

Allies Forging Collective Identity: Embodiment and Emotions on the Migrant Trail

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Introduction

Social movement scholars have long argued for the importance of collective identity (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Polletta and Jasper 2001) and have shown that social movement adherents must negotiate complexity and contradictions in order to establish a sense of “we” (Stryker, Owens and White 2000; Einwohner, Reger and Myers 2008). However, few have explored how allies, defined here as “activists working for the benefit of a group to which they are outsiders” (Myers 2008: 167), engage in this “identity work.” Allies have played a significant role in social movements throughout U.S. history, from the abolition of slavery to contemporary marriage equality struggles (Marx and Useem 1971; Ghaziani 2011). Because their distinct identity position brings benefits as well as challenges to the movements they join, exploring how allies forge collective identity is of importance to scholars and activists alike. This article examines this question through a case study of the Migrant Trail, an annual protest event during which activists spend a week walking 75 miles in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to call attention to and oppose migrant deaths. It is a tactic of the larger border justice movement, which seeks to prevent migrant deaths and change policies of increased border militarization.ⁱ Undocumented migrants, the border justice movement’s direct beneficiaries, cannot participate in this walk because of the great risk they would incur travelling through

an area rife with roaming border patrol, check points and vigilantes (Nevins, 2010; Magaña, 2008).ⁱⁱ Thus, participants in the walk are social movement allies.

The Migrant Trail is a deeply emotion-laden, physically demanding engagement. While the walk receives limited media publicity, participants share their experiences when they return to their home communities. In this way, the Migrant Trail is important to the cultural work of changing societal attitudes, meanings and values (Johnston and Klandermans 1995). However, one of the walk's most important purposes, if not its most explicit one, is that it offers allies the embodied and emotional resources necessary to forge collective identity with movement beneficiaries and each other. The Migrant Trail, then, is an ideal case study to add to the burgeoning scholarship on the role of emotions in social movements (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000; Jasper 2011) as well as begin to theorize the neglected realm of embodiment in social movement research.

In what follows, I outline the collective identity challenges faced by allies and argue for the importance of emotions and embodiment as resources allies draw upon to do identity work. I then provide an overview of the research methods and analysis and offer historical context for the Migrant Trail as a case. Finally, I discuss three key mechanisms by which allies draw upon their embodied and emotional experiences in order to forge and maintain collective identity during and after the walk.

Allies, Collective Identity and the Feeling Body

Scholars have long noted the presence of allies in collective action, if not always labeling them as such. While the term “allies” has emerged in more recent research on

gay equality struggles (Myers 2008; Ghaziani 2011; Bernstein and Taylor forthcoming), studies have documented whites in the Black Civil Rights movement (McAdam 1988), men in feminist movements (Schacht and Ewing 2001), U.S. citizens in the struggles of Central Americans (Smith 1996) and even caste Hindus allied with Untouchables in India (Marx and Useem 1971). Though allies are always defined by social movement context, a few features delineate their presence. For one, they enjoy one or more set of privileges that movement beneficiaries do not due to their race, class, gender or other social position. Moreover, because they are thought to act from a place of conviction rather than experience, research has emphasized their ideological and moral, rather than personal or material, motivations.

Allies trouble the traditional notion that social movement groups form collective identity in opposition to dominant society and a mainstream order (Taylor and Whittier 1992), as they often hold as much in common with those in power as they do with movement beneficiaries. This locates allies in a liminal position, rife with opportunities as well as challenges. They can help disenfranchised and stigmatized groups gain access to greater material and political resources and may have an easier time appealing to mainstream audiences (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Still, allies often face significant barriers in becoming part of a social movement collective. For one, because of their relative privilege, allies may struggle to develop the kind of close relationships with movement beneficiaries necessary for navigating differential privilege and the potential acrimony this can cause (Marx and Useem 1971, McAdam 1988). Second, due to their ideological motivations, allies often hold varied concerns and organizational affiliations

without the depth of personal investment that binds beneficiaries to their cause. This can make them “fickle” movement participants (McCarthy and Zald 1977), who face an increased obligation to prove their commitment to a movement, what Myers terms “the credibility hurdle” (2008: 169). Finally, lacking the history of resistance and common cultural resources that many subordinated groups have, allies face a greater struggle to forge community. This lack of community can lead to conflict and defection. It also means that while beneficiary adherents often have the aid of role-models and apprenticeship networks to develop oppositional consciousness, allies must forge a politicized identity “almost from scratch” (Morris and Braine 2001: 36-37).

While social movement scholars have pinpointed the “non-instrumental aspects of cognition,” including emotions and embodiment, as important for forging selves and collectives (King 2004), few have examined how these might operate in allies’ identity work. Further, the way social movement scholars have addressed embodiment thus far is inadequate for understanding the emotion-body nexus that has been long-studied in the sociology of emotions (Scheff 1979; Hochschild 1983). That is, social movement scholars have largely focused on bodily performances that contest the dominant order (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Bobel and Kwan 2011). While this work is immensely valuable, it neglects how the feeling, sentient body is linked to emotions, circumscribing scholars’ ability to draw connections between the body, emotions and identity formation.

In order to best capture the multifaceted dynamics all protesters, including allies, experience in social movement contexts, the body needs to be theorized as *felt*, as well as

done. These two approaches to embodiment are distinct but indelibly linked. For instance, sensory perceptions, such as sight, hearing, and touch, inform what a social movement participant can know about the social and political environment in which he or she acts, serving as a critical feedback loop (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Gibson 1966; Ahmed 2007). Moreover, bodies serve as a kind of archive of lived experiences, offering an orientation to the world and a framework by which we interpret meaning (Alcoff 2006). Social movement scholars have suggested that “activists’ *perceptions*” are central to identity work in social movements (Einwohner et al. 2008: 10). I argue here that the body is a key site for experiencing and acting upon these perceptions.

