How do they cope? Self-care lessons from abortion rights activists in Costa Rica

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Daniela Flores Golfín
(Costa Rica)

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Supervisor: Wendy Harcourt
Second Reader: Lee Pegler

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Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl
twitter: @issnl

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

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List of Acronyms

ALCR	Aborto Legal Costa Rica
IACHR	Inter American Court of Human Rights
RJ	Reproductive Justice
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights

Abstract

This research paper discusses the experiences with self-care and care of ten women who are abortion rights activists in San José, Costa Rica. It details the dynamics that facilitate or limit the inclusion of self-care in the activists' agenda; as well as the strategies they use to ensure their well-being. Through the use of the frameworks of ethics of care, social movements, reproductive justice and body politics, it explains why self-care is crucial to feminist abortion rights activists. It proposes as an alternative to traditional ways of conceiving social movements, proposing the construction of democratic collectives where care and well-being are key values.

The results show how different dynamics are obstacles for the achievement of well-being and care. Such as the activists' workload, time and resource constraints, political distrust, lack of relays, lack of communication and a culture that does not promote the reflection on well-being. Nonetheless, they all report valuing and attempting alternatives to those dynamics that include collective, external and individual strategies of self-care; the creation of safe spaces with open and emotional communication and strong collective identities; and the use of security protocols and cyber security techniques. As well as the importance of safe networks and clear boundaries, giving a clear picture of how these activists conceptualize self-care as a personal and political tool for resistance.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research paper intends to contribute to the body of work on social movements and development from a perspective on mental health and self-care. It raises concern on these issues and informs future policy interventions on the need to address not only the women who are not able to access sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), but also those women in leadership positions who are fighting for the services to be provided. The partnerships between state and civil society organizations need to be strengthened and part of that is ensuring the health and well-being of activists. As well as the SRHR of all women in the country.

Keywords

Ethics of care, reproductive justice, body politics, social movements, self-care, activism, abortion.

1. We should care for those who care

In Costa Rica there are several marginalized groups excluded from social policy and law (transgender people, intersex people, women, indigenous people, migrants). These groups are often ignored or neglected by the state (Murillo and Cascante, 2019:no page; Chacón, 2016:no page), leaving civil society groups to organize and fight for these groups' access to their human rights. One of the most contentious issues at the moment is the right to abortion as it is legal (since 1970) in cases where the life or health of the pregnant women is at risk but even in those cases it is not well-regulated. This puts at risk the access to what in Costa Rica is referred to as *therapeutic abortion.*

As most of the abortion rights activists are women themselves, they do the work while also experiencing the struggle their community goes through to get full access to their rights. They provide that care, but they themselves are affected by a care deficit. In that, "[m]any of their sustainability concerns are intertwined with the experiences of discrimination based on their genders" (Barry and Dordevic, 2007:117)

In my experience in different activities around the issue of abortion rights in Costa Rica I have noted the same faces over and over again. It appears it is the same group of people who are carrying the women's rights movement, often while also holding down an eight to five job. This has started to become a more visible concern as the debate around therapeutic abortion gets more intense and pressure from both sides increases. There are more and more articles every day on the attempts of conservative politicians to block the advances in this matter. Or to even set the accomplishments back, by trying to erase the threat to the health of women as a reason to allow therapeutic abortion (leaving only the risk of death as an acceptable cause) (Pérez, 2019:no page). Frustrations run high when confronted by these type of news and the activists are left to figure out how to counteract these attempts.

Abortion rights activists "face particular challenges stemming from social, sexual and gender stereotypes and prejudices, (…) when trying to challenge traditional socio-cultural patterns on the role of women and men" (Amnesty International, 2015:10). The aggressions they face can be aggravated due to the efforts to change current legislation (Amnesty international, 2015:35). This is the case in Costa Rica were the fight for legal, safe and funded

abortion continues, along with the demand for a norm that regularizes the access to therapeutic abortion.

Feminist activists in Costa Rica are aware of the discouraging reality of the country and the region (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2019:no page; Guttmacher Institute, 2018:no page). They fought and fight to secure and maintain women's rights in society and over their bodies. Against those who oppose them, and with little financial and human resources. Most, if not all of the activists within the movement, carry on their activism in their 'free time' with their own resources and learn day by day the limitations that come with that context.

> "Many of the demands that motivated the origin of the feminist fight in the country and the rest of the world are still pending and the achievements consolidated in the past threaten to be reversed, a reality that forces the movement to stay vigilant" (Méndez, 2017: no page).

Abortion rights activists in particular face the backlash of a conservative and highly religious country that believes that abortion is one of the ultimate crimes, regardless of the woman's condition. They are represented by three main groups called *Aborto Legal CR (ALCR), La Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir* and *Acceder* who are responsible for organizing most actions around the country to fight for the legalization of abortion.

These activists are mostly women who experience an embodiment of sexual and reproductive health and rights or lack thereof. Their personal realities are difficult to separate from their social cause. Nevertheless, they continue to work on sexual and reproductive rights issues for years and bear the burden of the stressful pace of fighting for human rights justice, dealing with bureaucracy and coping with disappointment. This while also having little time and resources to prioritize themselves over the movement.

During my research, I interviewed ten women who identify as abortion rights activists. These activists face common burdens within social movements such as a culture of selflessness, emotional labour, an excessive workload and infighting. I will dive into how those factors impact the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica and explain how the infighting and tensions within the movement impair the well-being of activists and their self-care. Furthermore, I will describe the strategies that these women use to cope with these dynamics and how they define self-care within their caregiving practices. I understand caregiving as the tasks they carry out to secure and advocate for the rights of those who still cannot access safe, legal and funded abortions.

My interest in this topic brings together two of my passions: psychology and human rights, in the area of gender. I believe care should be brought to the center of all our social and political interactions, ensuring that our well-being is also being addressed. As development practitioners I believe we should be concerned with how we position and care for ourselves and the people with whom we are working, making it clear that well-being is a human right and should be among our priorities.

2. Research objectives and question

Research Questions

Which dynamics facilitate or limit the inclusion of self-care in the abortion rights activists' agenda?

What self-care strategies do abortion rights activists in Costa Rica use in order to negotiate the balance between self-care and caregiving?

Aims

My main aim is to systematize the experiences of women within the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica to aid in their own reflections and further strategies to ensure their well-being.

Furthermore, I intend to raise awareness about self-care and the mental health of abortion rights activists in Costa Rica, in order to inform future health policy interventions to include the well-being of social justice advocates in the country. This can strengthen the partnerships between state and organizations of civil society and protecting the well-being of women in leadership roles as a part of their human rights.

3. The state of abortion rights activism in Costa Rica

3.1 Costa Rican Background

State, law and consequences

Abortion in Costa Rica is only legal and accessible if the woman's life is at risk. This was stated for the first time in Costa Rica's 1918's Penal Code (Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1918:no page) and modified slightly in the legislation the country follows today. The current Penal Code allows abortion, according to article 121, only when the life or *the health* of the pregnant woman is in severe danger and where every measure to prevent the abortion has been implemented (Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1970: no page). This is called "unpunished abortion" or "*aborto impune*" in Spanish (Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1970: no page). But it is often referred to as 'therapeutic abortion'.

Besides "unpunished abortion", every other interruption of a pregnancy is considered a crime. Including (according to articles 118, 119, 120 and 122) cases where the pregnant person is a child, where the fetus' life is incompatible with life outside of the womb, cases of rape, incest, or any cases where the life of the woman is not at direct risk (Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1970: no page). The only exception is when article 93 of the Penal Code is applied, meaning that a judge grants a pardon in cases where the pregnancy was caused by rape (Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica, 1970:no page).

With regards to the access to this service, there are no clinics in Costa Rica that resemble what is known as Planned Parenthood in the United States. But women who need to access therapeutic abortion can attend the public hospitals and clinics. However, the access to it depends on the medical criteria, meaning whether the doctor considers that the conditions really affect the women's life or put her health in severe risk.

In 2008 the case of 'Ana'[1] came out as she defied the state in a claim to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In this claim she wanted to denounce the state for the pain inflicted on her during her pregnancy, as she was not allowed to have a therapeutic abortion because the doctors argued there was no danger to her life. Ana's fetus had congenital malformations and from the beginning of the pregnancy the doctors knew it was not

[1] Pseudonym that has been used throughout the process to protect her identity.

going to survive birth for more than a few hours. But as Ana's health seemed sufficient and she could carry the pregnancy to term, they did not allow her to get an abortion. She spent 5 months with severe pain and in some cases bleeding and vomiting. She asked for psychological help because she started suffering from anxiety and depression and proved to several doctors that her mental and physical health were severely deteriorating. But the doctors still would not perform an abortion on her (Arroyo, 2018: no page).

In 2012 the case of 'Aurora'[2] had a very similar situation to Ana and also brought a complaint in front of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) (Arroyo, 2018: no page). Both Ana and Aurora presented cases in the Supreme Court in Costa Rica, before doing so in the IACHR, and in both cases, they were denied the possibility to get an abortion. These two cases were a reflection on how "there are no specialized protocols or sanitation guides that indicate to health personnel how to carry out the abortion procedure" (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2007:1), which makes women vulnerable to not accessing justice properly. The medical personnel in Costa Rica does not have clarity on the freedoms and limitations they possess in this issue. Their education does not usually cover a critical analysis of the Penal Code and its position on therapeutic abortion, not to mention the conservative stance from the media, politicians and society in general which do not stimulate them to question the status-quo. This results in fearful and/or conservative professionals that avoid the procedure as much as possible, for fear of legal repercussions, or due to personal beliefs (which the Medical College supports by giving medical professionals the right to refuse due to conscientious objection) (Umaña, 2017:no page).

