Evaluating the Ally Role: Contributions, Limitations, and the Activist Position in Counseling and Psychology

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Abstract

Community action is a core mission of activism in counseling and psychology, and the ally role is often viewed as integral to this work. This article provides a review of the benefits as well as the limitations of the ally role in social action in counseling and psychology. Lastly, the authors advocate for a values-based activism role as an alternative to the ally position in order to enhance effectiveness in achieving social change in counseling and psychology.

Keywords: ally, social justice, social action, activism, counseling, psychology

As social justice psychologists, anti-racist activism has been central to our mission to contest social inequities. During our training at a multicultural internship site, we noticed the limitations of naming white trainees as "allies" in anti-racist clinical practice. We discussed the importance of white counselors and psychologists becoming central to multicultural work instead of on the sidelines, as people with cultural identities implicated in and affected by racism. While ally activism has been a focus of study (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009), we found little research that critically evaluated this position.

As faculty in clinical psychology programs, we continue to be interested in positions that maximize our efforts in anti-oppression education with clinical trainees. Activism is central to the mission of social action in counseling and psychology, yet we believe there are limitations of the ally role in effecting social change. Furthermore, we have found the ally role does not account for the notion of intersectionality. While there are a number of theories on this concept, intersectionality generally

refers to the notion that an individual embodies multiple social identities, some of which may be oppressed or privileged, that intersect to uniquely shape one's experience (Crenshaw, 1993). Intersectionality has become central to contemporary activism and social justice in psychology (Cole, 2009), wherein one might be a member of an oppressed group and a privileged or ally group at the same time.

In this article, we explore the value of the ally position and provide a critical analysis of this role. An examination of the contributions and shortcomings of the ally position is offered, drawing from the theory of intersectionality. An overview of the literature on social action in counseling and psychology is also provided to contextualize the evaluation of the ally role. Lastly, a discussion is presented on an alternative to the ally role in activism, drawing from the frameworks of collective action and social justice in counseling and psychology research.

The Ally Role

The role of ally was popularized in the civil rights era of the 1960s with white allies in anti-racist activism, male allies in the struggle for women's rights, and straight allies in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) rights advocacy (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). Since the 1960s, additional allies have been identified to support the civil liberties of people with physical disabilities, serious mental illnesses, elderly, youth, transgender individuals, and other groups facing oppression. These movements have often been led by members of disadvantaged groups, with allies from advantaged groups typically positioned to offer support and resources (Iyer & Leach, 2010).

A number of definitions of the ally have emerged throughout the literature on this topic, emphasizing different aspects of this role. Washington and Evans (1991) focused on the ally as someone who provides assistance as "a member of the dominant group or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal or professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population" (p. 195). Broido (2000) also emphasized the power status of the ally who she described as "working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (p. 3). Tatum (1994) identified the goal of the ally "to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same" (p. 474). Yet another model of ally identification involves a sense of political solidarity through the agreement of a need for social change between both group members (Subasic, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). In general, the role of the ally is to spread awareness among a dominant group and support the activism of members of a marginalized group.

Contributions of the Ally Position

To conduct a critical evaluation of the ally role, we identified a number of contributions of the ally position to counterbalance a discussion of the limitations. The benefits of the ally role that we identified include: privilege awareness, support and resource access, and power sensitivity. In this section, we will integrate evidence from various research studies and theoretical articles on activism to support our theory of the contributions of this position.

Privilege Awareness

With regard to benefits of the ally, it is important to recognize that this role has presented many benefits to social action in counseling and psychology. For one, the ally position encourages individuals who have been free from an experience of oppression in a particular area to critically examine power and privilege in their daily lives. Within the ally role is a valuable emphasis on privilege consciousness. Privilege refers to the unearned advantages afforded to members of dominant groups such as white privilege, heterosexual privilege, male privilege, or age privilege (McIntosh, 1989).

For example, white allies are commonly encouraged to reflect on one's privilege as a member of a dominant racial group (Tatum, 1994). Thus, one benefit of this role is that when individuals define themselves as allies, they acknowledge their dominant group membership and privilege in relation to a marginalized group. Furthermore, this privilege awareness of the ally can become a tool for social change. According to relative deprivation theory (RDT), when individuals in a dominant group make social comparisons to an oppressed group, the member of the dominant group experiences increased awareness of privilege, facilitating collective action among dominant group members (Davis, 1959; Geschwender & Geschwender, 1973). Thus, privilege awareness may be heightened in the role of ally to an oppressed group, motivating social action.

