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Interrogating the Intersections: How Intersectional Perspectives Can Inform Developmental Scholarship on Critical Consciousness

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Interrogating the Intersections: How Intersectional Perspectives Can Inform Developmental Scholarship on Critical Consciousness

Abstract

Developmental psychologists widely recognize that the social structures and inequities of American society influence youth development. A burgeoning body of research also considers how youth marginalized by society critically evaluate societal inequities and take action to change them (critical consciousness, Freire 1973; Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011). This work suggests that marginalized youth who are more critically conscious experience improved mental health and better educational and occupational outcomes (Diemer et al., 2010; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015; Olle & Fouad, 2011; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles & Maton, 1999) and are more engaged in traditional forms of civic behavior (e.g. voting; Diemer & Li, 2011). The current chapter critically reviews and extends this area of research from an intersectional perspective. Drawing from core writings in intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and more recent psychological applications (Cole, 2009), we contend that research on marginalized youth's critical consciousness could be further strengthened by (1) focusing on marginalizing systems, rather than marginalized individuals; (2) conceptualizing and examining multiple systems of oppression; and (3) paying greater attention to sociohistorical knowledge. We conclude with some initial concrete recommendations for integrating principles of intersectionality into scholarship on youths' critical consciousness development.

Introduction

Developmental scholarship has long recognized that poverty, racism, discrimination, and other systems of oppression and privilege influence youth development (e.g. Cabrera et al., 2013; García Coll et al., 1996). However, much of this research focuses on the downstream effects of these systemic inequalities on youth development. More recently, scholars have begun to consider youths' own beliefs and actions regarding the fairness and legitimacy of the systems in which they live – treating youth as active agents in the construal and transformation of systems of oppression and privilege, rather than passive recipients of their effects. This chapter considers how intersectional perspectives can enrich this growing area of developmental research.

A central topic of examination in this research area is critical consciousness development, which explores how youth critically “read” social conditions, feel empowered to change those conditions, and engage in action towards that goal (Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Critical consciousness is considered to be especially potent for youth who experience marginalization and structural oppression first-hand in their daily lives and lived environments, such as low-income, immigrant, and sexual minority youth and youth of color. A growing body of scholarship now suggests that critical consciousness benefits marginalized youth, contributing to both individual well-being and social change efforts (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015; Olle & Fouad, 2015; Ramos-Zayas, 1999; Rogers & Terriquez, 2013; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). As this body of research grows, the time is ripe to refine and enrich its scope, particularly in regard to how power, privilege and oppression are conceptualized and assessed. An intersectional perspective, in which multiple, interlocking sources of oppression are acknowledged and explored, has much to offer scholarship on critical

consciousness development. Scholars have argued that intersectionality and critical consciousness can inform psychological approaches to counseling and racial/ethnic identity development (Shin, 2015) and have begun to draw links between intersectional perspectives and critical consciousness (e.g. Diemer et al., 2016; Duffy, Blustein, Dimer & Autin, 2016; Shin, Ezeofor, Smith, Welch, & Goodrich, 2016). Our goal here is to add to this scholarship by further specifying and deepening these links to show how developmental research on critical consciousness could be strengthened by incorporating intersectional perspectives. In this chapter we review research on youth critical consciousness through an intersectional lens, offering suggestions for how this framework can improve and nuance conceptualizations of critical consciousness in future research.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness was originally conceptualized by Paulo Freire (1921-1997), as a pedagogical method to foster the ability of marginalized people to analyze the economic, political, historical, and social forces that contribute to inequitable social conditions and become empowered to change these conditions (Freire, 1973, 1993). In recent years, developmental scholars have built on Freire's framework to explore how youth who are marginalized by the status quo develop and incorporate an awareness of structural inequality and oppression into their understanding of economic and social realities and become empowered to change these realities (e.g., Diemer & Li, 2011; Ginwright & James, 2002; Watts, Griffiths & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts et al. 2011). The bulk of this developmental work has focused on low-income youth and youth of color and immigrant youth in the United States. Three components are theorized to comprise critical consciousness: (1) critical reflection, which refers to youths' critical analysis of current social realities and recognition of how social, economic, and political conditions limit

access to opportunity and perpetuate systemic injustices; (2) sociopolitical efficacy, which encompasses the perceived ability to act to change these conditions; and (3) critical action, which is the extent to which individuals actually participate in individual or collective action (Diemer & Blustein 2006; Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, & Hsieh, 2006; Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer & Rapa, 2015; Watts et al. 1999).

