop a deepened dedication in the commitment stage, usually marked by a formal conversion ritual (e.g. baptism), and finally the convert moves into the consequences stage, learning to cope with the reality of a life-long conversion. Activists, too, experience deepened dedication. They commit varying degrees of personal resources and infuse their activism into their daily lives. While their may be no formal conversion ritual, activists take their beliefs public and typically engage in "witnessing" to others about their cause. They also have to learn how to cope with how their lives have changed. They have to learn to take specific self-care measures to sustain their commitment over time.

Activism can also be examined as functional religion. Yinger's (1970) criteria for functional religion do appear to broadly overlap with activist changes: for some there is a conversion experience, many become involved with a like-minded community and adhere to a new belief system. There are overt and expected behavior codes, and activists are surrounded by ritual and symbol. One study posited that activism is a quasi-spiritual choice made by jaded and educated individuals who seek secular avenues for expressing their spirituality (Jamison el al., 2000).

However, many of the activists noted that they see their activism as an *extension* of their religious faith. Others talked about how activism ties into their spirituality. Looking at activism solely as functional religion likely places too much emphasis on the group processes of religion and may be more applicable to certain activist groups, as opposed to activism, in general. It may be that certain insulated, tight-knit activist communities inspire a certain level of group-think and dogmatic adherence that is not reflected in the activists in this sample.

On the contrary, most of the activists talked about moving away from dogma. While they did experience dogmatic thinking while in the Stridency stage, they rather quickly moved past that type of thinking, and doing so likely protected their survival as activists over the life course. Thus, it may be that activism mimics functional religion during the Stridency period, when activists are new and zealous and hungry to congregate and propagate. It does not appear to serve as functional religion beyond that stage, but rather seems to deepen spiritual and religious feelings on the part of already believing activists.

Summary of conversion and functional religion

It appears that there is some similarity between a traditional model of religious conversion and activist identity development. However, it does not appear that the activists in this sample used their participation in activism as functional religion. For those holding religious or spiritual beliefs, their activism appeared to deepen these experiences. For those who reported no religious or spiritual beliefs, involvement might have provided more meaning and depth to their lives, but did not appear to exhibit the level of dogmatic adherence and cult-like tones described by Jamison el al., 2000, in their examination of a particular animal rights group in the US and Switzerland. Activism might serve as functional religion during the Stridency phase, and might be more readily apparent within particular organizations, rather than extending to all activism.

Prototypical stories and foregrounding difference

The philosophical underpinnings of this research are based upon the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm (Glesne, 1999) which recognizes multiple realities and multiple meanings, as opposed to attempting to present a logico-positivist "Truth." Therefore, in examining the emerging themes in this study, it was important to avoid over-generalization. When themes emerged, finding discrepancy and difference helped capture the richness and complexity of these human stories. Prototypical stories of activism do appear to exist, but so do marginal and overlooked stories.

The strongest prototypical story of activism, or the "essence" of activist identity development, involves an individual who becomes involved in activism at a relatively young age, in their youth or early adulthood. The individual experiences some sort of triggering event which leads to an epiphany, related to the need for action or to how one

can take action. Strong emotions propel the individual to seek out information related to the problem and become involved in carefully organized efforts to counteract the problem. The individual finds it difficult to resist sharing this information and may do so in an especially vocal, perhaps obnoxious manner, before mellowing in their approach to others. Consciously and unconsciously the individual adopts certain protective behaviors to help them sustain their commitment and passion over the long run. With continued exposure to activism, activists become more nuanced in their understanding of the issues.

This prototypical story seems to be embodied by the experiences of the "core" group of activists in this study – Valerie, Sam, Lois, Kate, Jane, Dallas, and Ben. These activists share very similar themes across their experience. All came to activism early in their lives, all recall experiencing a period of stridency that mellowed with time, all readily identify with activism aims if not the specific label, and all are dedicated, energetic individuals who have sustained over the long term, deepening their view of the problems and the larger structures supporting those problems. Robert's experience is similar on many levels, but his description of his involvement appears to reflect a much more "serendipitous" than planned approach. He appears to be especially intuitive and willing to allow his ethics to lead him from one chance path to another as they present themselves over the course of his life.