As this situation suggests, women who want to have an abortion have to resort to other illegal procedures. The most common ones being manual vacuum aspiration, dilation of the cervix and curettage and the use of Misoprostol which is an over-the-counter medication (Gómez, 2008:21). The access to these procedures is obtained through professionals in gynecology and obstetrics, general practitioners, nurses or through self-medication. All of these are done in a clandestine way (Gómez,2008:22)

Who is speaking and what are they saying?

a) <u>The state</u>

Besides the laws that are in place to regulate abortion in Costa Rica, the last three presidents of the country have been openly against any abortion that goes beyond the form

[2] Pseudonym that has been used to protect her identity.

already allowed on the Penal Code (La Nación Costa Rica, 2009; ElMundoCR, 2016; Repretel Costa Rica, 2019), or have said they will not propose any changes to the current laws.

But in 2015, as a reaction to 'Ana' and 'Aurora's' cases, former President Luis Guillermo Solís made a commitment. He affirmed that he would endorse a protocol that regulated the application of therapeutic abortion in the country (Ministry of Health, 2015: no page). To avoid cases such as the ones described, as well as to secure proper interventions and access to justice.

In reaction to this, the Ministry of Health formed an expert commission to create this protocol. The commission included doctors, lawyers, nurses, psychiatrists and forensic professionals. And in certain meetings asked for the input from activists working on the topic (Ministry of Health, 2015: no page). Today, four years later, the protocol for 'unpunished abortion' is still not in place.

The current president wrote in 2017 on his Facebook page that in cases of rape, women should have the option to ask for an abortion. He specifically said that "we do not have, politicians or anyone else, to determine if … [a women] should or should not do it" (Alvarado, 2017:no page). But in 2018 during the last stages of his presidential campaign, he took back that statement and assured that he would not add anything to or change the current law (Alvarado, 2018). Later, he added that the creation of the protocol on abortion rights in general was not on the list of priorities to cover at the moment, especially taking into account that this issue polarizes the country (La Nación Costa Rica, 2018).

This for me is a reflection of the haphazard and careless way the state handles the issue at its convenience without taking into account the impact these delays have on the life of women (Murillo and Cascante, 2019:no page).

b) <u>The church</u>

Costa Rica is one of seven countries in the world that recognizes Catholicism as its official religion. Its constitution states that:

> "the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Religion is that of the State, which contributes to its maintenance, without impeding the free exercise in the Republic of other cults that do not oppose universal morality or good customs" (Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, 1949: no page).

In theory there is no legal mechanism that enforces the opinion of the Catholic church in the decisions made in the country, meaning there is no clear implication of it being

its official religion. But in practice, the church is frequently asked about its opinion on multiple decisions. Lately, this is especially the case in matters surrounding sexual and reproductive health rights and same-sex marriage in the country (Ramírez, 2017; Córdoba, 2019; El País, 2018; Cordero, 2019).

According to the Political Studies and Research Center's (Centro de Investigación y Estudios Políticos in Spanish, or CIEP) 2016 Opinion Survey, 71.8% of Costa Rica's population is Catholic, 12.3% is Evangelic, 5.5% follows other religions and 10.4% does not profess any religion (Alfaro, et al., 2017:13). This strong religious affiliation has significant importance because it indicates the number of people who look to the church's opinion on certain topics. Religious and conservative ideals influence the decision-making process, as the amount of religious parties increases and their leaders demonstrate that their moral beliefs do not stay in the confines of their personal lives and decisions. These ideals thus make their way to congress and affect the way these parties approach their constituents and certain issues (Cruz, 2019: no page; Avendaño, 2018: no page).

In the case of abortion, the Costa Rican church has been very clear that an abortion in any case is a homicide. This includes therapeutic abortion, by saying that saving a life is no justification to commit a homicide (Ramírez, 2017:no page). The church, in turn, has urged its followers to "reject this attempt to introduce the unjustifiable practice of abortion in (…) [the] country" (Episcopal Conference, cited in, Ramírez, 2017:no page).

This situation has a major effect on the advances of sexual and reproductive health rights in Costa Rica. Especially since 2018, when presidential elections were held, and the second runner was an Evangelical pastor who ran his campaign under the premise of 'protecting the traditional family and not allowing abortion' (Ruiz, 2018; Cascante, 2017) Although he did not win the elections, fourteen congressmen and women from his party did, and are now in the Legislative Assembly, in some instances trying to block advances for human rights including for abortion rights. Just in August and September of this year, there were four attempts to block human rights advances in the country, coming from conservative congress men and women. The first one was in August when fifteen congress men and women (from religious parties) voted against a project that proposed that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be taught in high schools and middle schools. They successfully blocked the project, arguing that this could open the door for schools to "indoctrinate with issues like gender ideology" (Chinchilla, 2019:no page). In September only, there were three attempts to set back sexual health and reproductive rights advances in the country. One of them was a motion to modify the article that allows for people to access safe HIV treatment,

making it unavailable for immigrants who had an irregular migratory status (Gómez, 2019: no page). Another one was a project signed by 24 congress men and women in order to block same-sex marriage, which will be legal from May of 2020 (Alfaro, 2019: no page). Lastly, there was also a press conference held by fourteen parliamentarians that assured the public they would block any possible projects in congress if President Carlos Alvarado signed the norm to regulate therapeutic abortion (Martínez, 2019: no page), but as the president has not yet followed through with his campaign promise, we will have to wait and see if the parliamentarians' threat stands afterwards.

c) The activists

Feminist activists in Costa Rica are a diverse range of women and men that fight for the equality of women and their full access to rights. *Ni Una Menos Costa Rica, ACCEDER, Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir, Chicas al Frente, Las Rojas, Hablemos de Derechos Humanos, La Cadejos, Acción Respeto, Mujeres en Acción, Peras del Olmo* and *ALCR*, to name a few, are groups of women (mostly), that fight and organize for these causes.

In terms of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), the main groups fighting for the right to choose and the access to services are *ACCEDER, Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir* and *ALCR*, although several other collectives support the movement and are present in most protests and lobbying efforts.

"In Costa Rica free, legal and funded abortion is being discussed since the 70s" (Marta, 2019, personal interview[3]) when the last addition to the causes for therapeutic abortion was added to the Penal Code. It was a small movement with a few activists based mainly in the Great Metropolitan area. During those years it was a solitary cause, but the possibility to debate about it was open, as the government and the church assumed the majority of the population would be against it (Sara[4]; Marta, 2019, personal interviews). In the year 1979 there were a couple of debates on live television to discuss the topic and after seeing the acceptance from the public, the television network pulled back and there were no more debates (Carcedo, 2004). Years later in 1991, there was another debate. Nonetheless, after the support from the public the television network started to promote messages before and during the transmission that made it seem like abortion was done on full-term pregnancies. They also started broadcasting the documentary *The Silent Scream* (1984) which was a 'pro-life'

[3] Personal interview with Marta, in San José, Costa Rica, July 16th, 2019.
[4] Personal interview with Sara, via Skype, October 31st, 2019.

documentary with concerning, non-scientific narratives against abortion (ibid.). This was the last debate for years on the topic which came with a lot of silence around the issue, but after Ana and Aurora things changed.

Since the last presidential elections, activists are demanding the publication of the norm for the proper implementation of therapeutic abortion. As civil society realized the threat of a conservative candidate winning the elections and putting on hold all abortion rights issues, they rushed to organize and demand attention to the topic. This culminated in the creation of ALCR after candidate Carlos Alvarado became president and took back his urgency to pass a therapeutic norm.

ALCR was created in 2018 after the statements made by president Alvarado, and its supported by 46 organizations that believe in the freedom of choice over our bodies (Prado, 2018:no page). Representatives of ALCR state that "President Carlos Alvarado has made invisible the historical debt of almost 50 years by: 'not allowing access to abortion that is already guaranteed by law"' (Prado, 2018:no page). Their purpose is to demand the access to all types of abortion to be legal, safe and funded, to women, trans men and all people capable of being pregnant in Costa Rica.

ALCR as well as Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir and Acceder, have been very active in social media[5], sharing different types of content as well as having spokespersons communicate with the media to create awareness on the topic and organizing protests, assemblies and blockades in San José. ALCR has shared stories of women who have had clandestine abortions or needed one for therapeutic reasons. It shares recent developments or statements from the government on the issue, pictures from protests, announcements for manifestations or assemblies, as well as answers to frequent questions people send them (Aborto Legal Costa Rica, n.d.). Acceder and Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir have a similar type of content with a bigger approach from the umbrella of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. They both post information on sexual education, birth control methods, etc., focusing mostly on abortion rights (Acceder, n.d.; Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir, n.d.). All of them also have websites where they publish their events, literature resources and reports (some written by them) on the topic of abortion as well as images of events in the country (Aborto Legal Costa Rica, 2018: no page; Acceder, 2019:no page; Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir, 2019:no page). The main difference between the three groups is that

[5] Instagram (@abortolegalcostarica, @accedercr and @colectivaporelderechoadecidir)
Facebook (Asociación Ciudadana Acceder, Aborto Legal CR and Colectiva por el Derecho a Decidir)
Twitter (@AccederCR, @AbortoLegalCR and @colectivacr)

Aborto Legal CR has decided on a public strategy that advocates for all types of abortion to be legal, while the other two groups are focusing first on the therapeutic norm. Activists that are not a part of ALCR have even mentioned that it is not the most strategic approach to ask for all abortions to be legal when there are threats against the basic access to abortion in cases where the life or health of the mother are at risk (Marta, 2019, personal interview; Lila, 2019, personal interview[6]). These differences in strategy are common within the movement as will be discussed further on in the results of the research.

3.2 On the mental health of activists

Research on the mental health of activists has focused mostly on the burnout syndrome and its consequences on the lives of activists and the movements in which they partake (Chen and Gorski, 2015; Vaccaro and Mena, 2011; Acheson, et al., 2016; Gorski, et al., 2018). The literature points to the cause of burnout in activists, mentioning both the workload and the emotional labor done by them without much help (Vaccaro and Mena, 2011:357). Chen and Gorski add the element of a "culture of selflessness" (2015:16) to the mix, stating that according to their study, activists report to be part of a context in which thinking about their well-being is not encouraged.

