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Acting in Solidarity: Cross-group Contact Between Disadvantaged Group Members and Advantaged Group Allies

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Abstract

The actions of advantaged group activists (sometimes called "allies") are admirable, and they likely make meaningful contributions to the movements they support. However, a nuanced understanding of the role of advantaged group allies must also consider the potential challenges of their participation. Both in their everyday lives and during their activist work, advantaged group allies are especially likely to have direct contact with disadvantaged group members. This paper considers when such contact may harm rather than help resistance movements by disadvantaged groups. We also suggest that to avoid these undermining effects, advantaged group allies must effectively communicate support for social change, understand the implications of their own privilege, offer autonomy-oriented support, and resist the urge to increase their own feelings of inclusion by co-opting relevant marginalized social identities.

Keywords: activism; activism; solidarity; ally activism; social identity; advantaged group activists

"I mean nothing against any sincere whites when I say that as members of black organizations, generally whites' very presence subtly renders the black organization automatically less effective. Even the best white members will slow down the Negroes' discovery of what they need to do, and particularly of what they can do—for themselves, working by themselves, among their own kind, in their own communities…" – Malcolm X

"I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate…….Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

When members of disadvantaged groups engage in resistance, members of the advantaged group sometimes join in and support their efforts. During the women's suffrage movement in North America and Europe, some male politicians were openly supportive. Similarly, some White South Africans worked alongside Mandela and other Black activists to end Apartheid. More recently, some heterosexual parents have become strong supporters of same-sex marriage after learning their child was gay or lesbian (e.g., Johnson & Best, 2012), and this year as African Americans in US cities protested the killing of Black people by police, some Whites and even a few White police officers have shown support for the Black Lives Matter movement (Wing, 2015). The actions of these advantaged group activists (at times called "allies") are admirable, and they likely make meaningful contributions to the movements they support. However, a nuanced understanding of the role of advantaged group allies must also consider the potential challenges of their participation. This paper uses social psychological research and theorizing to consider when advantaged group allies may harm rather than help resistance movements by disadvantaged groups. Both in their everyday lives and during their activist work, advantaged group allies are especially likely to have direct contact with disadvantaged group members. Ironically, these interactions may sometimes (although not always) weaken the collective action engagement of disadvantaged group members. Throughout our analysis, we highlight a distinction between two subgroups within a given disadvantaged group - disadvantaged group members who are themselves activists and those who are non-

activists.

What is an Advantaged Group Activist?

Curtin and McGarty (in press) describe activists as committed participants in a social movement, with a "relatively enduring orientation" to the social issue or problem. Here, we focus on *advantaged group allies* (AGAs) - advantaged group activists who are committed participants in action to improve the treatment and/or status of a disadvantaged group (e.g., Smith & Redington, 2010; Russell & Bohan, in press). Some AGAs may be committed to engaging in action on behalf of a variety of disadvantaged groups (e.g., see Ravarino, 2008; Louis, Amiot, Thomas, & Blackwood, in press). For others, activism may center around one particular disadvantaged group (e.g., straight parents of gay or lesbian children active in support of same-sex marriage). Our current analysis focuses on the fact that AGAs' involvement in these social movements is likely to create frequent opportunities for cross-group contact, which may psychologically impact members of the disadvantaged group.

Everyday Interactions: The Challenge of Positive Cross-Group Contact

AGA's daily lives may include routine, friendly interactions with disadvantaged group members (e.g., as a neighbor or coworker). Although likely to improve intergroup attitudes, recent research and theorizing also suggest that such positive contact may be disempowering for disadvantaged group members (e.g., Wright, 2001, Dixon, Levine, Reicher & Durrheim, 2012; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). While echoing these concerns, we suggest that interactions with AGAs can also be structured to empower disadvantaged group members.