Trinity and Clara share the prototypical story of becoming passionately involved in activism later in life. Trinity's involvement in activism, six months at the time of her interview, is too short to determine how her activist development will grow over time, although she, too, appears to be progressing along a similar path despite a relatively late entrée into activism. Her emotional experience is quite similar to Clara's, who also

entered activism later in life. Both Clara and Trinity appear to share a similar emotional experience to the core group of activists with the exception of their Stridency phase, which was marked by the internalization of deep emotions, depression and anger, rather than the externalization of these emotions, as demonstrated by stridency toward others.

A last prototypical story appears to reflect a desire to live one's values in a manner deemed personally appropriate, without adherence to traditional social constructions of activism. Jessica and Jennifer were specifically chosen for this study because of their involvement in activist-type behaviors coupled with their lack of identification as activists. Their experience appears to be somewhat unique from the other participants in this study, and they also appear to be unique from one another.

One purpose of this study was to examine whether individuals who participate in more subtle forms of activism, like Jennifer, experience identity change similar to those activists who are more radical, vocal, and organized. With Jennifer this appears to be the case. She has not been the type of activist who organizes demonstrations or participates in protests, although she has organized large fundraising, pet-adoption efforts. However, she has not shied away from explicitly telling people what she believes and why, despite her recognition that this makes people uncomfortable.

Jennifer appears to be more like the other activists than Jessica. She has engaged in activist type behaviors since an early age, she described a Stridency phase similar to those described by the other activists, and she uses many of the self-care strategies characteristic of the Adaptations stage. Jennifer describes herself as optimistic and stated that she does not identify as an activist because she sees that as connoting anger, violence, rioting, picketing, etc. Toward the end of her interview, while reflecting on how

she has recruited and trained numerous volunteers herself, she stated, "I don't often use the word activist, but I guess it's kind of appropriate, isn't it? I just see it as such a negative the word."

Jessica, however, appears to be considerably different from the other activists who participated in this interview. Most notably, she is the only person interviewed who interprets the word "activist" as having a hopeful, idealistic connotation. This interpretation further separates her from possibly identifying as an activist as she describes herself as a "defeatist" who takes action out of anxiety and feelings of culpability. This is also a notable difference. Whereas the other activists take action based on their ethics or their desire to see a change in the world, and actively contribute to that change, Jessica takes action in order to cope with fear, anxiety, and guilt. Some of the other activists have described using action as a coping method, but this appears to function as a minor motivation, rather than as the predominant driving force behind their activism.

A core element of the activist repertoire seems to be outreach, and the willingness to share one's ideas and beliefs with others. Jessica specifically retreats from this, as she does not see herself as particularly able to persuade when in dialogue with someone who does not share her values. She noted that she admires people who can engage in this sort of activism, but recognizes that this approach does not fit her personality.

Jessica, like Jennifer, takes more subtle forms of activism. During college she participated in numerous demonstrations, and occasionally will do that now if the impetus is particularly salient and important to her (e.g. prior to the initiation of the Iraq War in 2003). However, she describes being most comfortable in contexts that allow her

to live her values. She volunteers regularly, sends emails, and makes targeted product consumption choices. Like Dallas, she was raised by parents who modeled activism as she was growing up. Like Jennifer, she did not recall having experienced any sort of epiphany in terms of "awakening" a social conscience. Jennifer's involvement in activism appears to be more of a personal, private desire to live her values and to do so in the way that most fits her personality. Adapting one's activism to one's personality is a shared experience for all of the activists, and may indicate that Jessica shares some activist identity processes, but processes that are unfolding in a unique manner from the rest of the activists.

Most significantly, Jessica does not consider herself an activist. Even Jennifer admits that "activist" might be an appropriate label for herself. Yet Jessica, when describing her lack of identification with the term, referred to a difficulty assigning herself with any label. Thus, examining the identity processes occurring for her might be particularly inconclusive.

Summary of prototypical stories

This section has attempted to trace the essence of activism, outlining the prototypical stories that emerged during the analysis of participant narratives. A dominant prototypical story captures the experience of eight of the activists, and this story describes what can be seen as "classic" activist identity development (e.g. becoming an activist before or during college, being vocal and loud, mellowing with time). However, two other prototypical stories also emerged: the first makes room for entering activism later in life with consequent emotional differences; the second involves action-taking that resembles activism without the confines of a label. All three of these stories describe the

identity development of dedicated individuals over time. This section attempted to point out the essence of activist identity development, while also foregrounding difference among the stories, in order to refrain from over-generalizing and further marginalizing the experience of these unique individuals.