Attending to the embodied experience of protest helps hone an understanding of how allies overcome the obstacles they face in forging collective identity: social distance from beneficiaries, a lack of credibility, and no lineage of resistance. Further, attending to activists’ embodied experience bolsters previous findings that connect the cultural dimensions of protest, such as emotions, religious ritual and symbolism, and oppositional consciousness, to the formation of collective identity. Prior research suggests that the emotions of protest are critical for strengthening a sense of collective identity (Jasper 1997, 2011; Taylor and Leitz 2010). Key among these is compassion, which can serve as the emotive link between an individual’s personal interest and that of the greater common good and generate a more unifying sense of self-interest. De Tocqueville described this union of personal and communal concern as “self-interest properly understood,” a concept that organizers in various social movements have used to mobilize constituents ([1835-40] 1956; Wood 2002). For allies, a sense of physical

vulnerability in protest can spur the onset or deepening of compassion, strengthening relationships with beneficiaries.

Scholars have long been interested in how commitment to social movements is secured and maintained (Kanter 1968; Rupp and Taylor 1987; Gamson 1991). Recent work on beneficiaries highlights the affective dimensions of commitment (Whittier 2009) as well as the importance of culturally resonant, shared practices, especially religious rituals, in maintaining activist engagement (Nepstad 2004). Further, research on allies suggests that those with relative privilege often draw upon religious teachings to justify their care for the downtrodden (Smith 1996). There has been little research, however, on how religious teachings about the body itself can inform the way allies experience and interpret “high-risk” activism (McAdam 1986) in order to fortify their sense of commitment. Viewed through a Judeo-Christian framework, bodily discomfort can be understood as redemptive suffering undertaken on behalf of the oppressed (Shilling and Mellor 2010).

Finally, as I will argue here, experiencing such compassion, commitment and physical vulnerability in close proximity to others, especially during longer-term protest events, creates a sense of bonding and tight community. This embodied solidarity replicates the qualities of social movement free-spaces, small-scale instances in which activists come together to cultivate key components of collective identity, such as camaraderie and shared oppositional consciousness (Taylor 1989; McAdam 1988; Gamson 1991; Tarrow 1998). Critical for sustaining commitment to a cause as well as generating new identities and claims, free spaces have been studied as the purview of the

aggrieved. However, it seems likely that such spaces might also help allies develop the collective culture of resistance it has been suggested that they lack (Morris and Braine 2001).

Data and Methods

This study relies on three data sources: participant observation over the seven days of the Migrant Trail during four different years, 2007 and 2009-2011; 16 interviews with 2011 walk participants and two with 2010 walk participants; and follow-up, open format surveys with 16 participants conducted in the fall of 2012. Field observations were used to document how rituals, physical exertion, emotions and camaraderie were displayed throughout the walk and offered context and verification for interview data. Interview questions, pilot tested and revised in collaboration with key informants, explored participants' motives for participating in the walk, experience of unity with other walkers, and their emotions during the walk. Each interview lasted about an hour and was digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded using HyperResearch software. The surveys were addressed to newcomers from the 2011 walk and asked about current social movement activities and reflections about the Migrant Trail for the purpose of understanding the impact of participating in the walk

While all participants on the Migrant Trail can be described as social movement allies, their motivations and histories vary greatly, affecting how they interpret their embodied experience and emotions on the walk. The participants vary in terms of the length and the degree of their participation, falling into three distinct categories: 1)

newcomers to the Migrant Trail *and* the border justice movement, 2) newcomers only to the walk with experience in the border justice movement, and 3) veterans of both the walk and the movement. Those interviewed and surveyed were selected to represent a diversity of participant standpoints. I interviewed four Migrant Trail organizers, six return participants and six newcomers to the 2011 walk as well as two people who had participated in the walk only once in 2010. Since the survey was intended to examine the subsequent impact of the walk on those who have not made it an annual commitment, it was addressed to all first time participants who had shared contact information. Of these 26 individuals, 17, or about 2/3, responded.ⁱⁱⁱ To offer an overarching sense of who participates in the Migrant Trail, 54 of 59 participants on the 2011 walk filled out demographic information forms. Table 1 (on page 10) offers a demographic portrait of the 2011 participants, including delineation by each of the three analytic categories.

The Migrant Trail is punctuated by Christian symbolism, but also draws on other spiritual traditions. These elements of the walk are important in that they inform the interpretations some participants have of their embodied experience. While scholars have explored a variety of explicitly Christian progressive social movements (Smith 1996; Wood 2002; Nepstad 2004; Summers Effler 2010), the Migrant Trail is not a formally religious event, and many on the walk, from veterans to newcomers, do not identify as religious at all, as the above table suggests. Thus, following Lichterman (2008), I approach religion on the Migrant Trail as a “cultural structure” that informs some participants’ interpretations of their Migrant Trail experience. In examining participant

explanations, I attempt to “locate religious language” and “explore what people do with it” (Lichterman 2008: 99) without attempting to surmise unspoken religious motivations.