The vast majority of the contact literature focuses on how it can improve intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice, especially among advantaged group members (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Wright, 2009 for reviews). However, although improving intergroup attitudes and

the fight for social equality may appear to be complementary goals that could be pursued simultaneously, Wright and Lubensky (2009) argued that the underlying psychology supporting these goals may not be complementary at all. A growing literature supports this contention, suggesting that the kind of positive cross-group contact most likely to reduce prejudice can simultaneously undermine disadvantaged group members' collective action participation (e.g., Dixon et al., 2012; Saguy et al., 2009; Wright & Baray, 2012). A number of mechanisms may account for these negative effects. First, positive contact is often structured to focus attention away from collective identities (e.g., Miller, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). However, collective identification is a critical precursor to engaging in collective action (Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Second, positive contact breaks down negative stereotypes of the out-group (Allport, 1954; Wright, Brody, & Aron, 2005). Indeed, the primary intended outcome of positive cross-group contact is to generate positive attitudes toward the out-group. However, holding a negative view of the advantaged out-group – for example, by identifying the advantaged group as responsible for the oppression faced by the disadvantaged group – can be critical for maintaining the strong perceptions of injustice and collective control essential for collective action engagement (Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Stott & Drury, 2004; Wright & Tropp, 2002).

To our knowledge, none of this research or theorizing has focused specifically on cross-group contact involving AGAs. However, cross-group interactions may become more likely as advantaged group members become allies and enter the communities and personal lives of disadvantaged group members. Ironically, these interactions may threaten disadvantaged group members' interest in collective action. This threat may be particularly relevant to disadvantaged

group members who are non-activists, as disadvantaged group activists and non-activists likely differ in a variety of ways that account for their differential engagement in collective action. In particular, non-activists likely identify less strongly with their disadvantaged in-group, perceive less injustice in the treatment or position of their group, and have a weaker sense of collective control (see Wright, 2010). As a result, non-activists may be especially likely to be negatively influenced by cross-group contact with advantaged group activists.

The Promise of Cross-group Contact

Despite the apparent conflict between positive contact and collective action engagement, there is also evidence that under the right circumstances, cross-group contact can be empowering. Specifically, cross-group contact may enhance a disadvantaged group member's collective action engagement when the advantaged group member deliberately moves beyond contact that is merely friendly and positive, and engage in *supportive contact*: positive cross-group contact in which the advantaged group member explicitly communicates opposition to inequality and/or support for the disadvantaged group and their goals (Droogendyk, Louis, & Wright, under review). For example, the advantaged group member might openly challenge the status quo or express support for resistance by the disadvantaged group.

Supportive contact could increase disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement by strengthening critical psychological mechanisms described earlier. By openly opposing existing intergroup inequality, the advantaged group member would focus attention on group memberships and represent the disadvantaged group as deserving and positive. Thus, rather than reducing the salience of group identity, the interaction might strengthen identification with the disadvantaged group. Open recognition of inequality by an advantaged group member could also strengthen perceptions of injustice. If injustice is apparent even to some who directly

benefits from it, this is strong evidence of the reality of that injustice (e.g., Czopp & Monteith, 2003).

Our recent research (Droogendyk, et al., under review) offers direct support for these claims. As there is a paucity of research on supportive contact, we describe this work here in some detail. Comparing supportive contact to other realistic positive cross-group contact experiences, we found that supportive cross-group contact can be empowering for disadvantaged group members.

One study involved international students in Australia. Although a significant source of funding to universities, this group is also the target of discrimination (e.g., Reitmanova, 2008). International students were asked to recall a domestic student with whom they had a friendly relationship, who was either clearly supportive of international students, showed little support, or was ambiguous in terms of their support (leaving the participant unsure whether the person was or was not supportive). Those recalling a clearly supportive domestic student friend reported higher willingness to engage in collective action than those who recalled a domestic student friend who was low or unclear in their support for international students. In addition, recalling supportive contact increased collective action engagement by heightening perceptions of injustice. In this context, supportive contact was empowering primarily because it drove home the reality of the injustice faced by international students.

In another study, first-generation Canadian university students engaged in a friendship-building interaction with a Canadian-born student (actually a confederate) and subsequently overheard the confederate make a comment regarding inequalities faced by first-generation Canadians. The comment was either explicitly supportive of first-generation Canadians (expressing opposition to intergroup inequality), or ambiguous (offering no information about

the partner's feelings regarding intergroup inequality). In addition, these two groups were compared to a control group that had no interaction with a Canadian-born student. Compared to first-generation Canadians in both the control and ambiguous comment conditions, those whose partner expressed support reported more willingness to engage in collective action and actually engaged in more collective action by requesting more buttons to be used to raise awareness of the intergroup inequality. Again, heightened perceptions of injustice mediated the relationship between supportive contact and collective action.

These two studies offer initial evidence of the empowering impact of *supportive contact,* compared to both no contact and to positive/friendly contact that does not include a clear statement in support of social change.