Chapter summary

This chapter serves as conclusive summary of this research on activist identity development. First, activist identity development was summarized as a chronological narrative, describing pre-activist life, the decision to act, the budding activist identity, the and the maturing activist identity. Activists appear to move through a series of developmental stages, learning about an issue, becoming involved, having emotional reactions, educating themselves, becoming strident or depressed, mellowing somewhat, and learning self-care strategies to prolong involvement. Activists' main conscious goal appears to be effectiveness and meaningful engagement, while congruence between their beliefs and their lives is likely an overriding unconscious goal.

Next, an exploratory Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID) was presented, postulating five stages: Contact, Commitment to Action, Stridency, Adaptation, and Deepened Understanding. In general terms these stages resemble those of existing models of identity development (e.g. the Cross Model, Downing and Roush's model of feminist identity development; Helms' Womanist and White Racial Identity Development model, and models of gay identity development.). Differences and similarities were examined, with the main similarities including the match-up between the MAID's Stridency phase and the existing models Immersion/Emersion militancy and rage characteristics. Another common similarity was the way individuals in all of the

models sought out and developed like-minded communities and demonstrated a mellowing over time. The main differences between the MAID and these models include the MAID's lack of a pre-change stage and that activism is considered an optional course of action taken in the last stages of those models.

This chapter then examined activist identity development through the lens of religious conversion and as functional religion. Activist identity development appears to be more similar to a form of conversion experience, in certain individuals, and does not appear to serve as functional religion. The conversion experience is, of course, predicated on a lack of exposure to a problem followed by exposure. That is, if individuals were raised by parents who endorsed a particular political ideology and raised their children to take activist action, the individual would already be sensitized to the problem, precluding a conversion.

This chapter concluded by examining prototypical stories of activism, as well as differences between the activists that made their stories and experience unique. There does appear to be a "typical" prototypical story, as well as two lesser prototypical stories. The MAID reflects the dominant prototypical story, outlining the general identity development of a typical activist over time. However, each person's development will be as unique and nuanced as they are, as individuals. The MAID captures the broad processes, but the innumerable small differences cannot be subsumed into a model.

The next chapter will conclude this study. I will examine implications, limitations of this study, and fruitful areas for needed research. An appendix will include advice the seasoned activist participants in this study would give to newly involved activists.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes this research on activist identity development. In the following pages I will briefly summarize this research, present implications of the findings and promising areas for future research, and then discuss limitations of this study. An appendix will follow that includes the advice the activists gave to new activists.

Research summary

In this phenomenological qualitative inquiry, twelve activists were interviewed in order to examine changes in their identities as activists over time. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to see if "prototypical stories" of activism exist, in order to determine the "essence" of how one experiences one's self becoming an activist. Interviews with the activists were taped and then transcribed. Data was analyzed according to phenomenological principles, using comparison across interviews to find dominant themes and patterns.

Three prototypical stories emerged from the data, suggesting a five stage model of activist identity development. The first prototypical story was the most common, found in eight of the twelve activists. In this story, an individual becomes involved in activism at a young age, becomes strident about their cause, and then mellows somewhat with time,

becoming an effective and congruent activist. The second prototypical story sees individuals becoming involved in activism later in life, experiencing their stridency as depression or anger held in, and then following the same course outlined above. The last prototypical story involves taking action, but without adopting the identity of an "activist." In this story, individuals do many things that can clearly be categorized as activists, yet do not recognize themselves in that way. Motivations for involvement and typical activist activities, such as education and outreach to others, may differ from traditional activists.

These prototypical stories suggest a Model of Activist Identity Development (MAID) having five stages: Contact, Commitment to Action, Stridency, Adaptation, and Deepened Understanding. These stages describe the way in which individuals are provided with information regarding a problem (Contact); make a decision to act while educating themselves about the problem (Commitment to Action); become fiercely and vocally involved, sharing their newfound knowledge widely (Stridency); recognize that being vocal and/or offensive to others will not help their cause or their peace of mind, and therefore adopt numerous strategies to protect themselves from burnout and increase their interpersonal effectiveness (Adaptations); and lastly move into a deeper stage of understanding regarding the problem, seeing the complexity of the issue and the larger social constructs maintaining the problem (Deepened Understanding).