Support and Resource Access

In addition to being aware of their privilege, allies may utilize their privilege, resources, and power to enact change in this role (Broido, 2000). According to resource mobilization theory, collective action occurs through the strategic mobilizing of resources of organizations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). For instance, allies in civil rights movements have often used resources afforded to them through their advantaged status in order to help a greater cause (Iyer & Leach, 2010).

Within the ally role is the ability to access and mobilize external resources, as well as assist with attaining objectives. Washington and Evans (1991) described the role of the ally as a dominant group member who provides support to an oppressed population, helping to carry out the objectives that are identified by the oppressed group. In this case, the agenda for social change is set by the marginalized group, with allies providing support. Identification as an ally helps to locate the privileged group who can utilize resources to support the group experiencing marginalization.

In many cases, allies are also given the responsibility to provide education and legitimize the movement among skeptical dominant group members (Gordon, 2010). In an example of male allies to women who have been raped, these men utilized their role to educate male peers on consent and rape prevention (Fabiano et al., 2003). Thus, the ally position can encourage activism among a privileged group and the engagement of peers into action.

Power Sensitivity

There is also a benefit to the ally role in developing sensitivity to power as a member of a privileged group in relation to a group facing oppression. This sensitivity to a power differential is represented in other theories in psychology research. For instance, standpoint theory involves the notion that members of a disenfranchised group can perceive power in ways those in dominant positions may not (Gorelick, 1991; Haraway, 1991). As a result, dominant group members may become blind to their power, posing problems to activism. Therefore, one task of the ally is to ensure that they do not take power away from the oppressed group in order to avoid replicating oppressive dynamics.

The peripheral quality of the ally role may therefore be tactical and necessary. Non-reflexive practitioners who are less aware of their privilege may overwhelm the social justice efforts of a community given their lack of power consciousness. Thus, the identification of ally may help counselors to retain a professional boundary and avoid crowding out the group they are attempting to "empower" in this role.

The benefit of power sensitivity of the ally position is supported in an article by white anti-racist activists entitled, "Becoming an anti-racist white ally: How a white affinity group can help" (Michel & Conger, 2009). Michael and Conger described the value of an ally affinity group among white allies, in particular, to create "a space in which we can be honest, ask possibly ignorant questions, and process our deep emotions around race, while also challenging ourselves to do better, to examine and engage our privilege more critically" (p. 58).

The ally identity may allow for formation of these groups to enhance sensitivity to issues of power and explore associated emotions and attitudes. In many ways the ally role has served activists well. In the following section on the limitations of this role, awareness of the various benefits of the ally role can help contextualize a discussion of how social justice counseling and psychology can be best served by activism.

Limitations of the Ally Position

In our critical evaluation of the ally position, we identified a number of limitations to the ally role. A key element of our argument is that the ally position may not be the optimal position to achieve social change and may lead to conflicts with social justice values. Hence, we believe that many of the aforementioned benefits of the ally role fall short of being implemented successfully due to inherent constrictions. Limitations of the ally role include the following: lack of integration of intersectionality theory, reification of social constructs and hierarchies, creation of a problematic ingroup-outgroup dynamic, reinforcement of a hero-victim narrative, development of pseudo-allies with hidden agendas, and contribution to role confusion. In this section, we provide examples from research in counseling and psychology to substantiate the present argument as to the limitations of this role.

Overlooking Intersectionality

The first limitation we identified in the ally role is the lack of integration of intersectionality. Social categories are constructed and overlapping. One may simultaneously hold membership in both a privileged and underprivileged group, not falling neatly into either a dominant or marginalized role. The ally is by definition a member of a dominant group. Therefore, allies seemingly overlook the complexity of intersecting identities, wherein we may be members of both a dominant and marginalized group depending on which aspect of one's identity is most salient (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).