Due to its potential to empower marginalized people to challenge systemic limitations (Freire, 1973; Watts et al., 2011), critical consciousness has been called the “antidote to oppression” (Watts et al., 1999). Critical consciousness is associated with traditional forms of civic engagement, such as voting (Diemer & Li, 2011), as well as other core developmental outcomes and competencies, such as greater clarity and stability of vocational goals, interests, and talents and better attitudes towards work and career planning (Diemer & Blustein, 2006), increased intentions to pursue the education needed for careers (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015; Olle & Fouad, 2015), and actual occupational attainment and job earnings in early adulthood (Diemer, 2009; Diemer et al., 2010). Constructs related to critical consciousness also predict mental health outcomes: sociopolitical control (similar to, but distinct from, sociopolitical efficacy) has been associated with reduced anxiety and depression among urban African-American males (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999) and improved self-esteem among low-income youth of color (Christens & Peterson, 2012).

Research on the antecedents of critical consciousness suggests that, as Freire (1973) theorized, dialogue is a key predictor of critical consciousness development. Discussions with parents and peers about current events and the importance of standing up for one’s beliefs are positively related to both sociopolitical efficacy and critical action (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Diemer, Hsieh, & Pan, 2009; Diemer & Li, 2011). Similarly, students in classrooms that have an

open classroom climate, in which diverse opinions about political and social issues are encouraged and respected, have higher efficacy to make change in their schools and communities and participate in more critical action in their communities (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Finally, a recent review of theory and practice (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015) identified fostering awareness of sociopolitical circumstances through small group discussion (with critically conscious group leaders), encouraging critical questioning, and promoting collective identity as central processes in raising critical consciousness. Similarly, critical pedagogy that emphasizes critical thinking and racial/ethnic studies, features the historical, literary, and social contributions of marginalized groups, and deals critically with controversial topics like race, discrimination, and socioeconomic inequality has the potential to foster critical consciousness and has been shown to improve academic achievement (an excellent example is the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson, AZ; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette & Marx, 2014).

Applying Intersectional Perspectives to Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is becoming increasingly recognized as a central aspect of developmental scholarship (e.g., Diemer et al., 2016). Research on critical consciousness and related ideologies has increased dramatically in recent years (Watts et al., 2011; Watts & Flanagan; 2007), and several new tools have been developed to better measure its components (Diemer, et al., 2015). This rapid growth suggests that the time is ripe to reflect on the current state of critical consciousness scholarship and explore new perspectives to improve, nuance, and refine this work (c.f., Carmen et al, 2015; Christens, Winn & Duke, 2016). We propose that critical consciousness scholarship has much to gain from intersectional perspectives.

Intersectional thought is a natural complement to the study of critical consciousness, as both ideas grew out of social justice activism, and both attend to systems of marginalization and

privilege that shape individuals' lived experience. In the following pages, we review the basic tenets of intersectional thought and consider how this lens can inform research on youth's critical consciousness. Our goal is not to undermine or diminish current critical consciousness work or its considerable contribution to developmental scholarship, but to act as a "critical friend" (Carmen et al., 2015) to push the boundaries of this important research.

Intersectional perspectives contend that multiple, interlocking systems of oppression lead to unique experiences for individuals and groups marginalized along different dimensions (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation). In this view, conceptualizing experiences of oppression along single axes of marginalization is incomplete because oppression unfolds uniquely for every individual based on the *interplay* of social forces acting on each person. Scholarly discourse does not pinpoint the exact origin of the intersectional framework (Cole, 2009; Grzanka, 2014). However, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989, building on the work of other Black women activists including Audre Lorde (Lorde & Baldwin, 1984) and the Combahee River Collective (1977). These initial writings explored the intersection of identities that Black women experience, describing how Black women were excluded from Black movements, which focused on the experiences of men, and from women's movements, which focused on the experiences of Whites. Crenshaw (1989) interrogated the treatment of Black women under the law, showing that while the law recognized both race and gender discrimination, it did not account for the way in which race- and gender-based marginalization intersected to uniquely influence Black women. Intersectionality is now used across disciplines as a conceptual and analytic tool to illuminate how (and that) these interlocking systems of oppression/privilege combine and reinforce each other.