While one of the purposes of this study was to examine whether or not activist identity development unfolded in a similar manner to other models of identity development (e.g. the Cross Model, the Downing and Roush model, etc.), the MAID had to be allowed to emerge unencumbered by prior research. As this is a phenomenological

study, biases and expectations for the findings need to be carefully held in check, in order to refrain from fitting one's personal agenda to research findings. Therefore, while the other models of identity development provided a conceptual framework for the design of this study, they were not taken into account during data analysis.

Emerging from this process, the MAID bears some similarities and some differences to these models. The most notable similarities are the chronologically and emotionally corresponding Stridency, Immersion/Emersion (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and Embeddedness/Emanation (Downing & Roush, 1985) stages. In addition, individuals across models sought out and maintained like-minded communities and demonstrated a philosophical and interpersonal mellowing over time. Differences between the MAID and these models include the MAID's lack of a pre-change stage, as well as the fact that activism is considered an optional course of action taken in the last stages of those models; whereas in the MAID, activism is the context of identity change, rather than an action taken due to identity change.

Implications and future research

Given that there does appear to be a discernable pattern of activist identity development, certain implications emerge from these results. It would be wise for organizations that rely on activist support to be mindful of these emotional changes and prepare new activists accordingly. Organizational training provided early on for new activists is highly recommended. Taking a stress inoculation approach, these trainings could prepare new activists for the potential changes they can expect to face (e.g. strong emotions, stridency, interpersonal conflict in close relationships, etc.) in order to help prepare them and their relationship partners, family members, and significant others for

the changes about to take place. Encouraging new activists to think about what this will be like, before it happens, and asking them to develop a personal action plan related to how they will cope, may smooth the initial growing pains, prevent burnout, and help activists lay a firm foundation to sustain over time. It appears to be especially important to educate new activists about the difference between a driven commitment and a flexible commitment, given the implications for burnout (Gomes & Maslach, 1991a, 1991b). Encouraging new and seasoned activists to take time off and practice regular self-care is highly important to sustain activists over time.

Given the results on the role of education in activist identity development, it may be helpful to provide new activists with a structured education period, providing them information that goes beyond the superficial "journalistic" information that inspires more anxiety and perhaps encourages learned helplessness (Finger, 1994, p. 158). Rather, offering new activists solution-focused information will likely be more helpful, teaching them in depth about the problem, but also offering a clear course of action for its remedy.

Likewise, it appears that another organizational implication would be to limit new activists' involvement at the beginning of their involvement in order to prevent them from over-committing, losing perspective, and burning out. Encouraging activists to occasionally switch roles with each other to prevent tedium will likely be helpful, as well as providing activists with public recognition and praise for their efforts. Providing new activists with training in interpersonal skills may be helpful, as well. Giving them pointers on how to interact with the public and within their close relationships may help prevent initial alienation and emotional upset, while furthering the goal of becoming more effective, in general, as an activist.

Providing this training may be a realistic concept for large organizations, such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund. Smaller, local organizations may not have the time or opportunity to provide this sort of training, and many individuals engage in activism in a more solitary way. Therefore, dissemination of this information is of particular importance. If larger organizations that provide information to smaller organizations made efforts to publicize the idea of activist identity development (e.g. on websites and listservs), activists across organizations might be more prepared in terms of their mental health, hopefully protecting numerous individuals from burnout.

This research also highlights numerous avenues for future research. This research was exploratory in nature, and designed to formulate a theory. It will therefore be important to put this theory to the test, to see if it holds up under closer scrutiny.

Several specific areas of fruitful research were also presented. For instance, what are the specific goads to action that are effective in leading people to engage? Why do some individuals who have relatively few predictors of engagement (e.g. modeling of activist values by parents, exposure to wild nature, participation in volunteering in youth) become engaged while those with many do not?