Table 1: Demographic Portrait of Migrant Trail Participants, 2011

	All Participants	Newcomers to movement	Newcomers just to walk	Veterans
	Total: 54 (100%)	Total: 17 (32%)	Total: 19 (35%)	Total: 18 (33%)
Gender	Female 35 (65%) ^a Male 18 (33%) Transgender 1 (2%)	Female 14 (82%) Male 2 (18%)	Female 13 (68%) Male 6 (32%)	Female 8 (44%) Male 9 (50%) Transgender 1 (6%)
Age	Under 30 20 (37%) Between 30-40 9 (17%) Between 40-60 14 (26%) Over 60 11 (20%)	Under 30 11 (65%) Between 30-40 0 (0%) Between 40-60 5 (29%) Over 60 1 (6%)	Under 30 9 (47%) Between 30-40 1 (5%) Between 40-60 4 (21%) Over 60 5 (26%)	Under 30 0 (0%) Between 30-40 8 (44%) Between 40-60 5 (28%) Over 60 5 (28%)
Race	White 43 (80%) Latino/a 7 (13%) Mixed/ other ^b 4 (7%)	White 17 (100%) Latino/a 0 (0%) Mixed/ other 0 (0%)	White 13 (68%) Latino/a 5 (26%) Mixed/ other 1 (5%)	White 12 (67%) Latino/a 3 (17%) Mixed/ other 3 (17%)
Religion ^c	Christian 29 (54%) None 25 (46%)	Christian 10 (59%) None 7 (41%)	Christian 10 (53%) None 9 (47%)	Christian 11 (61%) None 7 (39%)

^a Percentages do not always add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

^bThose designated as “mixed/other” include one person who identified as Filipino and white, one as Arab, one as Black-mixed, and one as native and white.

Religious identification was an open-ended question transformed into a dichotomous variable based on participant responses. All who considered themselves religious indicated that they were part of a Christian tradition. The participants who indicated no religious identification are categorized as “none”.

Deadly Crossing

It is the threatening hour of the day. At just ten a.m., we plod on in one hundred degree heat, under a vicious sun. Even the desert insects have stopped their rattling below the dry burn. I sip at my water bottle. I find it difficult to quench my thirst without filling my belly to sloshing. My lips are chapped. My joints ache as we continue into our fourth day. Despite the discomfort, I recognize the immense beauty of this place, stark peaks, fierce but glorious cacti flowering everywhere. The land is saturated with the rich history of peoples and fragile ecosystems that have made this place home for centuries. After being out here myself with all the comforts we are afforded as walkers, what is surprising to me is not that people have died. It is that anyone makes it at all. I remark at this as we pass abandoned backpacks along route 286, signs of migrants who likely survived many days in the desert only to be picked up by border patrol. (- adapted from field notes, Migrant Trail 2009)

The Migrant Trail begins in Sasabe, Mexico, and makes its way 75 miles to Tucson over the course of a week. Participants wake at dawn to walk ten to fifteen miles before the sun and scorching temperatures make such an undertaking dangerous. They begin in the Buenos Aires Wildlife Refuge and transition to stretches of isolated highway. They are given breaks to refill water and eat snacks. Participants camp in the wilderness, at trailer parks and in a church.

Throughout the week, walkers’ bodies are, in turn, challenged and pampered. They walk on tired feet in searing temperatures and sleep little. But they are spoiled with lavish meals brought in by area churches and border justice groups. Every afternoon a new portion of ice appears. Migrant Trail participants are always consciously aware of their physical selves. This consciousness is commonsensical in an environment where temperatures generally reach 105 degrees by noon and many participants, used to sleeping in beds and taking regular showers, are without these basic comforts. However,

this consciousness also helps Migrant Trail participants to forge collective identity as social movement allies.

The Migrant Trail is one of multiple collective actions planned by the border justice movement to protest and end migrant deaths. While activists on the border have had various priorities since the early 1970s, the focus shifted to preventing migrant deaths in the late 1990s. This is because in 1994, in an effort to deter unauthorized migration, the U.S. government began to close off the urban crossing points where many migrants had previously passed relatively safely (Andreas 2000). While these new policies did little to reduce the flow of people, they spurred a wave of fatalities that continues to this day (Magaña 2008). Between 1995 and 2009, five thousand bodies were recovered in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, with many more human remains likely never found (Nevins 2010). Most migrants who die in the desert fall prey to dehydration and over-heating in the summer, hypothermia in the winter, and flash floods in desert washes.

The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which liberalized trade policies between the U.S. and Mexico and required a restructuring of the Mexican economy, has forced many Mexicans to migrate. NAFTA had a devastating effect on Mexican farmers, pushing an estimated 3.5 million off their land into Mexican cities and ultimately north to the U.S. (Ferguson, Price and Parks 2010). Evidence suggests that U.S. and Mexican officials knew that these “campesinos” would be negatively impacted by NAFTA and that the need to migrate for work would escalate (Magaña 2008; Nevins 2010). The nearly simultaneous passage of NAFTA with various U.S. policies to “seal

the border” proved a fatal combination.

By the late 1990s U.S. activists and community leaders in and near Tucson became aware that migrant crossers were being funneled into the Arizona desert to perish. In 2000 Humane Borders formed to stem these deaths by setting up water stations near common migration routes. Samaritans was established in 2002 as a complementary effort, running foot patrols on common migration paths to offer water, food and help to those in distress. No More Deaths, launched in 2004, sets up summer-long encampments in the desert (Van Ham 2011). Other groups central to the border justice movement and to organizing the Migrant Trail include Derechos Humanos, founded in the early 1990s as an advocacy and immigrant organizing group, and Borderlinks, a hold-over from the Sanctuary movement^{iv} that continues to offer educational delegations to both sides of the border.