Most of the studies on this phenomenon focus on the causes and consequences of activist burnout but do not mention the strategies used by them to cope with these issues. In recent years, some authors have started to make a contribution in this aspect by tackling "self-care as a political strategy" (Hernández and Tello, 2017) and analyzing the sustainability of movements through self-care (Barry and Dordevic, 2007). Barry and Dordevic (2007) take on a quest through the key personal elements of activism, its consequences, and the resilience and strategies that several activists use for their self-care. They emphasize the importance of burnout syndrome on the physical bodies of activists and open the door to discuss how the embodiment of their activism is managed, its political implications and consequences. But most importantly, they suggest that there needs to be a shift in how activism is done. It should not be a matter of sacrificing themselves for a cause but working for it.

[6] Personal interview with Lila, in San José, Costa Rica, July 18th, 2019.

4. Theoretical Frameworks

For the theoretical framework of my research, I analyze my findings using several theories. I used different aspects of the social movement theories, specially Diani and Bison's (2004) approach, to analyze the different dynamics present in the Costa Rican abortion rights movement and to frame the importance of emotions within these dynamics. Ross and Solinger's (2017) framework of reproductive justice, that recognizes that the activist's fight for the right to choose cannot be separated from the attainment of sexual and reproductive health rights. Harcourt's (2009) theory of Body Politics, which is instrumental in understanding that this struggle passes through the bodies of activists and is carried out using those bodies as both battlefield and battle tools (as they call them). Using specific language and symbols to demonstrate their affiliation to the movement, such as the handkerchief, stickers, and concepts like 'poner el cuerpo' (place the body) and 'sororidad' (solidarity between women), which I will refer to later on. And lastly, Tronto's (1990) theory on Ethics of Care will be crucial in navigating the dynamics of care that are valued by activists, as well as those that are manifested to maintain care for themselves and their peers and their struggles to secure those dynamics, considering the setting they are a part of.

4.1 Social Movements

Social movement theory is a wide sociological field, therefore I will use the specific definition of social movements that refers to the

> "[i]nstances of collective action with clear conflictual orientations to specific social and political opponents, conducted in the context of dense inter-organizational networking, by actors linked by solidarities and shared identities that precede and survive any specific coalitions and campaigns" (Diani and Bison, 2004:283)

According to Diani and Bison (2004), for the collective actions to be social movements, they have to be sustained exchanges where bonds and identities are shared, and collective identities are developed. Social movements as opposed to some collective processes are not utilitarian, but are built on the common understanding of values and the construction of broader networks (Diani and Bison, 2004)

Feminism, specifically, is "a political movement of transformation [that] was built on the struggles of women united around the overcoming of domination and exploitation over their body, their sexuality and their reproduction." (Bastos, 2019:203)

As Gerlach proposes, social movements are conformed by different groups with links between each other and have multiple leaders, thus creating a network (as cited in Della Porta and Diani, 2006:157)

Within this understanding of networks and action, I will also focus on the influence that emotions have within social movements, both on an individual level and, as proposed by (Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005: 486), on a relational level. That is to say that I will recognize the role emotions play regarding the social movement and how those feelings affect the activists and vice versa.

4.2 Body Politics

Body Politics is the "political struggle of people to claim control over their own biological, social and cultural 'bodily' experiences" (Harcourt, 2016:1) It revolves around the dynamics of exclusion, determined by how society allows people to inhabit their bodies according to power dynamics and recognizes how different people act to reclaim their rights.

Reproductive rights activists are subjected to great vulnerabilities, as their labor "implies 'revolutions' in gender relations, economic development and democratic institutions" (Correa, 2006, cited in Harcourt, 2013: 863). In this thesis I explore how these women mobilize between all the spaces they occupy in order to understand how to care for their mental health in the process. As Harcourt proposes, they move between "body, home, community and public space" (Harcourt, 2013:1539) In this process, they do what in Spanish we would call 'poner el cuerpo' (*place the body).*

'Poner el cuerpo' in this case, refers to the way they volunteer themselves and their vulnerability for a cause they believe in. Using their bodies as sites of resistance, for themselves and for others, which "implies politicizing the private sphere" (Harcourt, 2013: 642) Using this approach, I analyze how body politics is involved in the way women's rights activists cope with the burden of their work. Body politics helps us to understand the political, social and personal struggles women face in Costa Rica when we look at how the power dynamics reproduced by state and church force women to take to the streets to demand their rights and what they are owed, putting their bodies on the front line of the political struggle in the streets and in the service provision. All while being mindful of the social backlash they

can face as well as the legal implications for those involved in clandestine networks for the access to abortion.

4.3 Ethics of Care

Fisher and Tronto define care as:

> "*everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible.* That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto and Fisher, 1990:40)

According to this definition, both activism and self-care enter within the parameters of what an ethic of care would hold interest in. Tronto's (2013) ethics of care consider different forms and steps of care. First, there must be a recognition that there are needs that require caring. Second, someone must take responsibility for the caring of those needs. Third, the caregiving takes place. Fourth, there is a response to the care given. And fifth, the assurance that the caregiving was done in a democratic way (with justice and equality) (Tronto, 2013:23)

The fifth step of care includes the recognition of whether the person giving the care is being cared for as well. And that, the understanding that all beings are dependent of care, reinforces the need for equality in the conditions one is being cared for.

As Tong proposes, care can be used by the hegemonic structures to reinforce inequality and power dynamics, but it is also "worth 'rescuing' from the patriarchal structures that would misuse it or abuse it" (Tong, 1998:150)

I will use this theoretical approach to inform the analysis on the ways care is given to others and to oneself in the dynamics of reproductive rights activists. And to ask the question, is caregiving taking into account democratic commitments? (Tronto, 2013)

4.4 Reproductive justice

I will use the Reproductive Justice (RJ) framework as a tool to think about self-care for activists as a necessary part of the RJ agenda. Ross and Solinger (2017:7) state that "[r]eproductive decision making is about the *lived experience* of individuals, including, for many

persons, their drive to possess reproductive autonomy as part of their achievement of full personhood"

This is a fight people are obliged to take up because they do not have complete freedom over their bodies. That fight frequently results in mental health distress that deteriorates activist's life conditions. Their struggle and the distress are not separate aspects of the problem but are linked and need to be analyzed together.

As Ross and Solinger propose, "reproductive justice activists and theorists focus on the lived, embodied reproductive and whole-life experiences (…) of people who can become pregnant and give birth" (Ross and Solinger, 2017:12). In my research, I will analyze the embodied experience of activists who fight for these rights, as part of their reproductive embodied experience when they explain to others that how valid a person is, is not dependent on their reproductive capacity.

Under this framework, caregiving can also be understood as a part of the reproductive responsibilities that women are expected to fulfill for others. Which in turn makes it difficult for them to take care of themselves without being perceived (by themselves or others) as selfish.

5. Approach with caution: treating the methodology with care

I conducted my research using a feminist methodology from an exploratory, qualitative research standpoint. It involved the application of ten semi-structured interviews, one focus group with abortion rights activists from Costa Rica and two participant observations. One in a protest for the legalization of abortion (being part of the group in charge of security), and the other one in a gathering to celebrate the one year since the creation of the collective Aborto Legal CR.

Table 1.1 Fieldwork calendar

Activity	*Date*	*Place*	*Alias of the participants*
Participant Observation #1	06/07/2019	San José, CR	-
Interview #1	16/07/2019	San José, CR	Marta
Interview #2	18/07/2019	San José, CR	Lila
Interview #3	23/07/2019	San José, CR	Agustina
Interview #4	25/07/2019	Online	Curie
Interview #5	31/07/2019	San José, CR	Susana
Interview #7	02/08/2019	San José, CR	Ana Lucia
Interview #6	06/08/2019	San José, CR	Helena
Participant Observation 2	08/08/2019	San José, CR	-
Interview #8	09/08/2019	San José, CR	Blanca
Focus Group	03/09/2019	San José, CR	Marta, Susana, Agustina
Interview #9	04/09/2019	San José, CR	Malina
Interview #10	31/10/2019	Online	Sara

The sampling was done first through the snowball method, which consists in choosing initial subjects and then continue the sampling with the suggestions of those participants (Flick, 2007:5). In my specific case, I started with a friend with whom I have done activism in the past, who is part of one of the groups that works on abortion rights issues in the country and she recommended I contact several people. In addition, I created a poster to invite the activists to focus groups and interviews and distributed them via WhatsApp to a few key contacts within the movement and a chat of allies to the group Acceder which I was a part of. I have also participated in several activities done to promote the right to choose in

Costa Rica and have acquaintances in the three groups that work mainly on abortion rights, therefore I could contact the women who organize those spaces, who were willing to distribute the information in their activist groups.

Even though I had a certain level of trust with several of the activists, the initial idea of focus groups was not a success mainly due to security/trust and time considerations, the amount of people willing to participate was small and it was difficult to organize a time where several of them could meet. This led me to change my plan from focus groups that then would result in a few specific interviews, to individual interviews that could then lead to a focus group. Ten women were willing to participate as interviewees, all involved directly in different collectives that work on advocacy and activism for the right to have a safe abortion. All of them are active members of their groups, except for one who, as I will elaborate later on, decided after 15 years to take a break from activism due to self-care and lack of time (with the intention to come back actively next year).

In line with the topic of this research and a feminist methodology, I intended to make care my main concern during the interview process. I wanted the participants to feel as comfortable and safe as possible, which resulted in several factors. First, I decided to use a semi-structured interview guide, where there were main topics to be covered but left room for the conversation to go where the participants wanted. In a pace they felt comfortable with. As Taylor (1998:366) explains, feminist research should be experiential, "allowing women to describe their experiences in their own terms, developing more egalitarian relationships (…) and encouraging interviewees to introduce new research questions based on their own lived experiences". I was always very open about the purpose of the research which helped with not straying too far from the issue of self-care but actually informing the topic with factors I would not have considered.