The field of psychology is beginning to acknowledge and, to some extent, incorporate intersectional perspectives into scholarship. Recent work has urged counselors to attend to the combination of external forces and of internal identities at play when working with clients (e.g. Shin, 2015), for example, and empirical research has begun to examine the psychological experience of multiple social identities. A frequent critique of this work, however, is that it takes an additive approach to multiple identities. That is, it considers how being a woman adds to the oppression experienced by being Black, but not how these two sources of oppression uniquely combine and overlap to influence a Black woman's lived experience (Bowleg, 2008; MacKinnon, 2013; Santos & VanDaalen, 2016). While current critical consciousness research is attentive to the presence of multiple overlapping systems of oppression/privilege (Diemer et al., 2015; 2016; Duffy et al., 2016; Shin, et al., 2016), intersectional perspectives have not yet been explicitly or systematically applied to inform research on youth critical consciousness development. Intersectionality and critical consciousness are natural bedfellows, given their joint focus on understanding systems of oppression and privilege.

In the following sections, we provide our interpretation of how an intersectional framework can be more fully applied to critical consciousness scholarship. By focusing on structural forces and their interplay, we attempt to move beyond formulations of intersectionality as membership in multiple static social categories that have characterized most psychological literature thus far (e.g., Bowleg, 2008; Hancock, 2007). However, we acknowledge when we fall short of this lofty goal. We also endeavor to stay close to the heart of the arguments made by intersectional theorists, at least as we see them. We identify and discuss three major lessons an intersectional perspective can provide current research on youth critical consciousness development: (1) focusing on marginalizing systems, rather than marginalized individuals; (2)

conceptualizing and examining multiple systems of oppression; and (3) paying greater attention to sociohistorical knowledge. We follow this discussion with some initial thoughts about specific ways in which critical consciousness research can better incorporate intersectional thought. In so doing, we seek to inform our own work on critical consciousness and that of our fellow scholars and spark continued conversation about how intersectionality can refine and enrich the developmental literature on critical consciousness.

Focus on Marginalizing Systems, not Marginalized Individuals

Intersectional perspectives conceptualize marginalization and opportunity as a set of interlocking systems or forces of oppression and privilege. A core aspect of this conceptualization is that oppression is located outside of, rather than within, the individual. One is not inherently a marginalized *person*, rather one is subject to marginalizing *forces*, such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. A strong intersectional perspective (e.g. Grzanka, 2014) shifts the level of analysis from individual social identities to the systems of marginalization that create those social categories. Thus, an intersectional analysis examines not what it is like to be a White woman or a Black man, but instead how forces such as racism and sexism operate and intersect to shape lived experiences. This is in line with other perspectives and models in psychology which focus on contexts, structures and forces outside of the individual directly and indirectly shape their development (e.g. Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Travis & Leech, 2014).

Quantitative research on critical consciousness has focused thus far on the antecedents and consequences of critical consciousness for youth who are marginalized by the aforementioned systems of oppression/privilege. Typically, research has been done this by focusing on youth who inhabit marginalized social categories, as defined by race and

socioeconomic status. Scholars also often aggregate youth across social categories to create a “marginalized” sample consisting of a variety of racial/ethnic, SES, and/or immigrant groups. This approach is especially characteristic of early critical consciousness scholarship, when the primary goal was an initial examination of its relevance to youth development. It is also driven by data constraints and the difficulty of obtaining the sample sizes necessary to disaggregate subgroups. However, critical consciousness scholars have noted this as a limitation of their research, and more recently, have begun to specifically examine critical consciousness and its relations for particular subgroups of racial/ethnic minority and low-SES youth (see for example, Diemer et al., 2010; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014).

We applaud these more recent efforts and encourage scholars to move away from the focus on “marginalized youth” and towards “marginalizing systems”. There are several reasons we argue for this shift. First, focusing on marginalized youth locates the problem of oppression in the individual, rather than the system. This approach treats the individual as oppressed and so looks for ways to “fix” the individual, rather than addressing the larger forces that marginalize the individual. Second, by aggregating all low SES and racial minority youth, this operationalization effectively erases diversity of experience by conflating multiple systems of oppression and their intersections. Focusing on a binary category of marginalized or non-marginalized ignores the existence of multiple different types of oppression/privilege and the complexity of experiences youth may have due to differential exposure to different systems and their overlaps. Third, this operationalization overlooks contextual factors and assumes homogeneity in the experience of marginalization for all youth occupying a given sociodemographic group. For example, a woman’s experience with sexism varies depending upon external factors such as geographic location and social milieu, as well as traditional social

identity factors such as sexuality, race, and social class. Considering all female youth in a sample marginalized on the basis of their gender, without examining the contextual factors that deliver, hinder, or warp this marginalization, oversimplifies the issue. While it is true that oppression and colonization can also live inside the individual (e.g. Fanon, Sartre & Farrington, 1963; Martín-Baró, 1994) psychology too often focuses solely on the individual, rather than the individual-in-context (e.g. Adams, Dobles, Gómez, Kurtiş & Molina, 2015). An intersectional perspective encourages attention to what these external forces of marginalization are, as well as how they intersect to influence individuals at their confluence. With critical consciousness scholarship growing to involve more primary data collection and recently-developed measures, this is an opportune moment to push ourselves to think in more complex ways about how to conceptualize and measure marginalization extra individually.