Clarifying the relationship between fear and education on the issues will also be important, if, as proposed in this research, activism is inspired and then initiated by strong emotions followed by a period of learning, rather than the learning itself leading to the strong emotions. This may implicate epiphanies as having a powerful effect leading to the emotion which leads to the learning which leads to involvement. Testing this theory would be an important next step.

The two activists who began their activist career later in life described an experience of anger and depression, as opposed to stridency. Examining stridency, in general, as well as when it is experienced and how it is expressed, may help determine if this is a coinciding developmental issue or a legitimate part of activist identity development. All described a sudden peak in intense emotions shortly after they became involved, and it will be helpful to examine this critical period, to see if activists are more susceptible to burnout or radicalization at this time.

The two who became activists at an older age also described internal, vs. external, coping methods, "sitting myself down" and introspecting on the problems, whereas younger activists described seeking support from other individuals. Examining age as a distinguishing variable between coping method and internal vs. external decision-making will be an interesting line of inquiry, as well. Further research is needed to see if early-career emotional vulnerability (the activist identity crisis) is found in other activist samples, as well as the role of age in relation to stridency and vulnerability, and appropriate protective measures activists can take.

The activists in this sample described a period of information-seeking occurring just before their decision to act or soon after their initial involvement. They all evidenced considerable knowledge on the facts related to their cause of choice, and stayed current on news, research, government policy, and trends. Seeking information appeared to be a shared characteristic among the activists. Further research on the cognitive styles and coping methods of successful activists will likely build on knowledge related to burnout prevention in activists, and presents a ripe field for future inquiry, as well.

A more fine-tuned examination of the minds and characteristics of activists will be helpful, as would comparing their motivations for involvement with the significant body of research on volunteer motivation (Clary, Ridge, Stukas, Snyder, Copeland, Haugen, & Miene, 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Examining differences between traditionally "left-wing" and "right-wing" political causes and activist identity development would be a fascinating avenue to explore as would be comparing secular and religious activism. Given the paucity of research on activism, in general, it is clear that there are many lines of inquiry wide open for scrutiny and that there is so much that we do not know.

Limitations of this research

A major limitation of this study is that eleven of the twelve activists are of European American heritage. One of the participants, Sam, is an American Indian from the Choctaw tribe. This lack of diversity appears to be a regular problem in the activist literature (Franz & McClelland, 1994) and may be tied to larger social problems of inequity, as activists more often come from advantaged, middle-class backgrounds (Franz & McClelland, 1994).

Another limitation is that all of these activists are from a central southwestern state that is traditionally politically conservative. Due to their location, their activism might be experienced differently than that of individuals who conduct activism which is politically congruent with their environs (i.e. conducting conservative activism in a conservative state or liberal activism in a liberal state). However, this geographical restriction may make these results more generalizable to individuals conducting activism in relatively unsupportive environments.

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, it was impossible to tell whether or not stridency is a coinciding developmental issue or a stage unique to activists, regardless of their age. Surveying greater numbers of activists, in varying social and political realms, may make this more apparent. Twelve participants allowed the data to reach saturation (i.e. patterns and themes emerged and began to be repeated with little or no new information being introduced in additional interviews) for the context of this research. Replicating this on larger numbers, in different contexts, and with more diverse samples, will help bear out these results.

Conclusion

This research makes several unique contributions to the literature on activism. First, a model of how individuals come to see themselves as activists was presented. This model makes apparent several organizational and individual implications for activist training and education at the beginning of their careers as activists. Organizations, mentors, and experienced activists can use this information to help new activists sustain longer as contributing, emotionally healthy participants in social activism.

Within the world of activism, there remains – and likely will remain – always more to do. While this could be an overwhelming and depressing insight, activists keep doing what they do. They continue to take action, even as they find themselves having to fight the same battles over and over again. Yet those who are successful sustainers find ways to stay optimistic and committed, contributing to the good of many with little thanks or appreciation. Activists are a vital inspiration for an apathetic public. We need them. These are the individuals who do most of the work, the small core group that says

okay, and takes on the next big project. It is unfortunate, then, that so many of us – including the activists themselves – see the word "activist" in a negative light.

In closing, and in order to pay respect to the activists' experience, I once again turn to their words, in this case, those of Ben, who is a fine example of a tireless, committed activist. He said, "And you know, we have many nights to go and many moons to travel." Indeed we do. Perhaps having insight into activist identity development, critical periods, and burnout will help those brave women and men as they travel those many moons.