Tucker,^v one of three founders of the Migrant Trail, explained how different activists spoke of wanting to “do something more.” Many were taken by the idea of doing a long walk, and saw the Migrant Trail as an important protest tactic. Organizers wanted “to have the same impacts as a protest in the sense that it would attract people’s attention, attract the media...get the message out about what was happening.” There was already a tradition of shorter ritual-infused memorial marches being undertaken at the border (Van Hamm 2011). However, the distance and remoteness of the Migrant Trail make it a bit different than these walks or more typical street demonstrations. For Tucker, the walk is “a protest that I wouldn’t even consider a protest. It’s almost a commitment.” The following analysis focuses on three ways in which embodied

experience allows social movement allies to overcome key barriers they face in forging collective identity.

Embodied Compassion

A first challenge Migrant Trail participants face as allies is in fostering a sense of connection to movement beneficiaries, undocumented migrants. Participants join the walk in order to better understand, honor and publicize an aspect of the oppression migrants face which embodied and emotional experiences help them to do. When walkers feel the heat, blisters and exhaustion of walking in the desert, they are confronted with their own vulnerability. This personal, visceral sense of prolonged discomfort generates compassion for migrants who have faced the extremity of anguish, enlarging participants' sense of self-interest to include justice for an oppressed other. While often a first step for allies in identifying the value of collective action, this compassion can only be actualized in relationships developed with beneficiaries outside of the walk itself. Survey data suggest that compassion generated on the walk motivates participants to build such relationships and offers them an important resource in deepening the relationships they already have.

The way compassion is experienced by different kinds of participants on the Migrant Trail varies. While nearly 90% of participants interviewed spoke of feeling heightened compassion on the walk, newcomers in particular reported this as being an eye-opening experience in which emotions were more valuable than factual information. Adelheid, a 22-year old German student, was fairly representative of many newcomers to the Migrant Trail. She had studied the U.S.-Mexico border briefly in a college course and

was required to do an internship abroad, which she was pursuing with a border justice organization. However, while interested in migration in the abstract, she had limited direct experience with injustice to migrants, herself a twenty-something, middle-income, white woman.

Adelheid reported that before the Migrant Trail, she had struggled to feel emotionally connected to the migrants that had so fascinated her in her studies. This was in spite of having spent much of the past month going on educational delegations to learn more about migrant rights in the U.S. Adelheid recalled sitting through deportation proceedings in an Arizona courtroom a few weeks before the walk. To her own shock, she had felt numb and ashamed at her lack of empathy. She explained her mindset in that courtroom, “I’m waiting for the moment when I get it, I like grasp how awful it is for the migrants.”

Adelheid went on to explain how her physical discomfort on the Migrant Trail helped her understand the situation of migrants in a way that other forms of witness had not allowed.

“I think I kind of got it when my feet hurt so badly and ...knowing that it’s like this but just a gazillion times worse is how migrants feel at night when it’s dark and hiding out, walking on bare flesh kind of...I’m walking and hurting and I have like the words in my head like [one of the walk organizers] said, ‘For every step you hurt think of your brothers and sisters,’ while I’m walking.”

These comments suggest that through physical discomfort, Adelheid finally experienced the emotional valence she had been seeking, Being able to connect her own well-being to the condition of crossing migrants allowed her to deepen her compassion for movement beneficiaries.

While bodily discomfort along with shared stories helped Adelheid to connect emotionally to the plight of crossing migrants, others reported that their sense of compassion depended upon physical proximity to the harsh desert environment alongside the visibility of injustice. Rory, a college student from Canada, knew little about migration issues when he was invited to join the Migrant Trail by his professor, a walk veteran. Rory shared how witnessing deportations and seeing the evidence of crossers while walking the Migrant Trail impacted him:

“The walking itself has taken a profound physical and emotional toll on me. Seeing the climate, the border patrol driving by and just rounding up people, loading them up on buses. Then you just see stuff on the road- a bottle, footprints. You just take a step back and think, ‘They’re probably making this passage right now, in our midst.’ And they don’t have the luxuries that we have. They probably have like a four-liter jug of water or whatever, but it’s desperate compared to our situation.”

Rory was one of the walk participants who struggled the most with the desert heat, hailing from the much cooler territory of Manitoba, Canada. He also misplaced his eye-glasses on the first night of the walk. During a dinner conversation, Rory admitted that he had at first felt sorry for himself when confronted with the walk’s discomforts. However, surrounded by a group with the shared intention of border justice, he was able to reconsider his own struggle and instead feel greater compassion for those forced into the desert. Sitting, head bowed, recovered glasses smudged with the ubiquitous Sonoran dust, he asked me rhetorically, “I mean, it’s not about me, right?”

Catalina was also on the Migrant Trail for the first time. However, unlike Adelheid and Rory, she was not a “typical newcomer.” Catalina was herself the daughter of an undocumented woman who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border many times and had

joined her mother in immigrant rights activism since she was twelve years old. While Catalina came to the walk with great compassion, she found the physical challenges made her even more empathetic to her mother's experience.

“Most of the time that I've been out here I've been thinking about my mom... When she got separated from my father she had to walk almost a week by herself. I think so highly of my mother. I always have and always will, but it's just, my perspective on her has changed a lot.”

In a sense Catalina's position in the border justice movement straddles the beneficiary-ally divide. While she is not herself undocumented, she has more direct experience with injustice to migrants than most Migrant Trail newcomers. Speaking in the fall of 2012, Catalina reported that the compassion she felt towards her mother on the Migrant Trail had been a critical piece of coming to know herself:

“The Migrant Trail for me was more about my personal growth and identity. The issues of the border were not new to me ...but it was a growing step in my identity and understanding more of my roots.”