Incorporating intersectionality – with its focus on axes of oppression and privilege – also shines an interesting light on the question of for whom critical consciousness is relevant. Freire (1973) originally conceptualized critical consciousness as a process for people experiencing oppression. Some have questioned whether privileged youth can become “critically conscious” or whether their awareness of structural inequity, efficacy and action represents a separate developmental process (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). An intersectional perspective reminds us that marginalization vs. privilege is a false dichotomy and that there are in fact multiple and overlapping systems of oppression and privilege and countless intersections thereof (see also Diemer et al., 2016). A low-income white man experiences a unique constellation of privilege and marginalization due to race, gender and SES. A high-income white man may also experience marginalization at the hands of another oppressive force (heteronormativity, ableism). We do not mean to imply that there are endless sources of marginalization, or that some sources are not

more entrenched and longstanding in our society than others. Yet, the intersectional perspective reminds us that youth are subject to varying systems of oppression *and* privilege in their lives, making it more difficult to draw distinctions between those who are wholly marginalized and those who are wholly privileged. This perspective also exhorts scholars to revisit the core tenets of critical consciousness and examine whether and under what conditions they apply under more nuanced conceptualizations of marginalization and privilege (Diemer et al., 2016). Moreover, intersectionality suggests that it is only by acknowledging both oppression and privilege in one's own and others' lives can youth become truly critically conscious.

Conceptualizing and Examining Multiple Systems of Oppression

As previously stated, intersectional perspectives conceptualize marginalization and opportunity as a set of interlocking systems of oppression/privilege. Two key points are inherent in this description. We have already discussed the first, which is the conceptualization of oppressive/privileging *systems* or *forces* rather than oppressed/privileged *individuals*. The second point is the explicit recognition of *multiple* systems of oppression and privilege which combine, intersect, and overlap to uniquely influence individuals. Individuals at the intersections of marginalization do not simply experience them in an additive way, or even in a multiplicative way (Bowleg, 2008). Instead, these forces combine to create a unique experience of marginalization. Take, for instance, a gay, Black man. His experience of marginalization is not simply the experience of heterosexism added to the experience of racism. Nor is it that the experience of heterosexism simply exacerbates that of racism. Instead, these two forces (and others such as sexism) interplay to create a unique experience of marginalization, informed not only by society's treatment of gay men or of Black men, but by society's specific treatment of gay, Black men. In her seminal piece, Crenshaw (1989) cogently argues this point by illustrating

how legal attention to only single axes of oppression (such as sexism, racism, or heterosexism) effectively erases protection against the unique experiences of discrimination that result from the collision of these forces. This explicit awareness of the interactions among multiple, connected systems of oppression is not fully reflected in current scholarship on youth critical consciousness. Such an awareness represents a thorough understanding of structural inequalities, and is a natural extension current representations of what constitutes critical consciousness.

While there is some qualitative critical consciousness inquiry, the bulk of developmental scholarship in this area employs quantitative survey methods and proxy measures of critical reflection, sociopolitical efficacy, and action that are available in existing large-scale datasets (Diemer et al., 2006; Diemer, 2009; Diemer & Blustein, 2005; Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2010; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). In recent years, scholars have developed new instruments to create a more comprehensive and unified operationalization of critical consciousness. These include the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS; Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2014), the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI; Thomas et al., 2014), the Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (MACC; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015), and the Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure (CCCM; Shin et al., 2016). The advent of these measures advances critical consciousness scholarship by defragmenting its conceptualization and measurement. These measures taps in various ways into youths' critical consciousness about various systems of marginalization and oppression including racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism, and their underlying general worldviews about the fairness of the status quo. They have been successful at differentiating youth's overall level of critical consciousness based on their general awareness of marginalization across these systems. However, these assessments could be further nuanced to capture the complexity with which

multiple, interlocking systems of oppression shape the lived experience of marginalized people. This is true despite the fact that the authors of one measure (the CCM) drew on intersectional perspectives in its development. For example, many of the items used to measure critical reflection use broad generalities, assessing awareness, for example, of “oppression” of “social groups” and generalized “inequality.” An example of this type of item formulation from the CCI is “I don’t see much oppression in this country (reverse-coded)” and from the MACC is “It is important to fight against social and economic inequality”. Other assessments do measure awareness of multiple specific systems of oppression, but do so in an isolated way. For example, the CCS has separate items assessing whether “Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs” and “Women have fewer chances to get good jobs”. The CCCM consists of separate subscales measuring reflection about racism, classism and heterosexism.