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APPENDIX A: ADVICE FROM THE ACTIVISTS

Excerpts from participant interviews regarding the advice they would give to new activists:

Ben – Well, I would say first of all, not to disappointed if they don't have success as the world defines success. The second thing would be to pick your targets carefully. And not to try to do everything. I mean I do a lot of things, but I really am not trying to do everything. There's a lot of things that I just don't…a lot of issues and causes and stuff that comes through my mailbox and I just go, you know, I don't, well, my plate's full…And I was not involved say 20 years with as many things as I am now. You know. So I would say that picking your targets carefully and I'm not opposed to tilting at windmills and I'm not opposed to beating your head against a wall. But if I'm going to tilt at a windmill or beat my head against a wall so that I personally get bloody, then I want to have put a lot of thought into why it was so important for me to hurt my head by beating on that wall, or ostensibly waste my time by tilting at this windmill. You know, and uh, which is, cause I've done that in the past, and I can't say that I won't do it in the future, but I think that if you do that it requires a lot of thought so that you aren't just like, you know, "Have fun storming the castle!" (laughs) You know, which is one of my favorite movie lines…So let's see, what else, and it would be to have fun. I think you need to have fun. And if people can have some kind of a spiritual, a spirituality about it, I think that that helps. But you know, I don't think that everybody needs to become a Catholic, but I think that having a spiritual life helps manage your activist life.

FOR BALANCE?

Yeah. And so that would be part of my advice to young activists. Limit what they're willing to take responsibility for. Certainly I think personal responsibility and taking responsibility is part of being an activist, but here again, just as we have to pick our targets wisely, we have to pick our responsibilities wisely. You know, and uh, if it's not enough, it's just not enough.

Clara – [My advice would be] to keep their cool. To not let it make them yell. Because you can. You can get above it. It's hard to do but you can, you must. I had to tell myself that I'm not, until I get myself well and stay well, I can't be successful in my endeavors to stop that plant. So you can't let it destroy your health and the health of your family.

Dallas – I guess uh, like I said before, make sure and take time for yourself, type of thing. And sometimes that can involve activism, too, you know……So you know you have to explore all the possibilities and learn as much as you can about, you know, whatever it is you're passion about and you want to work to change…So I guess, I don't know, like I

was saying, I guess the advice I would have would be, you know, as far as the burn-out factor or that type of thing, would be just to learn to do that. And you know great, if you have time to spend you know, two or three days working on one activist project or something like that and throw yourself into it, that's great. But on the other hand, it's also great if you just leave a few pamphlets or hang up a flyer somewhere while you're out doing your grocery shopping, or you know that type of thing, too. You know, you never know which little thing is going to make a difference. It might be a big project or it might just be a leaflet you hand to somebody or hang on a bulletin board somewhere.

Jane – You may find also that you end up holding the bag for something that you don't want to really be responsible for. If you believe in something passionately, there is some way that you can get involved. You just have to find the right way for you to do it. So look around locally, volunteer for various things. But if you're going to really commit to a particular organization or group of people, learn something about it before you get too vested. [LATER IN THE INTERVIEW] Well, I guess the only thing I would, what you just said made me think of this. It is very hard to realize and you can never convince young people who think they're invincible but you can't do everything, all-encompassed. My employee who thinks she has to do everything – you can't do everything. You can never do everything and the sooner you realize that, the easier it is to try to live as an activist and actually get something done. You can get something done if you realize that it doesn't do any good to lie awake at night worrying about the chimps at night in Africa, because for one thing, you're not in Africa. (laughs) Sadly. But, so what good does it do to lie awake thinking about them? You have to let go of some things or you can't do anything. And it's *really hard to do,* but just tell yourself when you get started that you can't do everything, but you can find something that you can do.

Jennifer – I don't know. I don't know. I guess if I were to give them advice I would tell them not to get, to be an optimist about things. Remember the good that you're doing, not the bad that you're dealing with. Just to keep, you know, you almost have to be patting yourself on the back to keep motivated. To keep yourself knowing that you're doing good things.