Catalina's identity as the daughter of a former migrant makes establishing a sense of collectivity with current migrants a bit easier than it might be for other allies. Still, the Migrant Trail helped Catalina learn more about her “roots,” creating a heightened sense of connection to the movement collective. Thus, while the kinds of identity work required of Catalina differ from other newcomers like Adelheid and Rory, the embodied sense of compassion offers all of these participants important resources for establishing a sense of collective identity.

Scholars have identified compassion as one of the more powerful and lasting affective orientations of social movement adherents (Jasper 1997). Three quarters of newcomers who were surveyed a year and a half after their first Migrant Trail explained

the compassion they experienced on the walk as motivating subsequent action. For instance, Eve, a recent college graduate, noted that in her current advocacy with migrant agricultural workers, her experience on the Migrant Trail provides “a new emotional well from which to draw upon, as opposed to what otherwise quickly turns into a heady, statistic-based analysis of immigration.” Reiterating the embodied link to these emotions, she added that this “emotional well” derived from the “partial embodiment of the struggle to make it through the desert”. For Eve, developing compassion through her embodied experience on the Migrant Trail has allowed for a deeper connection with migrants in her social movement involvement after the walk.

Other newcomers also reported that the compassion fostered on the walk had impacted their lives. For Caren, a college professor, the compassion she felt during her first Migrant Trail walk compelled her to return to the walk and expand her involvement in the movement. She explained, “I went back because after the first walk I learned a ton about the harrowing situation of so many migrants and began to feel very compassionate toward them.” This, in turn, pushed her to incorporate migrant rights activism into her daily life. She continued,

“I did the trail again this summer and then stayed and volunteered at [an Arizona-based migrant rights organization] until the middle of July. Through them I was involved in community education, abuse documentation, etc. Next semester I’m going to start volunteering at [a migrant services center in her hometown] where migrant workers and their family members can go to get their GED.”

While Caren’s sense of compassion motivated her to incorporate volunteer work with beneficiaries into her life, some walk participants found their experience forced a more dramatic reassessment of their current circumstances. Speaking a year and a half

after the walk, Teresa, a newcomer, recalled her rather traumatic adjustment back to work after the Migrant Trail, “I got back to the hospital where I was working and I found myself crying during a meeting. They were talking about undocumented immigrants using the health care system. I had to excuse myself and cry in the hallway.” Teresa sought to transition away from her administrative position in the hospital, becoming a Spanish teacher for students with disabilities. She concluded by explaining how she has implemented a unit on immigration and invited a speaker to talk to her students about opportunities for immigrant youth. She noted, “One student came to me and told me that the unit had made him reevaluate his beliefs about undocumented immigrants.” Of course Teresa’s transformation cannot be presumed typical for first-time Migrant Trail participants and her motivations likely extend beyond the walk alone. However, it is clear that the experience of compassion and enlarged sense of self-interest forced her to reevaluate the social implications of her job.

Thus, in terms of building collective identity, compassion provides allies with a sense of connection to movement beneficiaries that can have great impact long after the walk. While all participants affirm that the walk generates compassion, this embodied emotion seems to be the most life-changing for participants during and immediately following their first walk experience. Migrant Trail organizers and veterans, on the other hand, tend to report having already developed a deep compassion for migrants and see the physicality of the walk as offering them opportunities to demonstrate commitment to the larger movement.

Demonstrating Commitment through Redemptive Suffering

More so than beneficiaries, allies may face challenges in convincing movement adherents of their conviction and commitment. The embodied dimension of the walk allows participants to demonstrate their commitment through repetitive performances in which beneficiaries would not engage. This embodied commitment, in turn, influences larger movement impacts after the walk. It helps participants show themselves to be credible sources when, using their unique privilege as allies, they appeal to mainstream audiences and elites. It also helps allies experience a level of affective engagement that hedges against the rampant activist burn-out that so many face (Summers Effler 2010). Thus, the demonstration of commitment on the Migrant Trail or afterwards is not a disingenuous performance and should not be understood as operating in only one direction. Through engaging in embodied commitment practices, participants are able to self-verify their identities as border justice activists (Myers 2008: 177), coming to understand themselves even more as movement adherents. In this sense, participants' interpretations of embodied commitment muddy the distinction between *performed* and *felt* identity. By *performing* embodied commitment to border justice, participants come to *feel* a more profound connection with the cause.

Half of those interviewed, nearly all of them walk veterans, saw embodied experience on the walk as building commitment and depended on a religious framework to support this notion. While newcomers may also find meaning in Christian symbolism and ritual on the walk, veteran participants more often use religious language in

discussing the walk's physical components. Scholars who have examined social movements informed by the Catholic Worker tradition are particularly instructive for understanding these interpretations on the Migrant Trail (Nepstad 2004; Summers Effler 2010). The Catholic Worker model, developed by Dorothy Day, sought to establish commitment to a socially just cause by combining activism with spirituality and communal living. For participants who spoke of commitment on the Migrant Trail, the walk seems to operate as a micro-instance of this model.

Jessie, a walk organizer with over a decade of religiously informed, border justice experience, described how she explains the Migrant Trail to those who have not experienced it:

“I talk about it as being a very physical kind of incarnation of my commitment to the border in terms of research and activism. But a time to live it through walking and through feeling as opposed to staying up late writing emails or doing advocacy or going to Washington D.C. This is a very physical aspect of my commitment, and it requires that I think of all people that walk.”