Importance of Communication

The concept of supportive contact has obvious implications for the behavior of AGAs. Specifically, it points to the critical role of *communicating support* during cross-group contact. Contact with advantaged group members who are ambiguous about their support (i.e., offering no information about support, or sending unclear messages) appears to offer no benefits for disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. In fact, ambiguity is generally deleterious for collective action engagement (Wright, 1997; Becker et al., 2013), in part because it may raise doubts about whether action against a seemingly friendly advantaged group is really justified. Thus, AGAs need to include clear, explicit messages of support for social change to ensure that their friendly cross-group interactions do not serve to undermine disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement.

Offering such explicit support may not be easy. Talking about issues of intergroup inequality can be challenging for advantaged group members, who have to deal with anxiety

about appearing biased, feelings of embarrassment or guilt about their own privilege, and social norms to avoid "taboo" topics (e.g., Shelton, 2003; Tropp et al., 2006; Vorauer, 2006). And, regardless of one's good intentions, these conversations do not always go smoothly (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). These concerns may be most acute during everyday interactions, where disadvantaged interaction partners are either non-activists, or their movement involvement is unknown. In these casual, passing contact situations AGAs may be particularly hesitant to offer the kinds of clear expressions of support that we have described above, especially if they must initiate the conversation (Johnson, 2006; Tropp et al., 2006). Concerns around raising issues of structural discrimination, privilege, and intergroup inequality will be particularly acute when it is unclear whether one's interaction partner is interested in these topics. Thus, interactions with disadvantaged group members who are not known to be active members of a movement may closely resemble those shown to be most problematic – friendly and positive, but without clear communications related to intergroup inequality (Droogendyk et al., under review). In contrast, while interactions between AGAs and disadvantaged group activists are not immune to such concerns, it may be easier for AGAs to discuss intergroup inequality and offer explicit support during these interactions. While working together as part of a social movement to reduce inequality, conversations about social justice and group-based inequality may arise naturally and be much less "taboo." Additionally, AGAs' ongoing involvement with a movement may allow them to build meaningful personal relationships, in which supportive statements would appear more appropriate and genuine.

Finally, it is worth noting that not all supportive contact is likely to be equally effective. Rattan and Ambady (2014) show that even when advantaged group members attempt to offer cross-group support, they may not accurately intuit which kinds of messages are most beneficial

and lead to feelings of empowerment (see also Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Clearly, more research

is need to investigate what kinds of messages AGAs usually send and whether these messages

are received in ways that can produce the increases in empowerment found in our research.

The Challenge of Doing the Work: Misguided Activism

The challenge to AGAs does not end with the need to engage in clearly supportive cross-

group contact in everyday interactions – it also extends to how they conduct themselves in their

activist work. The stories and writings of disadvantaged group activists are replete with examples

of AGAs who may have the right intentions, and express their concern and dissatisfaction with

current injustices and inequalities but who nevertheless ended up doing as much harm as good.

Social psychological theory and research may offer valuable insights into the processes that

underpin these misguided efforts as well as offering explanations for the responses of

disadvantaged group members affected by them.

The "Intergroup Helping" Problem

"If we are discussing racial inequalities… and White voice rise to the top of the conversation… how is that any social change? White voices have long been the arbiters of social understanding and norms." – Jay Dodd, *Huffpost*

"When I see white people smiling for pictures at protests, carrying the biggest sign that takes up the most space, bringing in unnecessary violence, and talking about how 'we are all victims and all just need to get along' during demonstrations about the targeting of black people…I can't help but think that maybe they're just here to make themselves feel better about their own prejudice... I'm not saying don't support and/or participate, I'm saying make sure how you do so makes sense for you as a white person and doesn't harm the cause you claim to support." –Mwende Katwiwa*, FreeQuency.*

The sentiment expressed in these quotations highlights one of the ways enthusiastic

AGAs can serve to detract from, rather than enhance, social movements. AGAs may fail to seek

guidance from disadvantaged group activists, may take over work that would have otherwise

been done by members of the disadvantaged group, may co-opt and in so doing obfuscate or

trivialize the movement's message, may actively seek to become a leader or spokesperson within

a movement, and may offer unwanted and/or unneeded advice on strategy and tactics. Some poignant examples are evident in the activism that has emerged in numerous US cities in response to the many African Americans who have been killed by police officers (e.g., the *Black Lives Matter* movement). Among the many important and valuable conversations these recent actions have inspired has been one around the role that White Americans should play in the movement, as numerous Black activists have objected to the behavior of some Whites who seek to join protests and other social action (Fagan & Ho, 2014; De Graaf, 2014).