This also helped with the second element which was confidentiality. Most of them wanted to remain anonymous to not have any of the information traced back to them. Therefore, to ensure that I started every interview giving them an informed consent (appendix 1) that explained every detail of the research and the interview process as well as the use of the data provided. Initially, the idea was to have a signed written consent, but it became clear that because the purpose of their activism is to advocate for a practice that is still mostly illegal in the country, they did not feel comfortable with having their names registered in writing. Therefore, I gave all of them the opportunity to choose if they wanted to sign the

forms with their full names, only signature or not at all. All of them agreed to be recorded on audio, but the recordings will be deleted as soon as the requirements for the research paper submission are completed. Their full names were not mentioned during the interview audios which will only be heard by me in order to protect their anonymity and all of them were asked to choose an alias for themselves to protect their anonymity. No real names or initials were used in this document.

I kept the amount of questions short and did not follow a specific order to allow the setting to feel more like a conversation than an interview and to create an atmosphere that felt more comfortable. Concerns on how the setting affected the possibility for participants to be honest an open were very present to me (Heumann, 2010:38). Therefore, I decided to let the participants suggest cafés, bars, or other spaces where there was privacy and comfort. Five of the interviews were done in cafes suggested by the participants, one was done in the participant's house, another one in the participant's office (after work hours), two via Skype (one as requested by the participant due to lack of time) and the last one was done in an space, lent by a friend, that is usually used by feminist groups to have workshops and trainings on diverse topics (this was also the setting for the focus group). Although most of those spaces were public, they allowed for intimate, private conversations and in most of the cases it was places the activist frequented regularly and considered safe spaces.

All of the interviews lasted two hours or more, except for one that was an hour long, and all of them were recorded on audio. They all focused on the following questions:

- How does activism affect your mental health? In order to have an understanding of the impact of their activism and of their perception of it.
- How would you define self-care? In order to understand the elements that they considered crucial to self-care.
- What elements/conditions facilitate or impair self-care? In order to discuss the dynamics surrounding self-care in their activism and the obstacles that were present.
- What strategies do you use for self-care regarding your activism?
- Is self-care on your group's agenda? Prompt: Are there collective strategies?

The focus group on the other hand was carried out at the end of my fieldwork period with the intent to create an atmosphere that allowed for several viewpoints to be expressed,

to facilitate the interaction between participants and a collaborative construction of ideas (Barbour, 2007). The focus group was suitable for discussing sensitive topics, such as mental health (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). It was also an opportunity to share the findings I had gathered and to receive feedback. The space was difficult to arrange, as my attempt to set up the initial focus groups indicated. It reflected what I explain below as one of the measures for self-care. Specifically, it reflects the limited ability to procure safe spaces in order to avoid unpleasant interactions and conflict and it also reflects the lack of time that activists face when procuring self-care (which I will expand on later).

The focus group was made up of 3 activists, from different collectives, although two of them were members of several groups, and shared one in common. It lasted three hours, during which we did one Participatory Action Research technique called *mapping,* as well as an exercise to determine the different activities they do in their daily life and how those could continue or change, in order to improve self-care. These activities aimed to facilitate a conversation that covered the meanings behind their activist experience and the emotions attached to it.

The first exercise required them to list the activities they do in different aspects of their lives such as ways they share with others, related to care, routine, creativity, nature, cognitive development, alone time and activism. The purpose was to look at how the activists distribute their time and how some tasks take more time or priority than others. Specially, it was meant to open up the discussion on aspects that they could change or improve to prioritize self-care.

Secondly, we did an exercise on mapping, which refers to a method were participants create maps to explore different topics and the relations they have between each other (Kindon, et al., 2007:17). The objective of this technique is "to enable people to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms using their own symbols, language or art forms" (ibid.). Mapping challenges the idea that places are neutral sites and focuses on the value that people place on to them in order to relate to each other and themselves (Sanderson, 2007:125). With this in mind, I asked the participants to create a map of their self-care, a map that would look like a town and included all the spaces they related to self-care in their lives. This tool informed the conversation on what self-care looks like for them and how that relates to their peer's ways of taking care of themselves, and the collective strategies they share.

Finally, we discussed the findings I had gathered from the interviews so far and they gave their feedback as well as further input on what self-care is for them and what dynamics and limitations they encounter within the movement.

One key element during the whole research process was for me to be reflexive not only with myself and my motivations, but with the participants (Taylor, 1998:368). Being open every step of the way about my own experiences with activism, my knowledge gaps and my commitment to help turn the findings into action. I became aware during the research that one of the motivations that brought me to be interested in this topic, was my own fear of delving deeper into activism because I was concerned about the impact it could have on my own self-care and mental health. I have always wondered how they did it for so long and dealing with the frustrations that come with the context we are part of. That reflexivity allowed me to develop the interviews and focus groups as conversations where I was also very open about my concerns, and where I heard how they deal with those fears, or in some cases, how those are not concerns for them. These were interesting findings and also, reassuring for me in my personal quest into activism. It was also my personal commitment to move beyond ideas of "objectivity and disinterested knowledge production" acknowledging how my identity brought me to this research (Carrillo, 2005:19).

Analysis

To analyze the data collected I used the web-based software called Dedoose. Dedoose is a code-based software that allows you to code on text, video and audio. Allowing you to choose between transcriptions or coding over audios. I coded over my interview audios linking them to notes and memos on selective transcriptions of important data. Usually direct quotes from the participants which will be included throughout the findings chapter to illustrate the results (Silver and Lewis, 2017).

To do so, I used what Flick (2009) describes as *selective coding* by attaching concepts to a central category -in this case the activist's self-care- that was linked to other sub-categories (such as time, communication, boundaries, external, collective, individual, resources, commitment, sacrifice, security, etc.) until reaching theoretical saturation. With the intention of "discovering patterns in the data as well as the conditions under which these apply" (Flick, 2009: 312) specifically, the dynamics of the movement and the strategies under which these apply.

6. Findings

During this chapter, I dive into the results of my fieldwork in San José, giving priority to the voices of the women that allowed me to look closely into their experiences. Teaching me about the dynamics of a feminist movement in Costa Rica, with all the dynamics that play into it.

First, I will go into the *dynamics* of the activist tasks and the movement itself that result in a self-care deficit on the lives of the women I interviewed. Specifically, I will explain how a culture of selflessness is reproduced, affecting the time management of the activists due to not limiting the workload that the cause represents. I will also go into the dynamics that the movement reproduces that are harmful for both the movement itself and its members. Showing how in the Costa Rican abortion rights movement, some of the traditional dynamics of the movement interfere with self-care and the lack of self-care perpetuates the prejudicial dynamics. Chen and Gorski (2015) mention this in their work and call it 'in-fighting', claiming that it is one of the causes of burn-out. However, they do not expand on how is reproduced, which I will intend to do in regard to the Costa Rican pro-abortion movement.

Secondly, I will dive into the *strategies* that the activists and groups use to improve their self-care. For which I divide the care strategies into external, collective and individual. The *external*, refer to all of those strategies that they use to battle the external attacks and risks that come with their activism. Or the strategies they think are vital to install within the movement in that regard. The *collective*, refer to the positive strategies they use as groups and national movement, to improve the dynamics that affect both the movement itself, and the mental health of the individuals who conform it. And lastly, the *individual strategies*, referring to those that are most frequently used to cope with the different effects that activism has on their lives.

6.1 The dynamics of care in the abortion rights movement

"We have so little power, that the one we do have… oh how we fight for it"

(Sara, 2019, personal interview)

As the previous literature suggests, there are impacts on the mental health of activists that come with the task. Such as stress, frustration and burn-out. The literature mainly refers, as stated before, to the burn-out syndrome and attributes it to the effects of the workload, emotional labour and a culture of selflessness that does not encourage the reflection on well-being (Chen and Gorski, 2015). Neither Costa Rica nor its abortion rights movement are an exception of these dynamics.

The abortion rights activists commonly mentioned that activism was done on their "free" time and with a small network, causing a bigger workload than what allows for them to care properly for their social relations and personal time.

There is lack of time because beyond the cause, there is also a life to keep up with, a life that does not pause for activism. Therefore, they end up "dedicating [their] free time to activism because the rest of the time, operation beans comes first" (Agustina, 2019, personal interview[7]) as one of the activists calls her regular job, referring to the need to put bread on the table. Which translates, for some of them, into "spending their weekends at home making purple handkerchiefs together" (Ana Lucía, 2019, personal interview[8]) which is the symbol that identifies them in the movement in Costa Rica and what they sell to pay for materials for future activities. Others have to hit pause on the activism for a while because there is not enough time when you count going to classes, work, family, kids, and themselves (Marta, 2019, personal interview). For Marta, it was 9 years of being part of one of the groups before an actual break, but she says she will be back at it as soon as possible, and still tries to do her part from her day to day spaces and interactions.

For some of the women, that balance of time is not learned until after they burn-out and for some they still struggle with this and "do not know how to do an activism that has self-care, that allows you to develop your abilities responsibly, put rice and beans on the table, that allows you to love, be with your family, with your friends. Because if you didn't

[7] Personal interview with Agustina, in San José, Costa Rica, July 23rd, 2019.

[8] Personal interview with Ana Lucia, in San José, Costa Rica, August 2nd, 2019.

have time to rest, you didn't have time to see your family, partner or friends." (Curie, 2019, personal interview[9])

Some "work full time and a half more, because [they] still do not know how to manage it" (Blanca, 2019, personal interview) and end up not having time for leisure or basic chores because "it is doing activism plus an 8-hour workday. If they do activism it means that the clothes were left unwashed, tomorrow you have to eat out-side. Your needs are relegated because of the cause and you end up doing activism on a 'free time' that you are basically giving up" (Curie, 2019, personal interview).

For most, if not all of them, the time they spend doing activism is worth sacrificing that free time, and they do it because they deeply care about the cause. But as the majority of them recognize, there is a need to reflect on the mental health and social implications of this dynamic. "Knowing what will be sacrificed: family, partners, time, leisure, health" (Blanca,2019, personal interview) if they neglect to set boundaries, not only for others but for themselves, when taking on an unmanageable amount of activities.