Conceptualizing critical reflection as awareness of marginalization along certain single axes of oppression functionally erases the experience of people at the intersection. Items that ask about the female experience in the workplace and the Black experience in the workplace, but not the Black female experience in the workplace, acknowledge the existence of both racism and sexism, but do not capture an understanding of how these can overlap in many individuals' lives. This approach inherently assumes that multiple different forms of oppression can be measured in an additive way, but does not acknowledge the possibility that multiple forms of oppression can lead to unique outcomes, such that Black women may experience forms of discrimination unique from what is experienced by Black men or White women. It also limits the ability of measures to assess the goal of critical consciousness, which is to critically interrogate one’s place in society through multiple lenses of power and privilege (Freire, 1993). By focusing on broad societal injustices or marginalization along single axes of oppression, we fail to conceptually represent

the full complexity of what it means to be critically aware. We also limit our ability to empirically assess the full range of variation in critical reflection and to delineate its antecedents and consequences. A youth who is able to perceive how multiple systems of marginalization intermesh arguably has a higher level – or at least a different type – of critical reflection from what is currently assessed and this type of consciousness may be linked to different predictors and outcomes. While not all youth may attain this more nuanced understanding of interlocking oppressive/privileged forces, critical consciousness scholarship could be meaningfully advanced by allowing the possibility for such intersectional consciousness.

While assessments of critical reflection at least acknowledge the existence of multiple systems of oppression, measurements of critical consciousness's other two components – sociopolitical efficacy and critical action – do not yet even incorporate this. Items tapping into youth's sociopolitical efficacy and critical action sometimes do not even specify the system that is the target of change, let alone incorporate multiple, interlocking systems of oppression/privilege. For example, the critical agency subscale of the MACC includes items such as "There are ways that I can contribute to my community" and "I am motivated to try to end racism and discrimination". Sociopolitical efficacy has been measured with items like "How much difference do you believe that people working together as a group can make in solving problems in your community?" (Diemer & Li, 2011). The action subscale of the CCS uses broad action items such as "Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting" and "Signed an email or written petition about a social or political issues".

We recognize that these items are often taken from commonly-used scales in other domains and that they do tap into youth's sense of efficacy to take action and their actual activities. However, we argue that stopping at this more general operationalization limits the

complexity with which we understand critical consciousness. If we think of marginalization as connected systems, it is important to understand efficacy and action vis-à-vis these systems, rather than considering these constructs as internal individual factors. It is important to recognize that efficacy and action likely vary depending on what system of oppression youth are fighting. Moreover, from an intersectional perspective, efficacy and action are not about single axes or issues, but instead concern a broader, interconnected web of power and privilege. Beyond joining a movement or protesting action and efficacy also include recognizing solidarity across social justice issues and agitating for greater attention to the unique experiences at the margins. Indeed, in her seminal piece, Crenshaw (1989) specifically advocates for the use of intersectionality as a tool to promote greater solidarity across issues and highlight experiences at the margins.

Psychologists have also noted the potential of intersectionality to foster greater attention to social justice and equality in the field (Rosenthal, 2016).

Greater Attention to Sociohistorical Knowledge

Intersectional scholarship underscores the importance of sociohistorical knowledge for understanding the social, economic, and historical circumstances that have led to existing structures of power and privilege. Attention to the sociohistorical origins of current inequities is key to understanding how systems of oppression have developed, how they uniquely intersect, and how they all are rooted in similar issues of privilege and power (Lewis & Grzanka, 2016; see also perspectives from postcolonial and liberation psychology e.g. Fanon et al., 1963; Martín-Baró, 1994). For example, Crenshaw (1989) illuminates how current stereotypes about the sexual promiscuity of Black women are rooted in rape laws during slavery. These laws were established largely to maintain White women's property value (e.g., chastity) and police racial boundaries. As a result, White men raped Black women with impunity, while a Black man could be lynched

for accusations of raping a White woman. This historical asymmetry fed into stereotypes of Black women as promiscuous, because the legal climate made Black women more sexually available to men than White women were. Knowledge of history quickly exposes the falseness of this stereotype, by revealing how legal inequities led to asymmetric victimization.