The physicality of the Migrant Trail serves Jessie as a bodily commitment to border justice, while evoking compassion towards and memory of migrants crossing. The language of “incarnation” suggests that Jessie interprets the walk through a Christian framework. As incarnation describes the process by which a spiritual being is rendered flesh, Jessie's word choice suggests she sees the Migrant Trail as an opportunity to embody a greater purpose, giving flesh to a just cause, so to speak. Outside of the walk, Jessie generally pursues her activism through tasks she believes to be more mundane but practical, such as emails, and even potentially corrupt, such as working with politicians in the nation's capital.

Susan, a six-time participant, also spoke about establishing commitment on the Migrant Trail through the union of body and spirit. Susan had been debating taking a week to attend the Migrant Trail after having only recently returned from a year long sabbatical. However, she ultimately decided that attending the walk was worth the time away from her work as a community organizer, as it generates fortitude for the challenging campaigns ahead.

“What the walk has become for me is a personal recommitment to this work. It’s me putting my body- and getting into that spiritual space of committing to reengage in this work.”

Susan’s use of “recommitment” and “reengage” highlights that this is not her original or only source for committing to “this work”. However, for six years the walk has offered her an annual instantiation of her commitment to being an immigrant ally. It also allows her physical proximity to a reality that is usually quite distant. She continued:

“My reality in Chicago’s very different from this reality, seeing the helicopters of the border patrol, the vigilantes with the guns. Physically and emotionally and spiritually witnessing all of that and telling that story is why I feel like I need to come here.”

Susan concluded by explaining how her privilege as an immigrant ally made her attendance on the Migrant Trail important: “As a white person who has the institutional power and privilege, I feel that it is my- duty’s not the right word but still comes to mind- [to use] my privilege to make social change.”

Darlene, who was a newcomer to the Migrant Trail but not to immigrant rights work, also explained the walk as an opportunity to use her privilege as an immigrant ally. She explained that as a middle-class, white churchgoer residing in a conservative town, “I have come to believe that my ability to relate to conservative white people,

mostly religious, is where I might be able to have the most impact in terms of changing hearts and arguing a pro-immigrant position.” For Darlene, demonstrating commitment by participating in the Migrant Trail had the benefit of helping her establish credibility with the audiences she seeks to influence through her activism. A year and a half after the walk, she noted that because of the Migrant Trail, “people are much more apt to hear my first-hand witness to the border situation than if I hadn’t participated. People see that I have an investment in immigration and am not just spouting sound bites.” Darlene concluded by reiterating what many veterans observed, that the walk served her personally as an energizer. She observed that the walk “injected me with a new enthusiasm for the work that I was already doing and [I] am eager to get down there [to the Migrant Trail] again to be reinvigorated.”

In terms of discussing their commitment, many participants emphasized the value of physical suffering on the Migrant Trail. Striving for physical discomfort and even pain is somewhat at odds with predominant Western, biomedical thinking, harkening to a more religious and often Christian understanding (Norris 2009; Shilling and Mellor 2010). In the earliest sociological studies, Durkheim ([1912] 1995) found pain to be culturally productive in certain religious settings. Moreover, some strains of Christian theology, centered around the physical embodiment, torture, and crucifixion of God in the person of Jesus, point to the spiritual value of suffering. Tucker drew on these notions, comparing the purpose of the Migrant Trail to the sacrifice of Mexican saints:

“I think it’s like reinforcing the commitment. In Mexico, you go and see the saints behind the glass and their knees and their arms are all bloody. I’ve been thinking in a way we’re like doing [that]. Like when I start chafing or something like that, it’s almost like that idea of suffering... for something bigger.”

In this commentary, Tucker depicts how embodied experience on the Migrant Trail is both performative and felt. He compares walk participants to the symbolically powerful image of bleeding saints. However, it is the felt experience of his own body, in this case through “chafing,” that connects him to the performance of sainthood.

Jonah, a newcomer to the Migrant Trail but a veteran of the border justice movement, also spoke of the walk as an opportunity to express commitment to a cause, suffering as an act of solidarity with migrants:

“I would describe the Migrant Trail as a walk to show our solidarity and willingness to suffer for the people who have paid the ultimate price and I guess the ultimate...suffering, just to be in solidarity with those people and to call attention to what’s really going on.”

Like many walk participants, Jonah reiterates the value of suffering for another, though he is clear that migrants, and not the Migrant Trail participants, have undergone “the ultimate suffering,” a possible allusion to Christ.

The fact that participants often explain physical discomfort as building commitment is in line with research on “high-risk” activism (McAdam 1986). Studies suggest that tactics that generate the greatest participant buy-in and long-term support are often “sustained, difficult, emotional, even painful collective experiences”(Jasper 1997: 197). It is a stretch to equate the Migrant Trail with the serious physical, economic and legal sacrifices to which many activists have committed their lives. Nevertheless, many veteran walkers see moderate physical suffering as itself an act of protest, suggesting that the activist’s body is an important site for revitalizing commitment, especially when it comes to allies in religiously informed social movements. When this

demonstration of commitment is undertaken in close proximity to other allies, it contributes additional resources for collective identity formation.

Free-Space and Community Building

The third function of the bodily journey on the Migrant Trail is that it allows participants to cultivate community with each other, developing a sense of solidarity as well as forging a moral vision. Scholars have termed such small-scale instances in which activists model the social practices they hope to forge in the larger society “prefigurative free spaces” (Polletta 1999; see also: Breines 1989) Interestingly, prefigurative free spaces are often open only to beneficiaries, such as “women’s only” groups in feminist organizing. However, prefigurative free spaces appear to play a critical, if different, role for allies. While aggrieved communities often create a lineage of resistance, allies rarely inherit the same kind of political role models and traditions from their forbearers (Morris and Braine 2001). Finding a shared space with each other to generate politically-oriented relationships and identities can remedy such a lack. Moreover, the cultivation of community provides participants with access to important networks they can draw upon for subsequent movement activities once the walk ends.