Self-care is lost in these dynamics, as Ana Lucia narrates,

> "it is something we talked about at the beginning [referring to her group], and we talk about it every now and then. But we do not end up doing it because on the day to day, with everything we have to do, it keeps going down our priority list" (2019, personal interview)

The workload then, is accompanied by a culture of selflessness that Chen and Gorski (2015:14) describe as a culture of guilt, martyrdom and sacrifice. A culture that is not helpful when it comes to the management of time. That reinforces the idea that "somebody has to stay inside the fort or else it will fall apart" (Blanca, 2019, personal interview). 6 out of the 10 activists that I interviewed mentioned feelings of guilt related to choosing to abstain from activities they could not sustain and they mentioned that there is a "reproduction of a 'mea culpa'" (Helena, 2019, personal interview[10]) related to the fear of what will happen if the job is not done. Additionally, the reality is that there are few people doing a job that requires masses and there is an underlying notion that no one will replace them if they are not able to complete the task.

[9] Personal interview with Curie, via Skype, July 25th, 2019.
[10] Personal interview with Helena, in San José, Costa Rica, August 8th, 2019.

In Costa Rica, some of the activists believe this also comes back to the religious culture they live in, where the idea of sacrifice is upheld as a female's purpose. Malina explains it saying that "even if you are an atheist, it is hard to get rid of thousands of years of Catholicism from your brain. There is this notion of Mary under the cross, of a women silently taking on the burden and caring for others" (Malina, 2019, personal interview[11]). It is an idea that is installed in the cultural imaginary of the ideal women and when you add the pressure of the counterpart trying to bring the movement down, the reaction is to protect and 'sacrifice'. This is not to say that this dynamic is unusual, as scholars have noted that "many activist groups function within a climate of campaign urgency, resource scarcity, and guilt" (Hart, 2013:4). Nevertheless, as Curie says, "it cannot be just the sacrifice reaction, because otherwise it is exhausting. Because you will never have the resources that the anti-rights movement has. Although we do an excellent job ... of course, because we all get worn out." (2019, personal interview)

The problem in a lot of cases is that the culture does not encourage the reflection on well-being, it gives value to unhealthy perceptions, or encourages the group to make an effort to teach new activists the lessons older activists have learned along the way on care and self-care (Chen and Gorski, 2015; Hart, 2013). "We are not in a society based on care and affection. Therefore there is this idea that being overworked and exploiting ourselves is being successful" (Agustina, 2019, personal interview), and if you are seen resting people think you are not doing enough or that you are lazy and it is rare if self-care is valued because mental health in general is not seen as a priority. This translates to the movement when activists go into it, seeing how the most recognized figures are working 24/7, how they always have the latest news and attend every event, the idea that it reproduces is that the ideal is to know and do everything. Which is not respectful of everyone's capabilities and circumstances (Malina, 2019, personal interview). While also ignoring that those same activists that are being recognized are also struggling to keep up with their lives and their health (Blanca, 2019, personal interview)

Besides the fact that the culture does not encourage the discussion on well-being, there is also a lot of resistance to do it from some of the activists within the movement. As Helena says,

[11] Personal interview with Malina, in San José, Costa Rica, September 4th, 2019.

"they think self-care is too 'hippie' or 'pachamamic', they say it is obvious that they have to take care of themselves, but in my opinion, there is no real awareness of what it is. And they end up not doing it" (2019, personal interview).

The lack of time, workload, emotional labour and culture of selflessness are factors related to broader cultural issues. And usually due to the cause itself, to the fact that these women are moved by the injustice and committed to changing things. But the way the movement handles this and plans for actions to prevent it, is what I will expand on as the main findings on my research.

6.1.1 The specifics of this movement

"It's not about the fight itself, of course, it's about who we fight next to. Because the goal can be very hard, but if there is care, if there is company, you can do it." (Sara, 2019, personal interview)

During the past ten years I have participated in most woman's rights protests in Costa Rica and have attended events organized by the activists I wanted to engage with in my research. I have organized with friends to participate in those spaces but have not had an active part in the organization or any personal relations with the activist in charge of that planning. My first look into this side of the movement was in an event to celebrate the anniversary of the group Aborto Legal CR. Which was held the day after I arrived in Costa Rica to do my fieldwork. On July 6th the activists had a celebration at a bar in San José and I quickly understood that the approach and methods I had planned on using, would not work for this specific context. The way I approached my methodology would end up being my first taste of the dynamics of care within the movement.

At the start of the research process, my intention was to conduct this study from a participatory action research standpoint. My purpose was to involve as many activists from the abortion rights movement as possible, allowing me to engage with them as a community and have a look into their dynamics and perceptions. I also wanted to provide a space, that did not seem to exist (but seem to be wanted), to discuss the topic of self-care. I had a lot of ideas on how to make the interactions appealing and participatory, but I did not fully consider how that would translate into a context with small, closed groups, that had communication obstacles, safety concerns and a lack of time.

That day I found myself at a bar in the middle of San José surrounded by people I did not know but felt familiar. One by one they started to gather around several tables that were assembled together to form one big sitting area. A metaphor for what the movement looks like, if you ask me. Several pieces that look similar but not necessarily match with each other. All serving the same purpose.

I started to recognize the faces of women I have seen in protests, panels and the media. Women I admire, women that maintain the feminist movement in Costa Rica afloat. When I decided to attend this event, I pictured a lot of familiar faces but a lot of them were missing. On that Saturday I did not think much about it, but I would come to realize that those absences where a sign of a deep-rooted issue in the Costa Rican pro-abortion movement. And a big obstacle for care.

As social movements are based on "linked solidarities and shared identities" (Diani and Bison, 2004:283) it becomes an obstacle when they are faced with what Chen and Gorski (2015) call 'infighting' or "disharmonious or hostile environments" (p.12). Two days after I sent the poster inviting women to be a part of my research, I got into a conversation with one of the activists that asked me

> "have you considered what some of the girls in the movement are going to think when they see the poster and see that the picture you chose is from the group Aborto Legal CR? You should maybe be prepared for some not wanting to be a part of it" (Susana, 2019, personal communication[12]).

At that moment I did not have enough knowledge of the dynamics of the movement to understand what the implications were, of what for me seemed like a small decision. I changed the poster, redistributed it and kept that conversation present in every interview I had. I purposely did not add a question on infighting because I did not want to steer the conversation. But as I talked to all ten of them about what elements impair self-care for them as activists, the topic of the tension within the movement always came up. As it appears from what I discussed with all of them, the tensions are the product of agreements that were challenged, trust that was broken and relationships that ended. Within a movement so small that results in what Ana Lucia (2019, personal interview) explains as, "continuously collecting

[12] Personal interview with Susana, in San José, Costa Rica, July 31st, 2019.

other people's historical debts. Which is difficult to not be a part of when you work with people who have a longer trajectory and bring those tensions with them".

"Within social movement networks, membership criteria are extremely unstable and ultimately dependent on mutual recognition between actors" (Diani and Bison, 2004:284) After several fights that happened years ago, for personal or political reasons, those memberships were not necessarily 'revoked' but moved to other groups. Which resulted in a fragmented movement where small groups have positive dynamics that are directed by care and horizontality. Nevertheless, the movement as a whole is not managed the same way. As all of the women I interviewed explained, there is a lot of judgement between groups of how the separate strategies are chosen and little communication on how to become a more homogenous movement.

As Susana mentioned (2019, personal interview):

> "People don't realize that within the movement, with every post or march, there's only a few people holding it together because everyone else is fighting with each other. They just see the post or the protest so they think this must still be alive and well"

It is difficult to change that when "there is political distrust and no intergenerational bridges" (Lila, 2019, personal interview) between them. And when part of self-care for some of them is about not participating in spaces that are frequented by some of the other activists as both Lila and Helena (2019, personal interviews) referred to.

> "There are certain people with whom I do not share spaces with. The sorority does not go so far, my feminism does not stretch that far" (Lila, 2019, personal interview)

Some of the activists tried to explain it as a result of several factors. For one of them it is about "having different readings of the context, or a lack of historical memory" (Marta, 2019, personal interview). For Susana, it is "the result of people who do not want to be flexible and think they are right without noticing that everyone else is asking for something different" (2019, personal interview). And for AC it is a direct effect of "the presence of egos and people who want to be protagonist, or due to 'superior mandates' [referring to activists that are linked to political parties]" (2019, personal interview).

Either way, it results in problematic dynamics that impair the ability to care for each other and for themselves in a democratic way. Because although they are reflecting on the power dynamics that go on within the movement, that reflection is not being brought up to

a discussion table, where it can lead to improvements in the overall movement (Tronto, 2013:148).

There is a lack of communication specially between generations and when they do talk it is usually because there is a crucial situation that brings them together temporarily. Marta refers to it by explaining that "there was no transfer of intergenerational knowledge. The 'new ones' are re-inventing warm water and the others are seeing it without knowing how to enter that dialogue" (2019, personal interview). During the 2018 presidential elections, for example, a group was formed to counteract the sexist discourse that was being reproduced by the second runner in the political race. A lot of activists from all ages, groups and backgrounds came together, despite their differences and they accomplished a lot (Sara; Marta; 2019, personal interview). But that period was also used by several activists to pose complaints on past issues and dynamics that were long due a conversation. It was one of the times where newer activists complained about other activists being 'adult-centric' and not respecting their input and it ended up on everyone going their own way as soon as the political race was done (Sara, 2019, personal interview).

As Diani and Bison (2004:285) mention, this sort of arrangements that happen during critical situations are called conflictual coalitional processes. This processes refer to the "[r]esource mobilization and campaigning (…) conducted mainly through exchanges and pooling of resources between distinct groups and organizations. [Where t]he latter rather than the network is the main source of participants' identities and loyalties." (Diani and Bison, 2004: 285). That is to say that there are no "strong identity links" (ibid.) Which makes the coalitions weak and usually temporary.

During those temporary coalitions, activists behave different to the usual dynamics of the movement, but they bring some part of the communication dynamics with them. As Susana (2019, personal interview) mentions "when they talk about self-care it is in order to decide which situations [they] do not want to be a part of" and not to determine which alternatives they want to put in place.