Freire and other critical consciousness scholars also highlight that critical analyses of the social, economic, political, and historical forces that give rise to injustice and disparity is central to developing critical consciousness. Without sociohistorical understanding, individuals do not have the tools needed to question the legitimacy of existing social injustice or to perceive how systems of marginalization intersect to shape outcomes. Indeed, recent research suggests that in the absence of sociohistorical knowledge, people tend to see social patterns as resulting from the inherent qualities of their constituent parts, rather than structural, historical, or accidental factors (Cimpian, & Saloman, 2014). Thus, they are more likely to blame disparities on individuals' inherent characteristics. This tendency likely explains why less knowledge about the history of racism is associated with decreased perception of both systemic and acute instances of racism in the present (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013). Sociohistorical knowledge can also illuminate the intersection of marginalizing forces such as racism and classism. For example, historical understanding of the Great Migration, in which six million Blacks moved from the rural south to the rest of the US in the early and mid-1900s (Coates, 2014; Wilkerson, 2016), reveals the legally-sanctioned employment discrimination and red-lining that segregated Blacks into low-paying, dangerous jobs and overcrowded, under-resourced neighborhoods, creating the structural inequalities that today act on the "Black urban poor". Knowledge of the history that led to structural inequalities makes these structural factors more salient, thereby decreasing the plausibility of negative internal attributions. Historical knowledge also provides causal

explanations for structural inequalities, making them more credible and accessible and reveals important intersections and parallels among different forces of oppression.

In short, sociohistorical understanding is key to being critically conscious about systems of oppression/privilege, as it enables one to see common root causes undergirding multiple systems of oppression, and how they intersect. Current scholarly work on youth critical consciousness, however, rarely focuses on the sociohistorical origins of the systems of oppression and privilege it examines. Critical reflection measures focus instead on understanding of current realities, such as whether Blacks currently face racism and discrimination in the job market. These measures tap into comprehension of current realities of the opportunity structure, but fail to assess knowledge of the structural, sociological, economic or historical forces that shaped that particular reality. Nor do current measurements assess sociopolitical efficacy and critical action to change root causes of injustice identified by such an understanding. Indeed, in our review of critical consciousness scholarship, we only found one item that comes close to assessing knowledge of the sociohistorical underpinnings of current disparities: “The overrepresentation of Blacks and Latinos in prison is directly related to racist disciplinary policies in schools” (from the CCCM).

Incorporating Intersectionality into Critical Consciousness Research

In sum, we have argued that existing quantitative research on critical consciousness focuses too much on marginalized youth as opposed to marginalizing systems, does not adequately capture the multiple and interrelated nature of systems of oppression/privilege operating in our society and overlooks structural and sociohistorical understanding. How can these concerns be addressed? Below we provide some initial thoughts about specific ways in which critical consciousness research can better incorporate intersectional thought. However,

given the complexity of this task, we intend these as conversation starters rather than definitive answers. We hope these first steps serve as a launching point for future application of intersectional frameworks within critical consciousness research.

Greater exploration of subgroup differences

One concrete step scholars can take is to avoid, when possible, grouping youth facing different systems of oppression/privilege into a single marginalized category and instead examine how critical consciousness and its antecedents and consequences vary for youth facing particular systems of oppression and particular intersections of these systems. Although this approach still focuses on social identities, rather than social forces, it at least allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of marginalization than most current operationalizations. Recent research has indeed examined subgroup differences (c.f. Diemer et al., 2010; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014), but this practice could become more ubiquitous and intentional, especially as scholars begin to collect their own data on critical consciousness. We encourage scholars in this position to choose their samples intentionally, and do their best to maintain sufficient sample sizes to examine differences for youth facing particular systems of oppression/privilege and specific intersections of these systems. In addition, measures of critical consciousness are being developed and validated, we encourage scholars to examine the psychometric structure of their scales for different subgroups of youth and specifically assess their measurement equivalence. Current measurement development and validation has thus far not examined measurement invariance - whether items measure the same constructs in the same way across demographic subgroups of youth. This is a necessary step in ensuring that substantive associations can be compared across groups (e.g. Hughes, Seidman & Willians, 1993; Godfrey, 2013).

