Introduction

Critical Consciousness Theory and Measurement

Mapping the Complexity of the Terrain

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Structural oppression and systemic inequity are interwoven into the fabric of American society. One need only reflect on the past decade to see the continued pernicious influence of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, nativism, heterosexism, transphobia, and multiple other forms of marginalization on the rights, freedoms, and humanity of large segments of our society. We live in a system of white supremacy and patriarchy that patterns not only our history, but our current society, institutions, interactions, and beliefs about each other and ourselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). To be Black, Brown, Indigenous, immigrant, differently-abled, gay, gender-expansive, female-identified – among many other identities – means being subjected to systems and structures that, at best, limit access to the resources and privileges others take for granted and, at worst, take away fundamental rights to life, liberty, and choice. To be white, straight, able-bodied, male-identified, and more (e.g., Christian Protestant) means wielding privilege one may or may not know one has, but that contributes to the maintenance of these inequities. These unfair, unjust, and inequitable social conditions shape all our lives in multiple seen and unseen ways and have effects across all developmental domains (Brown et al., 2019; Ruck et al., 2019).

Social scientists have amassed considerable evidence on how oppressive systems shape people's development, adaptive functioning, and general well-being (Heberle et al., 2020), showing deleterious effects on multiple life outcomes across multiple populations. It is only relatively recently, however, that scholars have begun to consider people's own beliefs and actions regarding the fairness and legitimacy of the systems in which they live. This shift in perspective recognizes that individuals can be formidable assets in the fight against injustice, and treats them as active agents in the construal and transformation of systems of oppression. Central to this area of inquiry is critical consciousness (Freire, 1968/2000; Watts et al., 2011), which relates to how individuals critically "read" social conditions, feel empowered to change those conditions, and engage in action toward that goal. Alongside allied

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perspectives such as sociopolitical development, culturally relevant pedagogy, critical theory, and antiracist perspectives, critical consciousness theory has emerged as a particularly useful framework for interrogating how people understand, navigate, and resist social injustice and inequity.

WHAT IS CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

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, 1968/2000). Freire termed this process *conscientização* – translated into English as "conscientization" – and described it as a dialectical process of reflection and action in which people engage with others about their experiences of oppression and marginalization and attend to their historical, social, and economic sources. Through discussion and dialogue – core elements of Freirean pedagogy – people become critically aware of the causes of their marginalization at the hands of historical and societal forces, take action to address this marginalization, and further deepen their understanding of the causes of oppression based on this experience.

Critical consciousness is considered to be especially potent for those who experience marginalization and structural oppression first-hand, in their daily lives and across their lived environments. It has even been called the "antidote to oppression" (Watts et al., 1999) because of its ability to arm marginalized youth with the insight, agency, and engagement needed to navigate and change oppressive systems (Watts et al., 2011). Yet, critical consciousness is also important for those experiencing relative privilege, as they work to understand systems of power, and their own power and privilege within those systems, and ally with others to bring about social change.

Building on Freire's theory of conscientization, and his pedagogical approach, developmental scientists typically conceptualize critical consciousness as three distinct, but overlapping components (e.g., Diemer et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2011). The first component, critical reflection, refers to an individual's ability to analyze current social realities critically, and recognize how historical, social, economic, and political conditions limit access to opportunity and perpetuate injustice. The second component, critical motivation (also referred to as sociopolitical or political efficacy), encompasses an individual's motivation and perceived ability to act to change these social, economic, and political conditions. The third component, critical action, is the extent to which individuals participate in action, individually or collectively, to resist, challenge, or disrupt social inequity. While the first component concerns increased awareness of and deepening reflection on unjust