At first glance, it seems incongruous, even ironic, that AGAs would ultimately undermine a movement by dominating it, when their apparent intentions are to help reduce inequality. However, social psychological research and theorizing on intergroup helping (e.g., Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2015; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010) offers valuable insights into the underlying psychology of advantaged group helpers and why these kinds of dominating/co-opting behaviors might emerge.

A key contention of recent theorizing on intergroup helping (e.g., Nadler & Halabi, 2015) is that helping is not benign - it can often reflect, and thus reify rather than undermine, the existing status differences between the groups. Even an offer of help implies that the helper has resources the recipient lacks and needs, and accepting help can be seen as an admission of lower status and power. In addition, being self-reliant is a valued attribute, at least in independent and individualist-oriented cultures. Recipients of help may appear to lack this kind of self-reliance and competence. Finally, the act of helping is understood to be highly laudable. Those who help should be praised, even honored, for their efforts. Helpers may feel that they have a legitimate right to expect gratitude and some degree of deference from those they assist (Halabi, Nadler & Dovidio, 2013). Thus, to the degree that AGAs conceptualize their actions as helping the

disadvantaged, the more likely they are to fall prey to processes that lead them to see themselves (and by extension their in-group) as more powerful, more capable, and more worthy of respect than the group they seek to help. It is not a long route from this sense of personal and in-group superiority to the kinds of dominating behaviors described earlier.

Even more disconcerting is the possibility that AGAs may sometimes be influenced by processes that van Leeuven and colleagues (2010) describe as "strategic" helping. Even helping that genuinely benefits the disadvantaged group can be partially motivated by a desire to protect the reputation or status of the advantaged in-group (e.g., Van Vugt & Hardy, 2010). Importantly for the current analysis, when advantaged group members recognize that the in-group is to some degree responsible for the injustice experienced by the disadvantaged group, they are motivated to provide help in order to restore the in-group's reputation and relieve feelings of collective guilt (e.g., Leach, Snider & Iyer, 2002; van Leeuwen, 2007). However, these motives are likely to lead to *dependency-oriented help* (e.g., Nadler & Halabi, 2015) in which advantaged group helpers attempt to provide the full solution for the disadvantaged group's problem. For example, behaviors like taking over work that could be done by members of the disadvantaged group, seeking to act as a spokesperson or leader, and offering unwanted and/or unneeded advice would be consistent with this concept of dependency-oriented helping.

Finally, inappropriate forms of helping can also stem from AGAs' failure to recognize their own privilege. For most advantaged group members, the default view of intergroup inequality is to focus on the plight of the disadvantaged, seldom considering the flipside – the privilege of the advantaged (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012). Contemplating privilege can be uncomfortable. Privilege implies that one has received something unearned and appears to call into question the legitimacy of one's position, one's

accomplishments, and perhaps even one's integrity. Nonetheless, privilege is real and one of the ironic outcomes of possessing it is that one is not compelled to think about having it (e.g., Johnson, 2006; Case, 2012). Thus, AGAs may understand their helping as an effort to "raise up" those who are disadvantaged, without even examining how they are privileged by their race, their gender, their sexual orientation, their socioeconomic status, etc. and how the struggle they seek to support must also involve "tearing down" the privilege that their group holds. For these AGAs what needs to be examined and remedied is the lives and problems of the out-group. Their own lives and the lives of their in-group are the "normal" or the "desirable." We offer a few examples of negative outcomes resulting from this perspective. Of course, failure to recognize privilege can create a wide range of problems. We certainly do not mean to trivialize this by offering only these few.

First, a failure to examine one's own group-based privilege can lead to enacting that privilege in precisely the ways described above – expecting to be offered a position of responsibility, to be listened to, and to be seen as valuable without having to first demonstrate that value. Failure to examine their group-based privilege would leave AGAs unprepared to have that privilege openly questioned or denied to them within the social movement.