Migrant Trail organizer Ted explained how the prefigurative free space of the walk functions:

“It’s a blessed community that forms for a week every year. Blessed community in the sense that Martin Luther King talked about. It’s a community that’s governed by cooperation and brotherly love. And it’s an example of how we would like to live our lives. It’s an exercise in solidarity with all the people that walk and amongst ourselves all the people that care, that know about the suffering that goes on here and work to alleviate it.”

Ted mentions the obvious components of a prefigurative free space, in which participants exemplify how they want to live their lives, even if it is just for one week. By citing Martin Luther King, Ted's explanation also highlights the liminal position of allies. Dr. King conceptualized the "beloved community" as a new relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. As allies inhabit the threshold between these two groups but are better equipped to align themselves with migrants themselves because of having participated in the walk, the Migrant Trail does serve to build such a "beloved community." Ted emphasizes that the walk builds solidarity among allies, "all the people that care," as well as with migrants, "all the people that walk." He confirms that on the Migrant Trail, participants are forging a collective both with each other and, in vision at least, with migrants as well.

Much like compassion and commitment, establishing this prefigurative free-space as a means for building solidarity depends upon physical and emotional experience on the walk. Susan emphasized how the controlled physical duress of the walk allowed for vulnerability and connection:

"The desert wears you down and this experience kind of breaks away at those barriers that we hold up in our regular lives. We're able to feel things just being out here in the context of this community, a safe space, a place where, you know, we're having a shared experience."

Alex built on this idea, noting that embodied experience enhanced solidarity among participants because they could empathize with each other:

"What unites the walkers is our common experience. We know what it's like to feel hot and uncomfortable and sweaty and to smell bad and have sore feet and blisters and sunburn on the back of our necks."

Dave believed confronting the physical challenge of the walk compelled participants to come together as a collective:

“By the third or fourth day the process of working as a group to get through the desert and to make it from one mile and a half to three mile section becomes a thing that bonds people together.”

The profound bonding associated with the physicality of the walk helps to foster the kind of “reciprocal emotions”(Jasper 1997) that social movement scholars have identified as critical for the continuation of collective action. For Julie, a graduate student in her late twenties, these reciprocal emotions and cooperative spirit were a stark juxtaposition to the highly competitive individualism she experienced elsewhere, what she termed “a lack of community in the United States” and a “lacking desire to help people when there’s no gain.” Free-space communities often incubate the kind of alternative “emotion cultures” (Taylor 1995) that Julie recognized to be the most meaningful aspect of the walk:

“So many people can come together for this purpose but not be judgmental and just be there for each other when we need anything and just help each other. It’s kind of what I’ve been searching for for a long time. So it’s amazing to see it all manifested here.”

For Julie, the physicality of the walk was a cornerstone to this culture of care and her own experience of camaraderie. She reported a moment on the walk when she witnessed another participant’s vulnerability: “someone was sick and it freaked me out. So I was just overwhelmed with emotion because I realized how much that person means to me.”

After the walk Julie found herself seeking out communities where mutual affinity and care are tantamount. Reflecting on the walk a year and a half later, she observed, “I had always been someone who cared about other people, to a point, but

participating in the walk took that to a whole new level.” While Julie has participated in a variety of social justice oriented activities since the Migrant Trail, she is now involved in hospice. She explained of her current residence that “there aren't too many opportunities in this little Midwestern town. [Hospice] was the most tangible thing I could do to care for people and value others' lives, and I really believe that I wouldn't be doing it if I hadn't gone on the walk.” Julie also returned to the Migrant Trail in 2012 and concluded that, “doing the walk for the second year just increased my desire to work with people in a caring capacity tenfold.”

The sense of solidarity developed on the walk also allows some participants a space for healing. Those who are regularly involved in border issues understand the Migrant Trail as a time to surround themselves with those who share their compassion for migrants. After a year with the Migrant Resource Center, daily witnessing the tragedies that migrants face, Jonah explained his need to surround himself with those who cared. One step removed from crisis and trauma, he found a community in which he could process what he had witnessed:

“I wanted to come to the Migrant Trail because I needed to be in a space where everyone else was at least somewhat aware of the pain and struggle that these people go through. And so, maybe a bit selfishly, I just wanted to kind of decompress and be in good company and just kind of immerse myself in what I had experienced with people who knew what it was like.”

Social movement scholars have documented many instances of relief and joy experienced by those who join a social movement and find others like them (Rupp and Taylor 1987; Einwohner et al. 2008). While these sentiments are often reserved for social movement beneficiaries, in Jonah's case, they are also relevant to allies.