circumstances and their causes, the latter two involve the translation of this critical reflection into behaviors and action. The process of gaining critical awareness and acting to change conditions is self-perpetuating and reciprocal. That is, scholars conceptualize critical reflection as leading directly to action, but they also see critical action as reinforcing and deepening critical reflection and analysis, creating a virtuous cycle starting from either reflection or action. The role of critical motivation in this cycle is the subject of continued conceptual (i.e., theoretical) and empirical debate, but it is often thought of as a mediator through which reflection is linked to action or as a moderator that changes the way reflection and action influence each other or interrelate (e.g., Diemer & Rapa, 2016). Scholars are just beginning to delve more deeply into how these components interact and/or pattern together to characterize different types, levels, and/or processes of critical consciousness development (Christens, et al., 2013; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Godfrey et al., 2019). This is the case, at least in part, because measures incorporating all three dimensions of critical consciousness are just emerging (e.g., Diemer et al., 2022; Rapa et al., 2020; see also Rapa et al., Chapter 7 [this volume]).

Critical consciousness is important from a societal perspective as it can play a central role in addressing unjust systems, challenging marginalization in society, and promoting positive community development. It is also an extremely important developmental competency for individuals, as it promotes positive growth and development. As mentioned earlier, it can function as an "antidote to oppression" or a form of "psychological armor" (Watts et al., 1999) for individuals experiencing and navigating oppressive systems. Indeed, we now have considerable evidence, primarily for Black, Brown, and low-socioeconomic status (SES) youth, that higher critical consciousness is connected to better educational outcomes (e.g., Seider et al., 2020); higher occupational aspirations and attainment (e.g., Rapa et al., 2018); greater political, civic, and community participation (e.g., Bañales et al., 2020; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Tyler et al., 2020); and enhanced well-being across a range of dimensions (e.g., Godfrey et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 1999) (for excellent reviews, see Diemer et al., 2016; Heberle et al., 2020; Maker Castro et al., 2022). Although less scholarship to date has examined critical consciousness among individuals holding ethnic/racial, class, and/or other forms of privilege, developing a critical stance toward the status quo is also important – and doing so should not be the sole responsibility of those who are marginalized or oppressed. As many authors in this volume argue, it is also important for those who hold power and privilege to recognize it, and then use that power and privilege to engage in efforts to dismantle systems that reify, uphold, or perpetuate injustice and inequity. Indeed, recognizing privilege and its sources, and learning how to work in allyship and solidarity with those individuals and groups experiencing oppression, is a critical developmental competency for those who hold more privilege as well (Spanierman & Smith, 2017).

why theory and measurement?

While critical consciousness scholarship has matured in recent years (Heberle et al., 2020), no comprehensive collection brings together the voices of leading scholars working in this area to address – through careful (re)consideration of theory and measurement – some of the field's most pressing questions: How does critical consciousness develop? What theories can be used to complement and enrich our understanding of the development and operation of critical consciousness? How do various measurement approaches align with or diverge from theory? How might new directions in theory and measurement further enhance what is known about the development, operation, and effects of critical consciousness? These questions are of great importance. Answering them seems more urgent now than ever, especially in light of the current sociopolitical moment – a moment in which long-standing racial inequity, structural oppression, bias, discrimination, marginalization, and competing ideologies are not only evident but also have been amplified.

Critical Consciousness: Expanding Theory and Measurement addresses these questions and more. This edited volume – along with the complementary volume, *Developing Critical Consciousness in Youth: Contexts and Settings* (Godfrey & Rapa, in press) – stems from our engagement with leading scholars in the field to identify topics and content considered most necessary to meaningfully advance critical consciousness scholarship. This volume represents the most exhaustive compendium to date attending to issues related to the theory and measurement of critical consciousness. In the chapters that follow, readers will find contributions that push the boundaries of critical consciousness theory, along with contributions that carefully explore existing and new measurement approaches. Some contributions do both. We expect the ideas presented here to shape research and inform dialogue about critical consciousness theory and measurement for years to come.