Second, disadvantaged group activists often face uncertainty around the terms of an advantaged group member's support. As Black feminist scholar bell hooks (2000) comments, "Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment" (p. 67). At the root of the problem of *uncommitted activism* is a lack of understanding of privilege – a lack of awareness of how different life is for members of a disadvantaged group. For privileged AGAs, activism can be an occasional activity to be engaged in when they have extra time or motivation. They can then disappear back to the safety of their

own lives for days, weeks, or months. Disadvantaged group members do not have the luxury of taking time off from inequality and injustice. Part-time activism can be reasonably interpreted by disadvantaged group members as evidence of AGAs failure to understand this reality.

Finally, AGAs who are unaware of their privilege may fail to consider how group membership can influence the consequences of activism. For example, they may plan events that seem reasonable to them, and encourage disadvantaged group members to participate. However, time, financial resources and support networks may make their plan safe and reasonable for them, while not being reasonable or safe for some members of the disadvantaged group. Similarly, AGAs may inadvertently engage in behaviors during actions organized by disadvantaged group activist that are only mildly costly to them, but put their disadvantaged group "comrades" at more serious risk. Doreen Silversmith, an Indigenous Canadian, describes such a case, "At the reclamation site, some settler activists came and wanted to fight the police. They yelled, threw things and egged the other side on, getting our people all worked up. We have to live there. Remember, no white people were arrested in that raid but 50 of our people have been charged" (Canon & Sunseri, 2011). In observing a recent political protest, one of the authors (Wright) was reminded of the difference between the experiences of a White, middle class, middle aged, professional *choosing* to be arrested compared to the likely experience of a young, First Nations activist being arrested for the same act of defiance. Would an AGA choose arrest if all of his/her privileges were somehow removed? Although this is anecdotal, we believe it makes clear the need for AGAs to be aware of the privileges they continue to hold even as they seek to help those who do not share those privileges.

Responses of the Disadvantaged Group to Dominant and Dependency-Oriented Help

"We ask you not for an invitation to your rallies and to sit at your tables, we ask you not to save us, but to back us up…. Or get the hell out of the way." – Xhopakelxhit, Ancestral Pride

"*Who ever walked in behind anyone to freedom? If we can't go hand in hand, I don't want to go.*" – Hazel Scott

Although dependency-oriented helping can be very effective at resurrecting the damaged reputation of the advantaged group and relieving feelings of guilt, the implied message of this kind of help is that the disadvantaged group lacks the efficacy to accomplish their collective goals. The psychological consequences of this message for the recipients are typically negative, and may be especially negative when dependency-oriented help is provided in a very public way, as this public display further threatens the group's reputation (see Nadler & Porat, 1978). Thus, the public dominating actions by AGAs described above are particularly problematic.

Our analysis suggests two possible responses to this public dependency-oriented help. The first is represented in the quotations at the beginning of this section, and involves suspicion, frustration, and the rejection of the help. Disadvantaged group activists in particular (as opposed to non-activists) may be likely to respond this way because the dominant behaviors of AGAs clash with the *cognitive alternatives* that inspired their own activism. Being able to imagine a different and better world – a cognitive alternative to the current inequality – has been described as a critical prerequisite to collective action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Jetten, Iyer, Branscombe, & Zhang, 2013). A movement that is co-opted and lead by members of the group that currently holds power is inconsistent with this vision of a new and more equal world - no matter how benevolent the intentions of these "leaders". In addition, Haslam and Reicher (2012) argue that *how* the status quo will be replaced can also be important, and that a cognitive alternative involves "imagining an alternative social world …but also involves a sense of how we might get there" (p. 55). If disadvantaged group activists are indeed motivated by a shared vision of how the desired social change will be achieved, it is unlikely that this vision would involve a movement dominated by members of the current advantaged group. Thus, rejecting the

dependency-oriented help offered by AGAs may itself be an act of resistance.