> "We have not learned to communicate, or we have not learned to communicate assertively. Neither efficiently, nor in a way that doesn't hurt egos, and that doesn't hurt people. Sometimes it's easier to step aside than to tell someone 'look you're doing something wrong'" (ibid).

This precarious communication builds up the lack of trust across the movement. Expanding to those who are not in it and resulting in a difficulty to provide relays for the current activists, 'old' and 'new'. If they do not communicate their concerns, or what they

are not happy with, the responsibility stays in the same places. Which as Marta says, "is very sad because for so long we felt alone, and now that the streets are filled with women, we do not understand each other" (2019, personal interview).

The idea that only certain people can do some tasks is perpetuated and some end up thinking "if I do not do things, they do not get done" (Blanca, 2019, personal interview). Which also leads to activist burn-out and health issues as discussed before. For one of the activists in particular, this lack of self-care perpetuated by the culture of selflessness, the workload, tensions and lack of trust ended up with her in the hospital diagnosed with peritonitis because she refused to go to the doctor as she had too much to do. As she states, she only "understand[s] the impact of her work schedules until [she] was sitting in the wheelchair and asking the doctor when [she] was going to leave because [she] was traveling the next day and did not want to stop traveling if it was not strictly necessary" (Blanca, 2019, personal interview). Not to mention that this trip she is referring to was to represent the activist organization she is a part of and not part of her formal job.

This of course, is one of the extreme cases that result from the different demands of the movement, but it is an example of the implications of not setting boundaries or reflecting on the importance of care in the activist's processes.

Another factor that is present in the movement is that of the judgement or evaluation of other groups, that can be seen as demanding of certain standards or behaviors. Within small groups of activists, as I mentioned before, there seems to be more horizontal and caring dynamics. Nevertheless, when referring to other groups, there seemed to be some level of judgement of how they managed their strategies. As well as assigned responsibilities, to people or groups, for the effects of those strategies.

This specific dynamic is rooted mostly in fear (Marta, 2019, personal interview). Fear of being visible or not, of asking for more than what the context allows, or too little, and being stripped of rights that they already obtained or taking too long to get them because of not asking for them. To be more precise, there is a constant debate between some of the groups about the difference between asking for therapeutic abortion or overall legal abortion. As well as the difference of calling it 'legal abortion' or the 'right to choose' and the effect it has on the public discussion. These are key concerns because they imply a level of awareness of the context, that installs fear and caution but also brings up courage and resistance. Some of the activists think that asking for too much at this moment can be a reckless move (Marta, AC, Lila, 2019, personal interview). "You can't jump on the road to ask for anything. That happened in El Salvador and they penalized all kinds of abortion" (Sara, 2019, personal

interview). And others believe that there is no 'good time' to ask for the full legalization of abortion, and that they should not wait for a perfect timing (Malina; Susana; Ana Lucia; 2019, personal interviews). "At one point [they] said 'we just cannot keep asking for the minimum" (Ana Lucia, 2019, personal interview).

These polarizing positions create a wedge in the movement. As well as a lack of a unified front; the number of activists that are there is not being properly taken advantage of, because although they are all fighting for the same cause, they are doing double efforts as there is no consensus or assignation of roles at a movement level. This brings with it an overload of responsibilities and lack of relays that results in what I think of as 'reactive self-care'.

'Reactive self-care' is what I call all the strategies that the activists use to disconnect from the movement, and not as in a 'conscious or intentional disconnection' but one that comes from being overwhelmed and overloaded. Or what Susana refers to as "one of those moments where you don't want to let off steam, you just want to forget everything" (2019, personal interview). This are the moments that result on 'strategies' like hiding in their rooms and binging Netflix for hours without realizing it, recurring to drugs and alcohol to handle stress and anxiety (and not in a recreational manner), or having to stop all together because your body got to its limit (Ana Lucia; Curie; Susana;LA,2019, personal interviews).

In conclusion, besides the frequent factors that relate to activist tasks such as work-load, emotional labour and culture of selflessness. There are other dynamics of the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica that seem to perpetuate a culture that does not properly value self/care. The different patterns of communication, specially between generations is one of them. Making it difficult to provide relays for activists in specific moments or when they are ready to leave the movement after years of working for it. Which is probably rooted in historic tensions that were never fully resolved. Another one refers to the different demands between groups that express judgment on the strategies and discourses used. And lastly the fear that comes with the regional experiences and awareness of the national situation and how that threatens to generate setbacks in the access to rights for women.

6.2 How do they cope?

"The fact that we demand our rights while also having a good time is in itself a revolution within our struggle. We have the right to have a good time and demand what we want. And those two things can coexist."

(Curie, 2019, personal interview)

The last chapter was a glance at how certain dynamics of the movement impair a culture that is respectful to the ethics of care. All ten activists I interviewed are aware that these prejudicial dynamics are present and most of them have been involved in them at some point. Nonetheless, the activists I interviewed have been active in the movement for a minimum of one year and a maximum of 45 years. During those years, they all have found different ways to cope with the emotional implications of the cause, as well as with the dynamics previously explained. They all have built strong relationships with peers within the movement and still to this day think it is worth every struggle. The question is how do they do it?

Having interviewed people from a large range of ages, from their 20s up to their 70s; I got to hear about different ways in which they manage their self-care and learn to navigate activism. As well as different levels of engagements and energy, different stages of reflection on care, and a lot of lessons learned throughout the years. Out of all of that, one consistent point was that all of them believe in the importance of implementing caring and horizontal practices when building a collective. Which translates into them having alternative dynamics of care in their lives and within their groups, even if that does not yet translate into the movement as a whole.

In this chapter, I will focus on all of the positive behavioral efforts (in an individual and social level) that are put in place to create horizontal, respectful and democratic coalitions. In addition to maintaining well-being.

I divided the activists' strategies into *collective, external and individual.* In all of them I refer to strategies and values they treasure to resist the patriarchal system while also protecting their well-being. The collective strategies directly refer to the counterpart of the dynamics previously stated. Therefore, I will start with that.

6.2.1 Collective strategies

When discussing the strategies implemented, several of the women interviewed mentioned the support of peers within the movement and the construction of safe spaces as key factors. Specifically, there were three elements that where repetitive in their discourse and seemed to be crucial to their well-being. The construction of relations and safe spaces within the movement, having open and emotional communication and building a collective identity. All of these elements are interrelated and dependent on the commitment to avoid infighting, vertical relations and judgement (Sara, Curie, Susana, Helena, Marta, Agustina, 2019, personal interviews).

As Curie (2019, personal interview) states "the pain comes from other places, but participation, the group, should not be a cause of distress, it should not bring pain. Rather [they] are there together to survive the pain that the context brings [them]". Being aware of these dynamics, of the politics of relation, requires the reflection on how the interactions within the movement impact the activist's agency and perceptions of their experience (Carrillo, 2005:15). It is crucial for them to be aware of the implications of how they relate to each other and what message are those interactions reinforcing. Caring relations derive from a desire to repair the world or the situations surrounding people (Tronto, 1993:104) and so, as activists and human rights defenders some of them describe care as what should be a basic understanding. As Sara (2019, personal interview) says "is that not exactly what we are trying to do here? To change and fix things, doing them differently, from a place of sorority and care". Therefore, implying that care should not be an extra activity or an afterthought, rather the thread that ties all their interactions and efforts together[13].

This translates into different factors. First, they value settings where there are no demands from each other, or judgement about how they manage their time and activism. Spaces where they are able "to work from the affections. Understanding each other as emotional people, with a life story and different circumstances. Without demanding more than [they] can give and always looking for consensus" (Helena, 2019, personal interview). For Susana (2019, personal interview) it is very important to be able to "ask each other for time out and allow [themselves] to not be available at every moment. Not being expected to know everything and encouraging each other to do things only when [they] feel comfortable with

[13] "Self-care is not an activity, is how we do things, is what we believe in" (Sara, 2019, personal interview)

it" (Susana, 2019, personal interview). As AC and Susana mention (2019, personal interviews) interactions like these, where there is respect for each other's paces and limitations, make them feel safe and supported. Helping them cope with the workload and be more encouraged to work in their common goals. Nevertheless, this also implies that they are required to trust that they will be each other's relays when someone is not able to be there. As well as being aware that is necessary for them to be open enough to invite new people into their groups, investing time to prepare women to be new spokespersons and have an active role. Resulting in more balanced workloads for everyone and a higher involvement within the movement. Half of the activists mentioned that the role of spokesperson, for example, should not be a permanent role but a rotary role. Making sure that several people are able to address the press and public debates, while also preventing burn-out from the few who usually take on the task. As most of them agree that it is one of the tasks that wears activists down the most (Malina, LA, 2019, personal interview)

Another important factor that facilitates the creation of those spaces, is an open and emotional style of communication. As Helena mentions (2019, personal interview) she has implemented a style of communication from her emotions. She makes sure to tell her peers not only what bothers her or makes her overwhelmed, but to do it communicating how it makes her feel. Marta, AC and her all mentioned that being able to tell each other how they are feeling and why something made them uncomfortable is more important than never disagreeing, because it strengthens the relations they have and makes them more honest and open. As Marina (2019:220) proposes (when discussing the Argentinian pro-abortion spaces called Encounters) an "horizontal structure (…) does not exempt [spaces] from being a scenario of power disputes, but it does allow those disputes to be settled in a different way from a traditional politics". As Curie (2019, personal interview) mentioned, "[they] do not want to do things the same way they are always done. [They] want to prove that it is possible to be assertive while being emotional and that it actually gives value to the structures [they] promote".

Within social movements strategies are based on constant negotiations (Diani and Bison, 2004:283) and that is also reflected in how some of the activist choose to handle the intergenerational barrier that was discussed before. As Marta (2019, personal interview) says, it is important to learn from those women within the movement that are able to build bridges between the different generations. Several of them seem to be good at not getting caught up between the infighting dynamic and say it is a conscious effort. Susana (2019, personal

interview) explains that she makes it a point to listen to all of the sides, focusing on being empathetic and understanding others without trying to take sides. While also being very honest about her own opinions and positions.