This problem of overlooking intersectionality is exemplified in the study on youth activism by Gordon (2010). Many of the youth allies in this study were former youth activists who, within a short number of years, transitioned into adult allies. Youth activists in Gordon's study complained of adult allies tokenizing their ideas, overpowering their voices, and focusing on their own agendas. Positioning adults as allies could potentially allow the youth to utilize the adults strategically, and keep them at bay in order to bring youth voices to the forefront. However, the ally role did not succeed in maintaining power sensitivity to the activism of the youth. Instead, the adults dominated the agenda. The adult allies found themselves easily slipping into ageist behavior as their roles blurred, and they became less aligned with their political objectives. In this example, we see that the ally position may not fully capture the shifts in identity that may lead one to move back and forth between marginalized and privileged statuses in a lifetime, such as an adult ally or youth activist. The adults lost a connection to their activist values in youth empowerment, privilege awareness, and power sensitivity. Consequently, the ally role may not capture the shifting nature of identity and optimize the activist's commitment to social change.

Another study by Curtin (2011) on activism among older, middle-aged, heterosexual, black and white women, demonstrated this limitation of the ally overlooking intersectionality. These women held positions of power and privilege as heterosexual and middle aged individuals. They also embodied marginalized identities as women, many of whom were black. Thus, identification as an ally may be constrained for each of these women depending on their race, age, or sexual orientation. In addition, Curtin found that social identity as an ally or member of an oppressed group was not predictive of engagement of activism. Instead, activism was predicted by collective identification, experiences of personal discrimination (i.e., sexism or racism), and awareness of structural inequality.

It is important to note that recognition of the dynamic, overlapping aspects of identity may not need to lead to a total disregard of the ally role. Rather, this process may point to the complexity of an ally identity and relationship between the "ally" and "oppressed group." Nonetheless, these findings generally reinforce our argument that the ally role may not fully encapsulate the complexity of identity highlighted in intersectionality theory. Rather, the ally is positioned as a person with a dominant identity in relation to individuals with subordinate identities, implying that these identities are static. Conversely, we posit that these identities are contextual and fluid, as represented in theories of intersectionality.

Reifying Social Constructs and Hierarchies

The second limitation in the ally stance is the tendency to mobilize around an identity category, failing to acknowledge the social construction of categories such as race (e.g., white vs. black). Helms (1992) defined the category of race as socially constructed in order to grant access to power to a dominant group and maintain societal norms and disparities. In addition, Helms indicated that it is important to recognize that, although categories such as race may be socially constructed, they are a social reality. In other words, disparities emerge across identity categories based on social perception and associated prejudice and discrimination, such as in the case of racism. We argue that the ally position may not capture the socially constructed nature of identity categories, which function to maintain structural inequities.

Furthermore, the ally role does not incorporate the nature of social identities and group membership as flexible, context-specific, subjective, and perception-based. The theory of McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, and Bongiorno (2009) can be applied to support our argument in this regard. McGarty and colleagues indicated that activism is carried out most effectively through shared values in collective action, as opposed to membership to social category groups. This concept is referred to as social-categorization theory. The ally identity falls within this social-categorization approach to activism, which is a less effective means of collective action than activism motivated through shared values.

Defining a group as "marginalized" in position to the ally may also limit the empowerment of that group and reify dominant and subordinate statuses. For instance, Russell (2011) conducted a study of heterosexual allies to the LGBT community. Russell identified the problem of "hierarchical drift," where heterosexual allies began to assert power in subtle ways over the LGBT individuals in their ally work. We argue that subordinate and dominant statuses are inherent in the ally position, risking replication and reinforcement of power inequities across groups. As a result, we contend that the nature of the ally role risks objectifying and disempowering a disadvantaged group, reifying social hierarchies instead of contesting them.

Ingroup-Outgroup Dynamic

As an ally, one is located inside a dominant group that works to end marginalization faced by a non-dominant group. However, this ingroup-outgroup dynamic is limited for a number of reasons. Social psychology researchers have elucidated the ingroup-outgroup positioning in activism that can be applied to the ally role. Tajfel and Turner (1979) purported in their social identity theory that individuals perceive one's ingroup as separate from the outgroup. Thus, allies establish an ingroup and work towards promoting the cause and elevating the status of a disadvantaged group.