However, disadvantaged group members may not always resist the dominant behavior of AGAs. Acceptance of dependency-oriented help by AGAs is often closely tied to perceptions of collective control and may be especially likely among disadvantaged group members who are not activists. Wright (2011) describes two components of collective control. First, individuals must believe that change is possible – that there is some degree of *instability* in the intergroup relations (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Disadvantaged group non-activists may believe the system to be relatively stable, and as a result may welcome the leadership and other intrusions of advantaged group members who espouse egalitarian values, seek social justice, and appear to offer a more benevolent alternative to the current power holders. Second, feelings of collective control also involve a belief that one's group has the *agency* or collective efficacy to take advantage of instability in the system – that the group has suitable resources and abilities to effect change (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2008). Again, if disadvantaged group members believe their group lacks the resources to instigate or maintain a social movement, they may welcome and be grateful for dependency-oriented help (Nadler, 2002). Whether it results from perceptions of stability or a lack of collective efficacy, a lack of perceived collective control necessitates the acceptance of help that continues to reinforce and instantiate group-based status inequalities., although more benevolent than the hostility and discrimination offered by the current system. Importantly, a social movement that becomes dominated by AGAs due to a lack of perceived collective control may itself serve to reinforce those low feelings of collective control and further reduce the chances of future disadvantaged group led resistance.

Alternatively, some disadvantaged group *activist*s may initially tolerate the dominant behaviors of AGAs, while seeking to educate and reform them by encouraging them to take on

alternative roles that involve what Nadler and Halabi (2015) call *autonomy-oriented help* – help that offers needed resources but allows the disadvantaged group to describe and carry out their own solutions. Although perhaps constructive, this process of educating and reforming is likely to be distracting and frustrating and may take resources away from other needed action. As one Black feminist blogger commented, "[People of color] if they're honest will admit that sometimes it takes entirely too much energy and patience to support white people in their process of being an ally" (Feminist Griote, 2013). Having to stretch already-limited resources and energy in this way may also reduce perceptions of efficacy.

Finally, identification with the disadvantaged in-group moderates responses to dependency-oriented help, with high identifiers more likely to reject and low identifiers to accept it (Nadler & Halabi, 2015). Thus, AGAs offering dependency-oriented help may receive "mixed messages". They may be lauded and welcomed by disadvantaged group members who have lower in-group identification (likely non-activists), but will face criticism and rejection from activists, who are likely to have strong in-group identification. Having one's efforts to help rejected is unpleasant and can lead to feelings of resentment, to withdrawal of future support and can exacerbate group tensions (see Halabi, et al., 2013).

In summary, cross-group helping seems highly laudable and an analysis uninformed by the psychology of intergroup helping would find it odd that advantaged group members who have a genuine interest in reducing inequality would engage in help that undermines rather than enhances collective efforts by the disadvantaged to achieve this goal. Similarly, an uninformed observer might see it as foolish and ungracious for disadvantaged group activists to criticize and reject the generous support of advantaged group members. However, informed by social psychological theories both of these actions become understandable and predictable. Fortunately,

theory and research also offers a solution. AGAs need to focus on offering autonomy-oriented help – help that does not impede the disadvantaged group's ability to describe and carry out their own solutions. This kind of help represents a much smaller threat to the disadvantaged group's reputation, and it affirms their efficacy and is therefore much more likely to be sought and accepted. Moreover, it is more in keeping with the true intent of a movement designed to reduce inequality by moving resources and power from the privileged to the disadvantaged group.

The "Identity" Problem

>   *"Genuine allies know that when people claim their differences... such as an Indigenous person or a person of color, within the context of challenging the oppressive power structure, that this should not be perceived and argued as being... disruptive to the larger goal and needed solidarity."* - Lynn Ghel

>   *"'I wish there was an 'S' for 'Straight' in the acronym.' (Yes, people say this.) Rather than "fighting with us," how about you just try to help out as needed? This means not drowning out LGBT voices."* – Parker Marie Molloy

We propose that some critiques leveled by disadvantaged group activists against AGAs reflect concerns around collective identity and categorization, and that a social psychological analysis may be fruitful in articulating the processes exposed by these critiques. Research has demonstrated a connection between participation in action on behalf of a disadvantage group and an advantaged group member showing strong identification with that group (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2011). Given that advantaged group members are usually unable to physically join the disadvantaged group (e.g., become Black or Gay or Indigenous), this identification with the disadvantaged group may be represented in more symbolic ways. Although this growing identification with the out-group increases interest in engaging in activism for the out-group, it also seems reasonable that the more AGAs come to see themselves (even symbolically) as members of the disadvantaged group, the more they will feel justified in taking the kinds of dominating actions described in the previous section . For example, "As a member of the group

(rather than an outsider), I should have the right to speak for and lead the group." Thus, in some cases dominating actions by AGAs may result not from a sense of group superiority, but rather from a misguided sense that one has earned symbolic membership in the disadvantaged in-group.