Explicit conceptualization and measurement of marginalizing forces

Moreover, we encourage researchers to include greater description about likely forces of marginalization operating on the youth in their sample. Providing this kind of contextual information would direct attention away from static social group identities and towards social milieu, adding important nuance to the interpretation of findings. Providing readers with a description of the specific socioeconomic and historical forces at play in the region where data was collected, and more detail about social milieu of the school and local community(ies), would help both the author and the reader contextualize and interpret findings and direct attention to the prevailing social forces youth are critical about. Researchers could also directly model contextual factors as predictors of critical consciousness or moderators of its associations. For example, recent work has found state and local differences in structural stigma (policies, media representations, aggregate opinions) that have direct and indirect associations with individual health (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013). Such differences in youths' local contexts could be directly incorporated into models of critical consciousness development to concretize the type and level of structural marginalization inherent in the contexts in which youth are embedded. This could be particularly fruitful to conceptualize and model given that critical consciousness proposes recursive processes between a person's context and their critical consciousness. Another intriguing possibility is to include explicit assessments of youths' own reports of their experiences of marginalization into critical consciousness research. It is quite possible that the antecedents and consequences of critical consciousness vary for youth who experience different systems or intersections of systems as more or less marginalizing, given their unique context. Measures of experiences of discrimination and microaggressions (e.g. Harrell, 1994; Seaton, Yip, & Sellers, 2009; Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding, Andrade & Romero Diaz, 2012) on the basis of race/ethnicity, language, class, gender identity and sexual orientation and their combinations

could be adapted for this purpose and paired with youth's critical consciousness regarding these systems and intersections. This would allow for a more complex understanding of how oppressive forces are experienced and linked to critical consciousness.

Focus on privilege alongside oppression

We argue that intersectional perspectives encourage greater focus on privilege alongside marginalization. We propose that critical consciousness scholarship could be meaningfully expanded by incorporating youths' understanding of privilege (along with marginalization) into measurements. We also suggest that critical consciousness research could incorporate youth who benefit from structural privileges as well as marginalization and explicitly examine whether similarities and differences in critical consciousness measurement, levels and associations for youth who experience varying constellations of privilege and marginalization (c.f. Godfrey & Grayman, 2014).

Expansion of critical consciousness measurement

Another potential solution is to make assessments of critical consciousness more comprehensive by ensuring that items that represent *multiple* systems of oppression/privilege and their *intersection*. While including all possible systems and their intersections would be prohibitive, one could certainly assess the forces and intersections that most readily define the social milieu of the participants in the study. As other scholars have noted (MacKinnon, 2013), intersectionality does not require delineating all potential permutations of social identity, but rather focusing on intersections between the primary systems of oppression/privilege in society. For example, we recommend items assessing critical reflection regarding racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism and their various intersections. However incomplete, this list at least addresses major systems of marginalization/privilege affecting youth and would more finely

characterize their critical consciousness. While not all youth may attain this more nuanced understanding of interlocking oppressive/privileged forces, our conceptualization of critical consciousness could be meaningfully advanced by allowing for this possibility.

Moreover, the development of items tapping intersectional awareness is already underway. For example, Curtin, Stewart and Cole (2015) have developed and validated a scale measuring youth's intersectional awareness. Items such as "We must understand racism as well as sexism"; "People don't think enough about how connections between social class, race, gender and sexuality affect individuals"; and "People who belong to more than one oppressed group (e.g. lesbians who are also ethnic minorities) have experiences that differ from people who belong to only one such group". Another intersectional awareness scale under development (Santos, in preparation) prompts respondents to think about experiencing multiple forms of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) and then respond to a series of questions about whether those who experience multiple forms of oppression have it a lot worse in, benefit less from, experience more unfair treatment in American society. These types of items could be incorporated into current assessments of critical consciousness or administered alongside them to more fully assess youth's critical consciousness. .

Another possibility is to examine root perceptions of oppression and privilege that cut across multiple systems. For example, Watts and colleagues (2011) have suggested using causal attributions for societal inequities to capture critical reflection. Critical reflection of historical, sociopolitical, and structural causes of inequality is likely to produce causal attributions that blame societal structures and systems (rather than individual or group shortcomings) for inequities (see also Godfrey & Wolf, 2016). For example, attributing poverty to structural causes (wage stagnation; job scarcity) instead of individual causes (lack of effort, motivation, or talent)

represents a critical understanding of social class as a system of oppression/privilege. Critical reflection could be assessed via the structural or individual attributions youth make across various social issues and systems of oppression/privilege. These responses could be used to characterize critical reflection on single axes of oppression/privilege, but also combined to characterize youths' thinking across multiple axes. Person-centered techniques such as latent class analysis could be used to differentiate youth with different patterns of structural/individual attributions across multiple systems of oppression/privilege.