While social identification with the broader social category of a disadvantaged social identity can mobilize social action, researchers have found that specific activist identities among these groups are more strongly predictive of collective action (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Simon et al., 1998). To illustrate this problem, one study found mobilizing around categories of woman, gay, older, and overweight were weak predictors of motivation for collective action (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Simon et al., 1998).

Rather, collective action has been found to be most effective when identification between bystanders and those affected occurs, and a psychological connection takes place between the self and a movement (Louis, 2009; Thomas & Louis, 2014).

Another example of how collective action is limited by the ingroup-outgroup dynamic of ally work is in the case of anti-racist activism. The ally role may limit joint collective action between the dominant outgroup (white allies) and the subordinate ingroup that experiences oppression (people of color). However, it is typically understood in anti-racist activism that it is a responsibility of both white people and people of color to eliminate racism. It has even been argued that it may be the responsibility of the perpetrator of racism to fight it (Brandyberry, 1999). Nevertheless, positioning the white ally in the outgroup position may circumvent their responsibilities in anti-racist activism and allow white allies to anticipate that people of color will do most of this work.

Relatedly, the activism of white Americans in the civil rights movement was not historically conceptualized as an "ally" position, but rather a reaction to this power hierarchy and a rejection of the privileges that come out of it (Curtin, 2011; Duncan & Stewart, 2007). Specifically, this activism was based on politicized identities. Both black and white students became involved in civil rights for ideological reasons and tended to be mobilized through a process of identity development as civil rights activists (Fendrich, 1977).

Another similar limitation of ally work is that support may happen within a marginalized group, not just across an outgroup to an ingroup. An example of this issue is raised by Brooks and Edwards (2009) in their study on LGBTQ allies in the workplace. Based on their work, they amended the definition of allies to include LGBTQ individuals who may also be allies for each other in standing up for someone who is being treated unfairly. This definition is in contrast to the typical one, in which the ally is a member of a dominant group who advocates for an oppressed population. Brooks and Edwards moved away from this ingroup-outgroup definition of the ally, enabling greater flexibility in understanding how activism takes place.

Moreover, membership to a disadvantaged ingroup does not always predict social action alone as some groups do not act in their own best interest (Crosby, 1976; Curtin, 2011). This research has found that an added perception of one's group as deserving rights and resources was predictive of social action. For example, McGarty (2009) stated,

> *There are inevitable sensitivities and limits on members of advantaged social categories who seek to engage in collective action alongside members of disadvantaged social categories. What does it mean to be a male feminist or a white civil rights activist? These are not unproblematic or uncontested identities but our point is that they are possible identities and when salient they can have consequences that need to be understood (p. 853).*

In this quote, McGarty suggests that while the ally identity may be appropriate in some cases, there are potential limitations to this position in promoting social justice. The ally role may designate the individual as an outsider to oppression, reducing the ally's awareness of being implicated in a system of inequality.

Hero-Victim Narrative

We argue that the ally position also constructs a problematic "hero-victim" narrative. The notion of an ally may promote a condescending narrative of allies as "rescuers" to the "helplessly oppressed." This narrative also reinforces problematic emotions of pity for a marginalized group (Russell, 2011). It has been found that collective action is less effectively motivated by pity than outrage and anger over injustice (McGarty et al., 2009). Along with pity comes sympathy in the role of a "heroic ally." While sympathy has been found to be important to collective action, this role positions the ally on the sidelines instead of participating fully in social change (Thomas & Louis, 2014). Furthermore, identification with an advantaged group identity may reify inferior-superior statuses associated with it (McGarty et al., 2009), such as hero to a victim. We argue that the hero-victim narrative generates pity rather than indignation, with the latter being more motivating of action.

The potential for a hero-victim narrative in ally work is present in an article on anti-racist education by a white educator, Aveling (2004),

> *Sometimes I catch myself slipping into the 'good white' subject position. This is embarrassing but at the same time it is also gratifying because when students catch me out, I know they are thinking critically. In fact, the whole process is far from easy, however, a willingness on my part to admit that the struggle is on-going and to admit (if shamefacedly) that I have far from 'arrived' in the anti-racism stakes leaves an opening for students to begin to explore their own histories and value positions (p. 3).*

One might argue that an ally with self-reflexivity and power sensitivity can be vigilant to activism for secondary gain as a "good white person." However, this excerpt points to the potential for the white ally role to reinforce this notion that one can arrive at an identity of a "good white person," "good straight person," or "good man," as opposed to connecting with an ongoing struggle for social justice.