Jessica – N/A

Kate – Umm, find what you really care about, first and foremost, and connect with that. And that should drive you throughout it all, because you start to kind of expand your horizons once you find what you're interested in. You can connect with people and they might be interested in something else and you learn about that and it's kind of like a

snowball effect. You start accumulating all this information and knowledge and you realize that a lot of environmental problems are interrelated. And, uh, you know keep a balance. There are a lot of issues to tackle and kind of try to step back before you just dive in directly. Be like, what's the best approach to this and how can I rall- You need people. You need people to get involved. You can't take the burden all on your shoulders. And that, start talking to people and networking and coming up with strategies and then taking those strategies and implementing them. It's really important I think. Being very systematic is helpful in preventing burnout because you don't feel like a gerbil on a wheel you're actually branching out and taking different approaches. And I think that's important. That they keep a positive outlook, too. Not to get overwhelmed by it all. Because that's easy to do. And it's easy to become angry. Because I'm impatient, too. I have, I definitely think we have a limited amount of time to start taking action, and serious action. But we have to be *very* strategic in how we have that occur. And yelling at people is not going to help.

Lois – And I think in the activist world, whatever cause that you take up, I think it would do better if you try to think of your opponent as having much better motives than you're trying to assign to them. That's not the way it always is. But I think we do too much demonizing in that. [LATER IN THE INTERVIEW] First of all, I would tell them that you shouldn't try to make it your overarching everything in your life. Try to have some relationships. Try to have certain aspects of your life to be normal. Even if there are certain things about it you don't like. You should try to have a job different than what your cause is. Even though we're all very tempted to have a job that is our cause, but if it is then you can't get away from it. You should try to laugh. You should try to remember… most people in activism are in their 20s and think they have it all together and I was the same way. Thing to remember is, with God's help, you will live to be in your 80s and so you need to be here for the long haul. And so you just need to try to remember that every day is a journey and we're getting a little bit closer. You don't have to do it all at once. Every day just do your bit and then try to go on to the next because you have to be here for the long haul. Oh, and don't think that you're more important than anyone else because in all likelihood, you're not.

Robert – I probably wouldn't [give advice]. I'd just say, go to it. Do as much as you can. And, ah, if they wanted to know history, I'd be happy to talk history. But I'm not sure what kind of advice I could give them. If they're already into it, they're into it. And I couldn't inspire them any more into it. Um, so, I would just say, go do it. Now if I happen to know somebody who might be helpful to them, I would probably do something like that. Or if they came to me and said, "What can I do?" I could probably direct them to certain channels that they can explore but…words of wisdom? (shrugs) Sorry… [LATER IN THE INTERVIEW] I do think, ah, in order to sustain a life of activism, there has to be down times. Um, my wife and I running off to Germany for nine months was downtime…So if you stop along the way and replenish as you go as opposed to full-boar,

24/7, 365, the fuel will, in time, whether you do it for four years or you do it for ten, eventually the fuel will run out. And you'll collapse. And your passion will disappear. Because you're burning not just within the core area, but it's your whole life, it's family, it's society, the circle is huge. If you're burning your fuel faster than you can replenish it, the glass will just be (whistles) down to this, and those wider circles will disappear. [LATER IN THE INTERVIEW] I think you have to pick your path very carefully. It can be one that could kill you, can kill your joy in life…So I think you have to be very careful to sustain that…So you have to pick your path very carefully. And know what you can and what you can't handle. And don't try to do the impossible.

Sam – Learn as much as you can. Learn as much as you can, dive in with both feet, but be graceful. Be diplomatic to those around you. Those relationships are really important. And they're not going to go away. I think that's what I would say.

Trinity – What advice would I give activists? Be sure you're not being taken advantage of. Sit down with people you respect and bounce your ideas off of them. And become part of an organization.

Valerie – I would say that I have seen a lot of burnout and there are not enough people doing the right thing for us to afford losing anyone to burnout. So as a, and you may not be a young activist, you may just be a new activist. You may be 50 but they're a new activist. So as a new activist, I know cause I've been there, you want to do everything. You want to sleep 30 minutes every night and you want to be everywhere and you can't… So to new activists I would say keep your goal reachable…and when you complete an important initiative or goal, go and eat five gallons of ice cream and don't do anything the next day and then get up and start something next week. Moderate yourself.