



Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups (Morality and Society Series)

Erika Summers Effler

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Why do people keep fighting for social causes in the face of consistent failure? Why do they risk their physical, emotional, and financial safety on behalf of strangers? How do these groups survive high turnover and emotional burnout?

To explore these questions, Erika Summers Effler undertook three years of ethnographic fieldwork with two groups: anti-death penalty activists STOP and the Catholic Workers, who strive to alleviate poverty. In both communities, members must contend with problems that range from the broad to the intimately personal. Adverse political conditions, internal conflict, and fluctuations in financial resources create a backdrop of daily frustration—but watching an addict relapse or an inmate's execution are much more devastating setbacks. Summers Effler finds that overcoming these obstacles, recovering from failure, and maintaining the integrity of the group require a constant process of emotional fine-tuning, and she demonstrates how activists do this through thoughtful analysis and a lucid rendering of their deeply affecting stories.

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