Collective action may be less effective when iterations of the hero-victim narrative are constructed by ally work. This key problem that has been referred to in ally activism is the notion of "working with, rather than for the Other" (Giroux, 1993, p. 29). This concept problematizes ally work that is motivated to rescue a marginalized group who is viewed as suffering from injustice in isolation. This notion overlooks the effects of injustice on privileged groups and motivates social action out of sympathy rather than collaboration for a common good.

In one study, for example, perceptions of pervasive inequality motivated the collective action of men in challenging gender discrimination against women (Iyer & Ryan, 2009). Rather than being heroes to

the helpless female, men were more effectively mobilized around the ways in which inequality was toxic to not only women but to men as well. The ally position limits activism by reducing a focus on how oppression harms the ally group. In this example, men are harmed by patriarchy via the pressure to conform to rigid gender norms that limit emotional expression, as well as relational and occupational expectations. These men developed awareness that men are not just agents of oppression but are also negatively affected by gender hierarchies. Spanierman has conducted a body of research on the psychological costs of racism to whites. These costs include guilt, shame, irrational fear of people of color, distortions in thinking about race and racism, and barriers to relationships with people of color (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Spanierman, Poteat, Beer, & Armstrong, 2006). It is essential to remember that the harm of oppression encountered by the dominant group is lesser in both severity and daily impact. However, recognition of the broader harm of oppression can deepen investment in change among individuals with privilege.

Pseudo-Allies and Hidden Agendas

Another problem we have identified with the ally role is the risk of quasi-allies with hidden agendas to emerge in this role. Relatedly, Evans and colleagues (2009) put forth the term, "pseudo-allies," which we define here as supporters of a cause who are motivated by secondary gain. One example of this secondary gain was identified by Reason and Broido (2005) who indicated that allies might sometimes expect praise from the marginalized group. We argue that this is a potential negative consequence of identifying as an ally. Identifying as an ally may allow one to benefit from social desirability without experiencing firsthand the risks of oppression.

In addition, a history of pseudo-alliances can lead to wariness among those communities approached by allies. For example, Evans and colleagues (2005) described the case of allies to people with disabilities who have often condescended to, taken advantage of, and exploited people with disabilities for their own personal benefit. In another example, multicultural counseling expert, Derald Wing Sue, gave a public lecture in which he stated that white allies might be the biggest barrier to racial justice because of superiority beliefs and tendency to dominate the agenda (Lee, Jorgensen Smith, & Henry, 2013; Sue, 2008). Thus, pseudo-allies masquerade as supporters to people in non-dominant groups, and instead cause harm by maintaining their own agendas (whether consciously or unconsciously) for power or appreciation.

In addition, a pseudo-alliance may develop in an effort to temporarily assuage one's privilege guilt, referencing our earlier discussion of pity and sympathy invoked in an ally position. Although guilt can be an important first step in developing an awareness of privilege and becoming incited to take action, operating primarily from a place of guilt can be problematic to activism. When an ally acts primarily out of guilt, minimal involvement in social action may occur, instead of sincere efforts in the struggle for social justice. For instance, Aveling (2004) encourages her white students to move beyond feelings of guilt to critically examine whiteness.

Moreover, weak ally identification can lead to superficial engagement in social action. For pseudo-allies, one may feel that all that is needed to fulfill one's role as an ally is to acknowledge one's privilege. Thus, the ally can engage in surface levels in activism, creating pseudo-allies with hidden agendas that are ineffective at promoting social change. Instead, pseudo-allies seek to assert dominance, assuage guilt, or garner applause under the auspice of ally work.

Role Confusion

Lastly, the ally is limited by the role confusion that can develop within this position. Is there a need for the ally label when activism may be a natural end-stage of social identity development? For example, Borgman (2009) described Christian identity development as culminating in taking action against injustice towards LGB populations. Does that make one a devout Christian, an ally, or both? The ally label may contribute to role confusion, obscuring an internal mission to end injustice.