As Agustina states "we are very few people in the country who dare to do activism, we are going to meet, and we are not necessarily going to get along. Nor are we necessarily going to agree on the readings or the ways of doing things" (2019, personal interview). But it is important for them to communicate in order to focus on the common goals they have. When they do that from a place of empathy and respect, the spaces become more inclusive and the bonds become stronger.

A lot of them already do that within their specific groups, but at least three of them expressed a desire to get as many groups or activists together to start a conversation about care as a movement. AC and Helena (2019, personal interviews) both thought it could be interesting to get together to discuss the tensions within the movement, the strategies they have for the future and the importance of self-care and care as a political tool. AC proposes to do it as an open assembly where they "could get together as people, as women, not as an organization or a group. This could draw more people in than if the invitation is done by an organization that polarizes the discussion before it starts". For Helena (2019, personal interview) another thing that could be helpful is to have self-care workshops to make sure everyone has the tools and resources to ensure their well-being. She implements that in her own life by offering those workshops to women and participating in them as she truly believes that "self-care should be considered a health promotion matter".

Both a 'no demands' environment and the use of open communication and negotiations make the building of safe spaces much easier than the power challenges and resentments that have been installed in the past. They make the perceptions of the activists on their groups much better and allow them to enjoy their time doing activism and building collective identities. This last element is crucial as a strategy for self-care as one of the main goals most feminist movements have is creating visibility (Marina, 2019:219)

Within the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica, they use several strategies to build a collective identity. First, they are making a point to be consistent in their discourse, being inclusive and intersectional, using science as their base and fighting for the human rights of all women. All of the ten activists I interviewed refer to 'sorority' (solidarity between

women) as their main focus and a source of strength. And lastly, they use certain symbols to recognize and empower each other.

One of the strategies they use is to pick specific people to be the spokespersons within the different groups. In most of the groups there is some sort of preparation to be a spokesperson given by those who have done it in the past and they have constant discussions about the message they want to put across (Ana Lucia, Curie, Lila, 2019, personal interviews). All ten activists I interviewed believed it is important to be consistent in the message and try to present themselves to those outside of the movement as a united front even if there are tensions between them or divisions. They all use scientific arguments in all of their communications with the media or in their public releases. Avoiding the participation in personal attacks to defend a point and maintaining a respectful dialogue with others.

They are moved by an idea of sorority being a priority in how they attain their common goals. And even the word is part of their identity, installed in their vocabulary and going further than a notion of solidarity and into a perception of care, strength and union. When the activists talk about *sororidad* (in Spanish) there is a weight you can perceive in the word, an affection that is attached to it that is part of who they are as feminists. You can see the word in a lot of the banners during the protests, in their social media posts (Aborto Legal CR, n.d), and it is constant in the personal interactions with them. That is not to say that just because the word is used, the dynamics are being done in a way consequent with sorority. Curie (2019, personal interview) is actually one of the activists that was very critical in how often and lightly the word is used. Nonetheless, when used in contexts where actions are consequent with it, she believes it implies a long-term political practice of relations of trust, respect and care even when there are differences between each other. Helena (2019, personal interview) defines it as an "ethical-political positioning of respect and support for the situations and processes that other women carry. Understanding women in the broader sense including trans people, non-binary people and other feminized bodies". This relates to Tronto's (1993) understanding of care as going beyond a disposition. As both sororidad and care (being a part of it) are conceived as practices that go beyond personal relations or emotional investments. Making it difficult "to sentimentalize [or] privatize" them (p.118).

The use of the handkerchiefs and symbols also contributes to identity building within the movement. The Argentinian movement for the legalization of abortion created the symbol of the green handkerchief to represent those people fighting for a women's right to

choose. As the movement gained notoriety across the globe it turned into a worldwide symbol and was appropriated by feminist in different countries, with variations in some of them to make it more specific to their contexts. In Costa Rica it turned into a purple handkerchief to maintain the line of the feminist movement in the country and it had added a symbol combining the symbol ♀ and a flower. The 'Guaria Morada' is one of Costa Rica's national symbols (specifically our national flower) and it resembles a vulva. Which in combination with the symbol makes for a powerful and unique representation of what the movement stands for. The handkerchief is now used in all of the feminist protests in the country, as well as the green handkerchief. Bringing a sense of community and making a political stand visible to everyone who sees it.

Figure 1. Handkerchief of ALCR "For out right to choose"

Source: Aborto Legal Costa Rica (October 1st, 2019) Twitter Post.

The handkerchief promotes community for a lot of them because "one sees it and knows that that woman knows that her body is hers. And that is a work of self-care in itself, because we are telling ourselves that we are ours and nobody else's." (Curie, 2019, personal interview).

> "Because women are often silenced or ignored, and without dismissing the many forms of oppression effected through the body, we also see that women's bodies can become at times the only place to make their needs, sufferings and joys visible." (Harcourt and Escobar, 2002:8)

The use of the handkerchief is a practice that exposes their beliefs on a day to day basis to people who do not agree with them. The handkerchiefs are made in gatherings they call 'pañueleadas' and are later sold to pay for the activities they plan around the issue of legal abortion. A lot of the activists I talked to carry one with them in their wrists, backpacks or necks frequently, as well as together in the protests they organize. These practices are common in social movements, where the "collective identity is a process strongly associated with recognition and the creation of connectedness." (Diani and Bison, 2004: 284). And where tactics like using those symbols and their power to support further actions are also a way to challenge the hegemonic powerholders and demonstrate the power of alternative ways of building community (ibid:303)

6.2.2 External strategies

'External strategies' is the name I have given to all of the efforts activists make to protect themselves from external threats. Including physical and emotional threats. One of the most important factors activists keep in mind to ensure their self-care is that of being aware of the context they are a part of and regulate their actions and expectations accordingly. As Marta (2019, personal interview) states "you need to understand that abortion is still a crime here, you can be prosecuted because of it and we should all act taking that into account. Not to be paralyzed rather to take the appropriate measures and not expose ourselves"

These feminists understand their bodies as 'battlefields' and all of the spaces they inhabit and the actions they take are considered "a complaint against the implicit and explicit threat of patriarchal power." (Fernández, 2019:231) Therefore, they also know that battling that power has implications and make an effort to protect themselves accordingly.

In the practical sense, that is translated into several strategies in order to avoid attacks (which in the Costa Rican context are mostly verbal or online attacks), confrontations or inaccurate reports on their actions. During protests they make sure they always have security protocols in place (both internally and one distributed on social media to the general public). They have a security committee that is vigilant of any external threats or provocations during the activities. Registering both the confrontations and the protest itself to make sure there is never an inaccurate representation of their actions and they have a way of defending themselves if it is ever necessary. During activities planned as informative or reflective, such as movie screenings, forums, debates, etc., they make sure that the spaces they choose are owned by allies of the movement. As well as that the people who are invited are known by

someone within the movement and that the topics discussed do not expose them or those attending in any way. Their important communications where there is any sensitive information are done in person or through applications where they have higher levels of encryption and control over their data[14]. Additionally, several of them (especially those in spokesperson positions) limit their social media use in some way. Some do not have social media altogether. Others have some public social media where they communicate with the public and release pertinent information from the movement, and some private where they only accept people they know and avoid their activism to be represented. Some have anonymous social media. And almost all of them avoid reading comments on social media posts or news to avoid the frustration and anger it causes them to read anti-rights comments (Blanca; Curie; Helena; Lila, 2019, personal interviews).

Regarding the clandestine side of the movement, the activists that are a part of it have further considerations than the ones who are not. There is more fear and higher implications with being visible if you are also part of the clandestine movement. Therefore, they make sure to avoid unsafe web apps or emails to communicate with each other or the women they are helping. Some of them have different phones for those tasks and use encrypted applications to provide the services. They also rarely use their real names during the interactions and avoid being spokespersons for the movement or visible in any way. Most of the times they do not all know each other, to ensure that everyone has just the necessary information to do their jobs in a safe and care-full way[15] because their priority is to make the women who need it feel safe. As one of them mentions, "once those women are aware that it is a network of professional women (who know the legal, medical and psychological) who is in charge. They know it is safe situation, and with that everything already changes"[16]. Although, as one of the activists says, it is a burden and it wears them down sometimes. "It's not a quick job and done, it is integral and caring and you get involved. At the end I felt like a little spider where, if I did not take care of myself, I could affect the greater web" [17].

These specific task and the implications of a context where abortion is still illegal requires them to be more conscious of when they need to stop. They stop because the

[14] Author's fieldwork observations.
[15] 2019, Personal interviews. The pseudonyms will also not be included to avoid the information to be traced back in any way.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

emotional labour of accompanying these women and their experiences has implications on their mental health. Because they want to be able to be more vocal on their cause. Or because they evaluate the situation and understand that there are periods were the risk is too high for them to help someone. In the end, there usually someone willing to do the job, but they evaluate the risks wisely and have a network that is there to take care of them as well[18].

6.2.3 Individual strategies

The individual strategies for self-care can be summarized in two words: networks and boundaries. As Tronto states

> "if citizens are willing to recognize their own needs, then they can also recognize that others have needs as well. Once people recognize their own self-care, they also see how much of their time and energy are devoted to caring for themselves and others." (Tronto, 2013: 146)

It is through this awareness of both their needs and how they provide care for others, that they also become aware of what they need, to maintain their well-being. Some of the factors that influence this are the basic physiological needs that seem obvious for many but tend to be ignored in some level when there is an overload of work. Having proper eating schedules, sleeping periods, human interaction, exercise, etc., are crucial in self-care. For example, six of the activists mentioned long periods of sedentarism that affected them emotionally and said that by participating in some type of exercise, they feel better and healthier (both physically and mentally). They report using yoga, long walks, gym training, etc., to take care of their bodies and minds with exercise.