Finally, the Migrant Trail community provides participants a means to develop their consciousness about border justice. Most participants are at different stages of this process. Susan noted, “certainly we’re not all in the same place,” hoping that newcomers would be able to ultimately develop “a solid analysis of the border”. While skeptical that such an analysis could be achieved over the course of a week, she added that the Migrant Trail is likely an important entry point, “I definitely can’t imagine that someone participates on the walk and their hearts and their minds aren’t shifted.” Most Migrant Trail organizers, then, have an interesting approach to the development of oppositional consciousness. They resist offering formal information sessions or, as walk organizer Ana described, “a travelling conference.” Rather, they see the physicality of the walk as the teacher. Ana explained that, among newcomers, “I think some people are coming because they think it’s like a conference and they’re gonna learn more, which they will, but we mean it more physically than you know workshops and speakers.” She went on to explain how organizers provide various factual resources for newcomers ahead of the walk. However, the Migrant Trail is not intended to be primarily about structured fact sharing.^{vi}

The community established on the Migrant Trail has a lasting impact on many. Previous social movement research has suggested that people involved in emotionally and physically charged tactics, even of relatively short duration, forge enduring relationships (McAdam 1988). While walk participants are only together for a week, respondents often highlighted the friendships and social movement networks they drew upon long after the walk ended. Gillian, a Migrant Trail newcomer, explained how her

friendship with walk veteran Jane motivated her to build relationships with social movement beneficiaries. She explained, “After the Migrant Trail, I went back to Tucson and visited a center for minors in Nogales, Mexico. I only went there because of Jane who introduced me to people there.” Eve noted that the relationships developed on the Migrant Trail “have served both as partnerships to continue the work and as personal relationships necessary to feel understanding and camaraderie as we continue.” The community of the Migrant Trail has allowed Eve access to resources and networks which are invaluable as she travels the country, organizing protest events for a migrant worker campaign. In addition, new friendships offer her an important emotional resource through challenging movement defeats as well as the joys of victory.

The prefigurative free space of the walk, rooted in the shared physical journey, can at its most ambitious, portend a different social order. However, it also does the more pragmatic work allies require to cultivate collective identity. It helps participants to build solidarity and oppositional consciousness in the absence of a shared history. This solidarity, in turn, offers some a healing break after battling rampant injustice while motivating others to get involved in social action. It also promises enlarged networks and resources for campaigns to come. Indeed, for both personal reasons and the efficacy of collective action, a majority of participants who continue in the movement depend on the Migrant Trail community after the walk in order to advance their social activism.

Larger Movement Outcomes

This article demonstrates three ways in which embodied experiences and the

accompanying emotions help social movement allies to forge collective identity on the Migrant Trail. I conclude with a review of how this might impact larger movement outcomes. First, the embodied experience of walking through the desert generates compassion for migrants, enlarging newcomers' sense of self-interest and helping to establish and deepen relationships with beneficiaries. This has the potential to lay an important foundation for working through the knotty dynamics of privilege that allies may bring to the movements they join. Second, participants feel that their controlled physical hardship on the walk demonstrates commitment, often interpreted through a Christian framework that understands suffering to be redemptive. While offering allies the opportunity to self-verify as movement insiders, the embodied experience helps them establish credibility with mainstream audiences and reinvigorates them in the face of activist burn-out. Third, while the free-space component of the walk allows allies to develop a sense of solidarity and oppositional consciousness, the cultivation of community also provides participants with strategic partnerships and broader alliances to draw upon in future campaigns.

This analysis makes two important contributions to our understanding of social movement dynamics beyond this specific case. First, social movement research has largely explored collective identity by studying movement beneficiaries. As scholars begin to acknowledge the ubiquity and importance of ally participation in social movements, it is important to illuminate how allies build ties and commitment to each other as well as aggrieved groups. While allies have often been understood as ideologically driven, their emotions and physical experiences clearly serve as crucial

resources in their identity work that should be further examined. Second, as scholars continue to make impressive advances in studying the role of emotions in social movements, the relationship between the body and emotions has gone relatively neglected. This seems a critical oversight as the sociology of emotions long ago observed the visceral foundations of human affect.

With the explosion of globalized, virtual technology, more collective action is occurring in disembodied spaces than ever before (Earl and Kimport 2011). However, this does not mean that the importance of activists' embodied experience has waned. For groups at the frontiers of collective action, even those highly involved in virtual organizing, the body remains a primary site of contention. Political prisoners go on hunger strike and spur ethical battles over force-feeding (Pedigo 2012). Students continue to face pepper spray and rubber bullets at campus protests (Medina 2012). Youth seeking to overthrow dictatorships have put their bodies front and center in their resistance (Fleishmann 2011). Moreover, for the most aggrieved, the body is always central to the experience of oppression. Migrants die in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands because of draconian enforcement policies. The neglect and exploitation of these bodies motivates the movement for border justice just as deprivation and bodily violation inspire social movements around the world. Findings from the Migrant Trail suggest the need for a more robust account of the *feeling* body in collective protest.

ⁱ I use "border justice movement" to refer to a movement community of varied organizations in Tucson and Southern Arizona. There are other organizations addressing similar issues in California and Texas that the data does not encompass. Many people who are part of this larger social movement community

and veterans on the Migrant Trail call their cause “immigrant rights.” While border justice and immigrant rights are not fully interchangeable, the major difference depends on where people are based geographically, at the U.S.-Mexico border or in the country’s interior.

ⁱⁱ Former migrants who were at one point forced to cross the U.S.-Mexico border undocumented have, in a few cases, returned to participate in the Migrant Trail walk years later, after legalizing their status.

ⁱⁱⁱ The issue of self-selection bias must be considered in the follow-up sample. Those who responded to a research inquiry a year and a half after the Migrant Trail’s completion are likely those first time walkers who disproportionately felt the walk affected their lives and work. The point with this second round of data collection, then, cannot be to suggest the general efficacy of the Migrant Trail as a social movement event. Rather, it serves to explore how the embodied component of collective identity formation among allies might have an impact beyond the single week of the walk.

^{iv} The Sanctuary Movement was a response to U.S.-backed wars in Central America during the 1980s. U.S. residents, mostly white Americans involved with Christian congregations, transported Central American refugees into the United States despite the government’s unwillingness to grant them amnesty.

^v All names have been changed to protect privacy.

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