Again, the ally may risk positioning the individual in role as hero, dominant group member, outgroup member, and helper, standing on the sidelines of a given cause. As discussed previously, this position can be ineffective at inciting change, and may obscure the true nature of the individual's role in activism. For example, Yamato (1990) has referred to the need for white allies to "work on racism for your sake, not their sake" (p. 423). It may be that the ally role interferes with conceptualizing engagement in activism as for oneself given one's implication in a social hierarchy that results in unfair advantage and disenfranchisement of members of disadvantaged groups.

Ultimately, the ally role contains a number of benefits, potentially making it a useful position to take on in some cases. However, we feel the ally position is generally limited, requiring consideration of alternative positions. By positioning oneself as ally to a social group, an ally becomes situated outside of a problem. This outsider position may not fully capture the universally toxic effects of oppression and motivate effective engagement in social action. As discussed earlier, it is essential to recognize that the effects of oppression for the dominant group are lesser in toxicity and daily impact. Yet ultimately, social action in counseling and psychology may be better served by a focus on defending one's core values regarding equality and justice. In the next section, we will discuss alternatives to the ally role that most effectively maximize a commitment to social action and instigate effective participation in change.

A Vision for the Activist Position in Social Justice Counseling and Psychology

In our examination of the ally role, we see that this position may feel static and ineffective for contemporary activism. Here, we put forth a vision for the activist position in social justice counseling and psychology other than the ally role. Our review of the benefits and limitations of the ally role highlights a number of values that are central to effective social action in counseling and psychology. Values-based activism has been found to mobilize social action across various kinds of oppression (McGarty et al., 2009). The position we discuss in this section is integrative in nature, composed of values that are central to contemporary social action in counseling and psychology. This position

captures the dynamic, intersecting nature of identities and communities and focuses on enacting effective social change.

Intersectional

First, theories of intersectionality must be a central component of social justice work in counseling and psychology. Cole (2009) encouraged use of an intersectionality model as a tool for political advocacy in psychology, viewing social categories as constructions as opposed to individual characteristics, and learning about what role inequality plays across the different multiple category memberships that people occupy. Within the intersectionality paradigm is the idea that identities are socially constructed and create social realities that contribute to oppression and privilege. This theory applies to the multiple, overlapping identities of mental health clients that uniquely impact their experiences of privilege, oppression, and mental health. While there are important differences in mental health work pertaining to issues of mental illness stigma, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, there are also commonalities in how oppression operates across groups. For example, women, LGBTQ populations, people of color, and people with serious mental illness have unique identities and histories, yet they also encounter stigma in similar fashions within the broader culture (i.e., work, family, healthcare disparities). Valuing the model of intersectionality can allow social justice counselors and psychologists to pool their efforts across social identity groups and facilitate broader social action across communities.

Relational

Within models of social justice in counseling and psychology is an emphasis on community-oriented values in relationships with clients and the contexts in which they live. For instance, Griffin and Steen (2011) indicated that social justice activism involves engagement in relationships to work towards social change. Support is relational in itself, meaning something different in the context of each client, family, or community. Therefore, one's role as a pursuer of social justice in counseling or psychology may shift depending on the given setting or modality – whether it be counseling, psychotherapy, education, research, or policy. Understanding the relational nature of social justice work involves defining one's goals in the context of a relationship to an individual, couple, family, community, or institution, changing shape and role depending on the relationship at hand.

Power Conscious

Structural awareness of group inequalities is a primary component of social justice counseling and collective action in psychology. In our presentation of our critical evaluation of the ally position to colleagues, a key reaction is fear that without the ally label, activists would not be made aware of their privilege. This benefit of the ally position is vital to anti-oppression work, and should be sustained and reinforced in other activist positions taken on by social justice counselors and psychologists. This consciousness includes being mindful of one's power and privilege as a counselor, psychotherapist, researcher, educator, or policymaker. Thus, a central principle of this alternative to the ally role is a position in which the activist avoids reproducing problematic power dynamics. Activists must

maintain awareness of the different experiences of privilege and oppression they encounter within their various social identities and in their interactions with others.