A second factor is that of networks. Eight out of ten of the activists mentioned having a strong support system, that encouraged and supported their activism and helped them unplug when they were feeling overwhelmed. The relationships they cherish include those they build within the movement, their families and friends. For some of them, it is their families who provide a big sense of comfort and guidance. Blanca, for example, says "if I talk to my mom everything is fine. She does not only tell me the good things, she is also my moral compass. She always asks me 'do you think you did the right thing?' and I know if I did" (2019, personal interview). Ana Lucia on the other hand says "my mom was always a feminist, so I never had an aha moment. We even make handkerchiefs in my parents' house,

[18] Ibid.

they were one of our first buyers. So yeah, they support us" (2019, personal interview). Some of the other activists also said that being able to tell their families when they are tired and receive their love and support is one of the things that helps the most.

Most of the activists mentioned that the friends they make within the movement are crucial. Those friends within their peers allow them to vent about the concerns they have in common and to relate through their similarities and passions. As Marta says "we are there for each other, not only for things related to the movement but in general. If one of us cannot come to the meetings because her mom is sick, we try to help, alternate to care for her mom so she can attend if she wants. We figure out a way" (2019, personal interview). They have small groups of friends but with strong bonds that provide care and comfort in the face of difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, for some of them is easier when they have friendships outside of the movement. Allowing them to take breaks from the issue and have leisure time without the topic of abortion rights being brought up (Susana; Ana Lucia, 2019, personal interviews).

Regarding their boundaries, they all understand how powerful it is to take care of themselves, set limits to their involvement, others and the work. Curie explains it by saying,

> "I cannot demand from myself what I would not demand from another person. We have to start getting involved according to our capabilities. No fight should be at the expense of the physical or emotional well-being of even one. When we say, "no one is left behind" that also includes us". (2019, personal interview)

As Agustina mentions, "self-care is much more complex than eating a slice of cake on the weekends. Taking it on is a heavy task and you have to be able to say I can't" (2019, personal interview). Those boundaries can represent different things, to different people but the first step is to recognize what is becoming too much to handle. Is it the WhatsApp groups, the meetings, the time you are giving, the communication dynamics? For some of them it has meant deciding to not attend certain activities and focusing on the ones were their capabilities are more useful, and also bring them joy. Susana, for example, mentions that she does not attend meetings regularly, but she is very involved in the organization of protests because she is good at it and it brings her joy. Others have tried to limit how active they are in the movement, by writing or posting less or taking less of the responsibility (Blanca, 2019, personal interview).Others have learned how to minimize the amount of

group chats they are a part of and how active they are in them (Susana; Ana Lucia, 2019, personal interview). It looks different for every person although Curie proposes that "activism should be planned as well, according to everyone's capacities and without guilt or judgement" (2019, personal interview).

Mainly, what they agree on is that it is about making conscious decisions. About which discussions to be a part of, what activities to attend, the amount of time they want to dedicate to the movement and who to do it next to. About avoiding exhaustion or guilt for not being able to do everything they want. Because their well-being needs to be a priority.

7. Conclusion

This research paper has presented the context of the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica and how its dynamics limit or facilitate the implementation of self-care practices from the activists. Using the body of work on social movements, especially the work of Diani and Bison (2014) and the focus that Chen and Gorski (2015) give on mental health and burn-out, it examines the dynamics of care within the movement. Furthermore, it details the strategies that activists use to counteract these dynamics by using Harcourt's (2009) body politics and Tronto's (1993) ethics of care.

This paper tries to exemplify the proposal of Chen and Gorski (2015) of the different elements that impair mental health reflection on social movements. As well as expand on the role of what they call infighting within social movements (ibid.) by giving a clear look into how those dynamics are reproduced and why. Within the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica there are certain elements present that are common in social movements in general (ibid.). The workload, emotional labour, culture of selflessness and lack of reflection on well-being are traditionally part of the culture of the movement. They promote the idea that there needs to be sacrifice in order to do activism properly as there is a shortage of time and resources and a context that promotes the view of women as responsible for care. Besides these elements, there are other dynamics of the abortion rights movement in Costa Rica that seem to perpetuate a culture that does not properly value self/care. The infighting, as Chen and Gorski (ibid.) call it, is also seen within this movement and there are different historical dynamics that explain it. Starting with the patterns of communication, specially between generations, that do not promote open and respectful dialogues but install a culture of debt-collecting that keeps bringing up conflicts and tensions from the past into the present. This creates divisions within the movement and causes political distrust between groups. Resulting in turn, in dynamics of judgement and evaluation between collectives, that only come together when there is a contextual need for union (such as the presidential elections on 2018). These attitudes make it difficult to build relays for activists in specific moments or when they are ready to leave the movement after years of working for it. Therefore, increasing the workload for some of the women and perpetuating the possibilities of burn-out.

As Diani and Bison (2004:284) propose "[w]ithin social movement networks, membership criteria are extremely unstable and ultimately dependent on mutual recognition between actors". This makes it crucial for these dynamics to be prevented and dealt with in a

systematic way. Avoiding reactive care that responds to outside threats or exhaustion, and instead promoting a conscious care through the use of alternative strategies.

These strategies do not necessarily translate into the movement as a whole but are used by individual activists and smaller groups as an alternative to the dynamics previously stated. My conceptualization of those strategies is in three categories: collective, external and individual. The collective strategies involve the creation of spaces where the activists are able "to work from the affections. Understanding each other as emotional people, with a life story and different circumstances. Without demanding more than [they] can give and always looking for consensus" (Helena, 2019, personal interview). This reinforces Tronto's (1993) definition of care as going beyond a disposition due to emotional investments. Which means that there is no need for personal relations to be involved for care to be present, useful and valuable in democratic communities. This can be reinforced through the construction of collective identities, through symbols and discourses that in the Costa Rican abortion rights movement are represented with the purple handkerchief and the notion of sorority (sororidad). Both the handkerchief and 'sororidad' are representative of the collective's identity, they build on their own history, that of the region and the feminist movements worldwide to install a notion of union and support. Understanding that 'sororidad' in all the weight that word possesses, involves the 'acuerpamiento' (or embodied support) of other women. Reinforcing that "women's bodies can become at times the only place to make their needs, sufferings and joys visible." (Harcourt and Escobar, 2002:8) as well as their unity. These collective dynamics come from a "recognition and creation of connectedness" (Diani and Bison,2004:284) which are necessary for social movements sustainability.

Externally, the strategies used are meant to contest the threats from the 'outside'. By being aware of the context, national and regional, and ensuring the use of security protocols. Avoiding exposure and using ciber security to protect the identities of women involved in the movement and their safety.

Finally, the individual strategies involve the activist's recognition of their own needs, and the time they spend in themselves and others (Tronto, 2013:146). Including the procurement of their basic physiological needs, safe networks (family, peers, friends) and clear boundaries for themselves and others. As Curie says "I cannot demand from myself what I would not demand from another person. We have to start getting involved according to our capabilities" (2019, personal interview).

All of these elements are a result of the activists understanding self-care as a political tool of feminism, based on the use of conscious strategies that allow the creation of safe spaces for oneself. Understanding safe spaces as spaces of self-love, security and sorority (Helena; Agustina; Sara; Curie, 2019, personal interviews). As Tronto (2013:143) proposes "[t]o take caring seriously as a kind of political concern upsets many of the starting premises of contemporary life in democratic societies. Because entrenched patterns of thought, scripted care as a private matter, to include care as a public concern upsets the distinction between public and private life. "(Tronto, 2013: 143)

Nonetheless, I believe it is critical to say that, although these paper is based on the activist's agency to determine their well-being. It is ultimately the state's responsibility to ensure that gender equality and SRHR are a reality in the country, which would make the abortion rights activism unnecessary and allow these activists to carry on their other responsibilities without an extra care task to think about.

Future research could be done on specific proposals for social policy that improve the situation of human rights defenders in Costa Rica, As well as the development of interventions with the activists in the form of self-care and well-being workshops that build on their strategies, to strengthen the movement as a whole.

Appendices

Appendix 1.

CONSENT FORM
INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP
(To participate in this research)

How do they cope? Self-care lessons from abortion rights activists in Costa Rica

Name of the Researcher: Daniela Alexandra Flores Golfín
Name of the participant:

A. PROJECT'S AIM: This research consists of the Research Paper (master's graduation project) of Daniela Alexandra Flores Golfín. Student of the International Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands. The objective of this study is to explore the dynamics that facilitate or limit the inclusion of self-care in the abortion rights activist's agenda. AS well as the strategies used to negotiate the balance between self-care and caregiving.

B. WHAT WILL BE DONE? If you agree to be part of this study, you will have one or a maximum of two individual interviews that will be recorded in audio. As well as be a part of one focus group (according to your availability). The recordings will be listened to and used only by the researcher and once the research is finished, the researcher will eliminate the recordings made. There will be no transcripts with any data that identifies you.

C. RISKS: Participation in this study may mean some risk or discomfort to you because of the following: risk of discomfort when talking about elements of your personal life or when remembering unpleasant events, generating a mobilization of unwanted feelings.

D. BENEFITS: From your participation in this final graduation work you will not get any direct benefit, however, it is possible that researchers find out more about the dynamics and strategies that promote the self-care of Costa Rican reproductive rights activists and that this knowledge will benefit other people in the future.

E. Before giving your authorization for this study you must have spoken with Daniela Flores Golfín about this study and she must have answered all of your questions satisfactorily. If you would like more information later, you can get it by calling Daniela Flores Golfín at 83235000 from Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. at 5 p.m. In addition, you can consult on the rights of the Participating Subjects in Research Projects in the Direction of Health Regulation of the Ministry of Health, at telephone 22-57-20-90, from Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

F. You will receive a copy of this signed formula for your personal use.

G. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation or to discontinue your participation at any time.

H. Your participation in this study is confidential, the results could appear in an academic publication or be disclosed in an academic meeting but in an anonymous way.

I. You will not lose any legal rights to sign this document.

CONSENT

I have read or been read, all the information described in this formula, before signing it. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered in an appropriate manner. Therefore, I agree to participate as a research subject in this study

_____

Participant's signature

_____

Daniela Alexandra Flores Golfín, I.D 1-1474-0750 date

Name, identity number and signature of the researcher requesting the consent

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