Of course, this co-optation of their group identity can be unimpressive, even offensive, to members of the disadvantaged group. As one Indigenous activist eloquently puts it, "Just because you know some songs or are rejecting your heritage does not mean you can somehow become one of us. Never going to happen" (Ancestral Pride). In a very poignant example, Black activists in the *Black Lives Matter* protests in the US responded with frustration and dismay as White supporters joined the protest and stand at the front with their hands in the air chanting "Hands Up, Don't Shoot". This chant and stance were initially taken by young Black protesters to symbolize their fear that they would be the next target of a police shooting. When White protesters mimic this behavior, it implies that they are just as likely to be shoot by the police. This simply is not true. Unarmed Whites are much less likely to be shot by police. However, more importantly, the movement was supposed to be about the plight of Blacks, and many have argued that the visual of White people standing with their hands up misrepresents the problem and undermines the message (e.g., FreeQuency). So, while increasing psychological identification with the disadvantaged group out-group may inspire action by AGAs, it may also inspire behavior that will offend and be rejected by the disadvantaged group.

Given the difficulties of trying to take on the disadvantaged group identity, AGAs may instead seek to find a common identity that they can share with disadvantaged group. Thus, they may (inadvertently) seek to alter the social identity that drives collective action from one that is exclusive to the disadvantaged group to one that can be shared by anyone who holds the same values, or attitudes, or commitment to the cause. For example, a Black activist identity, which

defines Blackness as existing in opposition to Whiteness, may be replaced by a focus on an identity like "Anti-racists" which changes the intergroup struggle to position those who are fighting against racial inequality against those who are complicit with it. There is compelling evidence that of these kinds of shared in-group identities centered around opinions or causes can be very effective in garnering and solidifying the support and participation of advantaged group members (see McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009; Thomas & McGarty, 2009). This is not surprising given that these social identities are consistent with advantaged group member's preferences for focusing on cross-group communalities rather than group differences (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). While acknowledging that shared group identities can play an important role in social change, here we offer a word of caution about their specific impact during interactions between AGAs and disadvantaged group members.

First, Mummendey and colleagues' *In-group Projection Model* points to one problem with replacing of the disadvantaged group identity as the focus of collective action with a more inclusive identity that includes both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Research supports the contention that when multiple groups are part of a larger social category, all subgroups will seek to project the content of their local identities onto the identity of the larger social category and thus to have their own group define the normative representation of this larger shared identity. However, the advantaged subgroup is likely to be far more successful in doing so, resulting in the larger shared group identity being more reflective of the advantaged subgroup (e.g., Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007; see also Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). This allows members of the advantaged group to feel more prototypical and perhaps to see themselves as most capable of acting as leaders for this shared group. So, because anyone can be an "anti-racist" and Whites come to this anti-racist coalition with more structural

power and status, there is the potential for White anti-racists to come to see themselves as the legitimate leaders and spokespeople for this coalition. Again, we are back to dominating AGAs.

Finally, we propose that in addition to avoiding these pitfalls of altering group identities, there may be direct benefits for AGAs to remain highly aware of their advantaged group identity. Earlier in discussing the importance of recognizing one's privilege, we noted that engaging in activism frequently comes with tangible costs, but that these costs are much more pronounced for disadvantaged group members. It is also clear that confronting injustice can also come with social costs such as disapproval, denigration, and further discrimination (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, Nadolny, & Noyes, 2013; Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez, 2012), and again these social costs are borne more strongly by the disadvantaged, who may be disliked for speaking up, and unlikely to be taken seriously (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2003; Kaiser, Hagiwara, Malahy, & Wilkins, 2009). Conscious recognition of one's advantaged group status and its accompanying privilege may help AGAs recognize that the cost of confronting is lower for them, and encourage them to play a special role in challenging prejudice and discrimination by members of their in-group (e.g., Smith & Redington, 2010). Thus, recognition of their status as an out-group member might not only remind AGAs to seek the guidance and leadership of the disadvantaged group activists, it might also remind them of their obligation and special capacity to confront in-group members who stand in the way of social change (e.g., Greenwood, 2015). This sentiment is nicely demonstrated in the words of Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones (2010) who encourages White allies to,

"Be loud and crazy so Black folks won't have to be! Speak up! Say it! Name it! If you are male, YOU be the one to tell your department chair that the women's salaries in your department must be brought line with those of the men. If you are white, YOU be

the one to advocate for the qualified grad student of color applicant over the qualified

white grad student applicant."