We also strongly encourage the development of sociopolitical efficacy and critical action items that (a) focus on specific and multiple systems and (b) include the intersection of these systems. As with critical reflection, the list of systems need not be exhaustive. A good start would be to include the most pervasive forces of oppression/privilege that characterize our society. Items that currently tap agency and efficacy could be expanded on to address multiple systems and their intersection. For example, the MACC already includes an item "I am motivated to try to end racism and discrimination"; this could be replicated for classism, sexism and heterosexism. Similarly, items asking "How much difference do you believe that people working together as a group can make in solving problems in your community?" could be expanded to focus on problems involving particular systems of oppression/privilege and their intersection. Santos (in preparation) suggests asking youth how much they agree that "they can do things to try to improve the living conditions of individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression" or "they can do things to try to improve the opportunities available to individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression". Even items such as "Some types of oppression are easier to address than others" would go a long way towards nuancing our understanding of youth's feelings of agency and efficacy regarding different forces of oppression/privilege. These

approaches would also help shift focus away from efficacy as an individual (static) trait and foster an understanding of the construct as embedded in context.

Items assessing critical action could be expanded in similar ways. For example, items that ask youth to report on the different types of actions they have engaged in more generally (e.g. “joined a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting”) could be modified to address specific issues or movements related to various forces and their intersection. One example of such a modification is “joined a protest march, political demonstration or political meeting to support the rights of black women (e.g. #sayhername)”. Another approach suggested by Santos (in preparation) is to ask youth how often they have engaged in a set of activities about issues affecting individuals who experience multiple forms of oppression. Youth are asked about two types of activities representing low-risk actions (seeking out information, participating in a protest, signing a petition) vs. high-risk actions (engaging in physical confrontation, blocking access to a public area). A third area of action could be added to round out this conceptualization that includes actions taken in the interpersonal sphere to combat marginalization from a variety of forces and their intersection. These could be adapted and expanded from items in the CCI such as “When someone makes a prejudiced comment, I tell them what they said is hurtful” and “I tell people when I feel that their joke was offensive”.

Finally, we argue that measures of critical reflection should include assessments of youth’s sociohistorical and structural understanding of current disparities and injustices. Current critical reflection measures tap youth’s understanding of marginalizing forces such as racism, classism and sexism, but fail to assess their knowledge of the structural, sociological, economic or historical forces driving. Nor do current measurements assess sociopolitical efficacy and critical action to change root causes of injustice identified by such an understanding. Although

an exhaustive assessment of these might prove prohibitive, measures could address knowledge of the primary root causes for prevailing marginalizing forces (e.g. how past racist housing policies have contributed to the Black-White wealth gap; how school disciplinary policies, police tactics and criminal laws differentially affect youth from certain backgrounds). Measures could also assess the efficacy youth feel in their ability to change these root causes and the actions they have taken towards that goal.

Incorporation of more qualitative work

Qualitative techniques may prove a useful empirical tool to more fully address critical consciousness regarding multiple interlocking systems. Previous research on critical consciousness development has taken a qualitative approach (c.f. Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998; Watts et al., 1999; Watts, Abdul-Adil & Pratt, 2002; Godfrey & Wolf, 2016), yet has not necessarily focused on youths' awareness of multiple systems of oppression/privilege or the ways they intersect. Instead, it has focused primarily on examining critical consciousness about single axes of oppression/privilege. Qualitative approaches could be fruitfully used to elicit youths' intersectional understanding of power and privilege, the efficacy they feel in addressing multilayered systems of oppression, and the actions they do or not take toward this end. This more nuanced and grounded understanding could then be used to develop and refine quantitative measures or incorporated into mixed-methods work on critical consciousness and its antecedents and consequences.

Conclusion

Critical consciousness scholarship positions youth as active agents in interpreting and acting on their world and positions oppression, privilege and power as central to understanding and fostering youth development and societal well-being. We believe that intersectional

perspectives have major potential to refine, deepen and nuance this important work.

Operationalizations of critical consciousness vary widely, and lack consensus on what specific forms of oppression are important to identify and understand. An intersectional framework recognizes multiple, interlocking forms of oppression, focuses on systems of marginalization rather than marginalized individuals, and uncovers sociohistorical roots of oppression and privilege. In the preceding pages, we have endeavored to show how these perspectives can be fruitfully applied to developmental research on youths' critical consciousness to nuance, deepen and complicate our understanding of this important developmental asset among youth facing diverse social experiences. Critical consciousness scholarship has much to offer youth and researchers alike. Incorporating an intersectional perspective will make the study of youth critical consciousness more nuanced and relevant to the lived experiences of people marginalized by systems of oppression, and identify new research questions and approaches to intervention that might otherwise be overlooked.

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