Politicized Identity

As discussed previously, collective action researchers emphasize the effectiveness of an activist identity in motivating political efforts (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). A politicized identity makes social change a personal goal to one's sense of self. For example, research has found that membership to a feminist group as opposed to mobilizing around the gender category of female is more strongly predictive of collective action given that it specifies a position on gender inequality and suggests specific goals and actions that define the group's objective for social change (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995). Thus, the ally identity may not be the most effective means to becoming strongly identified with collective action. Instead, the social justice activist takes on a politicized identity, motivating action against inequality among many communities. Social justice activists are not constrained by the roles of hero, sympathizer, or outgroup member, but rather recognize social justice as integral to their identities and important to fighting inequality.

Naming an alternative to the ally raises the issue of language. Many different labels may fit the role of counselors and psychologists pursuing social justice depending on the goal at hand or one's unique preferences. For example, in the context of policy work, defining oneself as a social policy advocate may feel appropriate to the goal of modifying or changing public policy to promote fairness (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). More broadly, defining oneself as a social justice-counselor, -psychologist, -educator, or other related title, may be sufficient in encapsulating one's values and mission as an activist-practitioner. In addition, terms such as social activist or political activist may specify one's objective to take direct action in changing social and political structures (Arredondo & Perez, 2003). Or, one might identify as simply an activist, (political) advocate, solidarity worker, womanist, (intersectional or multicultural) feminist, or community collaborator. These words might specify one's intention to collaboratively join with a community and unite against injustice. Otherwise, one might focus on one's mission and values as opposed to naming one's role. It is likely that our language will continue to shift and reflect the evolution of contemporary theory on social justice in counseling and psychology.

Table 1. *Contributions and Limitations of the Ally Role and Social Justice Counseling Position in Social Action.*

Contributions of the Ally Position	
Privilege Awareness	The ally role encourages individuals to critically examine their own experience of power and privilege.
Support and Resource Access	The ally role emphasizes the use of dominant group members' resources to attain community objectives.
Power Sensitivity	The ally role ensures that power within a movement resides among the disenfranchised group.

Limitations of the Ally Position

Overlooking Intersectionality	The ally role overlooks potential membership in both a privileged and underprivileged group, not falling neatly into either an ally or marginalized role.
Reifying Social Constructs & Hierarchies	The ally role may reinforce hierarchies and reify socially constructed dominant and subordinate statuses between group members, limiting empowerment.
Ingroup-Outgroup Dynamic	The ally role locates the activist as either inside or outside of an oppressed group, when support can happen within a disenfranchised group.
Hero-Victim Narrative	The ally role may promote a limiting narrative of allies as "heroes" to marginalized "victims," reducing a focus on how oppression harms the ally group.
Pseudo-Allies and Hidden Agendas	The ally role may allow pseudo-allies to benefit from social desirability and mask hidden agendas of secondary gain.
Role Confusion	The ally role may contribute to role confusion, instead of aligning oneself with an internal mission to end injustice.

A Vision for the Activist Position in Social Justice Counseling and Psychology

Intersectional	Social justice activists in counseling and psychology focus on multiple social identity memberships that create complex experiences of privilege and oppression.
Relational	Social justice activists in counseling and psychology emphasize a value on relationships.
Power Conscious	Social justice activists in counseling and psychology maintain awareness of power and privilege.
Politicized Identity	Social justice activists in counseling and psychology are motivated to enact political change as a personal goal central to one's sense of self.

Conclusion

With shifting economic, social, cultural change, social justice activists in counseling and psychology can become more aware of the pervasiveness of privilege and oppression within our own identities, the communities we belong to, and those that we serve. Contemporary movements in social justice raise consciousness of both the social construction and fluidity of identity. The term ally has made many contributions to social action, and may still hold value in communicating one's position in relation to a certain community. In addition, one might apply limitations of the ally role discussed in this paper as guidelines for conducting better ally work. Ultimately, social justice activists in counseling and psychology can be encouraged to conceptualize terms for their politicized identities that accurately capture their standpoint and effectively motivate their commitment to social action. In this inquiry, we remember the enduring words of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. from his letters

from Birmingham Jail: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Social justice in counseling and psychology involves awareness of injustice everywhere, with responsibilities to seek justice for all.

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