To our knowledge there is no research addressing responses of disadvantaged group

members to the redefinition of the relevant social identity from their local in-group to one that

includes others committed to their values or cause. However, it seems reasonable to assume that

their reactions might be very similar to their responses to offers of dependency-oriented help. For

example, disadvantaged group members who are only weakly identified with their in-group, and

perhaps are already identified with the larger mainstream community – those who are dual

identified (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) – might be particularly welcoming of a broader

definition of the relevant in-group. For example, a group like" anti-racists" might mesh well with

and reinforce their existing dual identity, where a movement more tightly tied only to their

disadvantaged group identity might not.

However, disadvantaged group members who are highly identified with their local in-

group and whose clear vision of an alternative system has inspired active struggle (i.e.,

disadvantaged group activists) might be much less likely to endorse this redefinition of the in-

group. As the quote by Malcom X at the opening of this paper indicates, those who are actively

committed to the in-group struggle are likely to recognize that inclusion of advantaged out-group

members as part of the relevant in-group could call into question who the rightful leaders and

architects of the movement should be, and that broadening the goals and scope of the movement

might reduce its impact on the disadvantaged group whose concerns should be at the center of

the problem. Again, the *Black Lives Matter* protests offer a very relevant example. As well-

meaning White AGAs joined the movement, some thought to broaden the scope of the

movement to be more representative of their "anti-racist" perspective by adapting the moniker to

All Lives Matter. To those offering this adaptation, this new representation of the movement as emphasizing equality and respect for all seemed at worst innocuous and at best more inclusive. However, it was reacted to swiftly and vociferously by many who point out that *All Lives Matter* obfuscates the real problem – Black people are killed at a much higher rate than members of other groups. As Black American activist blogger Luvvie Ajayi explains, "We know that all lives matter. WE KNOW. But we have to say #BlackLivesMatter to remind people of our humanity, which is far too often forgotten. So for white people to feel like this proclamation somehow diminishes THEIR humanity is to confirm that very self-centeredness that we're fighting against" (Awesomely Luvvie, 2014).

Similarly, a larger and more inclusive identity which includes members of the advantaged out-group might also undermine the feelings of efficacy and illegitimacy that are key to vigorous collective action (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, 2010). The argument here is similar to the one raised by Wright and Lubensky (2009) as to why cross-group contact might undermine collective action participation. A more inclusive in-group that includes advantaged group members alters and obfuscates the relevant out-group that can be clearly pointed to as the "oppressors" responsible for current injustices (see also Corenblum & Stephan, 2000). The belief that the advantaged and disadvantaged groups are in clear opposition to each other is part of the construction of a *politicized identity* (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Stott & Drury, 2004), which is valuable in supporting perceptions of control and injustice, and distinguishes activists from non-activists. Thus, acceptance of a new broader identity may undermine the collective action engagement of those who would otherwise be most dedicated – disadvantaged group activists. It seems important that AGAs avoid the allure of modifying and expanding relevant social identities so that they can feel included, as these alternative identities may in fact serve to further

marginalize those the movement seeks to benefit.

Concluding Thoughts and Some Suggestions for Advantaged Group Allies

Our analysis focused on potential pitfalls stemming from the actions of advantaged group allies, but it is important to emphasize that we are by no means suggesting that advantaged group members avoid engaging in activism to benefit disadvantaged groups. Although there is a clear need for future research on appropriate AGA behavior, we offer some tentative suggestions. AGA's should actively consider how their presence and actions might influence the motivations, identities and resolve of the disadvantaged group members they seek to work alongside. If AGAs incorporate effective communication of support for social change as part of their cross-group interactions, their presence may benefit disadvantaged group members' collective action engagement. Additionally, we suggest that AGAs should seek to better understand their own privilege, which may increase the likelihood that they will offer autonomy-oriented support, rather than engaging in dominant behaviors consistent with dependency-oriented help. AGAs should also avoid the temptation to increase their own feelings of inclusion by expanding or modifying disadvantaged social identities. Instead, they should recognize their group-based privilege and leverage it to confront members of their in-group and social institutions that oppose social change. If done correctly, there is certainly potential for the activism of advantaged group members to make meaningful contributions to the creation of a more equal society.

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