In short, this volume: (1) provides novel insights about critical consciousness theory itself, and articulates new links between critical consciousness and other related, but distinct developmental theories and frameworks; (2) fosters deeper understanding of critical consciousness and, in places, offers new empirical evidence about how critical consciousness develops and operates over the life course; and (3) highlights the complexity of this field of study while offering innovative ways that critical consciousness might be theorized about and measured. Ultimately, through this volume, our aim is to examine and expand critical consciousness theory and measurement in order to elucidate anew – by way of an incisive and groundbreaking collection of chapters – issues germane to theory and measurement and to set new directions for future research in this area.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

This volume is organized into two parts. Part I contends with issues more salient to and is more explicitly focused on critical consciousness theory, while Part II summarizes, highlights, and attends to issues more relevant to measurement. Of course, the close interplay between theory and measurement means that chapters appearing in the measurement section also address issues relevant to theory, even while the chapters appearing in the theory section point to and address issues relevant to measurement.

Part I: Theory

In Chapter 1, Andres Pinedo, Gabrielle Kubi, and Matthew Diemer examine critical consciousness theory alongside the theory of identity-based motivation in order to explicate how the psychological experiences of youth of color shape the way they navigate oppressive societal conditions, particularly those resultant from racial capitalism. Through their explication of critical consciousness and identity-based motivation theories, Pinedo et al. offer a new framework for assessing how various contextual and motivational factors interact with critical consciousness to shape adaptive development and support social mobility among youth of color.

In Chapter 2, Sara Suzuki, Sara Johnson, and Kevin Ferreira van Leer situate critical consciousness theory alongside developmental systems theory – highlighting the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), in particular – to suggest the expansion of critical consciousness theory to account more fully for how critical consciousness functions within developmental systems. They also highlight how individual's meaning-making processes might serve as a primary mechanism supporting the development of critical consciousness, suggest the importance of considering broader chronosystemic (time-related) impacts on the development and operation of critical consciousness, and call attention to dynamic and collective characteristics of critical consciousness. Consequently, new research questions are envisioned that consider how individuals contend with marginalization and resist marginalizing systems over the course of their development.

In Chapter 3, Luke Rapa, Candice Bolding, and Cari Allyn Brooks present a new framework that integrates critical consciousness with social empathy, which itself is tied to people's ability to understand, connect with, and empathize with others who face marginalizing conditions and contend with structural inequities. After introducing an integrated critical consciousness–social empathy framework, the authors test that framework within the context of an exploratory study, highlighting the ways in which social empathy may complement critical consciousness, both in terms of theory and in terms of measurement.

In Chapter 4, Amy Heberle, Flóra Faragó, and Noah Hoch push theoretical boundaries by exploring the ways that children in early, middle, and late childhood exhibit developmental competencies that equip them to understand social inequities, feel empowered to promote social change, and actually engage in action to address injustice. As a matter of great practical benefit to the reader, while they engage in this expansion of critical consciousness theory, Heberle et al. provide both very specific examples of how critical consciousness may manifest across preadolescent developmental periods and details about how measurement approaches may need to be adapted to assess critical consciousness during childhood. In this way, they offer a blueprint for – and reveal the urgency of – the explicit examination of critical consciousness in children.

In Chapter 5, Laura Wray-Lake, Jason Plummer, and Lauren Alvis integrate relational developmental systems theory, critical race theory, and intersectionality theory to highlight processes tied to critical consciousness development among both youth of color and white youth. They then explore how variation among youth in critical consciousness dimensions, in light of the contextual realities tied to oppression and privilege, can elucidate – both empirically and theoretically – how critical consciousness develops and operates.

In Chapter 6, Esther Burson, Erin Godfrey, Riana Brown, and Deanna Ibrahim examine how critical consciousness theory encapsulates more than what current critical consciousness measures typically capture. Specifically, Burson et al. contend that the structural and historical thinking that is central to critical consciousness, from a theoretical perspective, has not been sufficiently accounted for in its instrumentation. In this chapter, the authors explicate critical consciousness theory to make the case for expanding measurement approaches in order to account more fully for structural and historical thinking in critical consciousness scales. Serving as somewhat of a bridge between this volume's two parts, this chapter suggests that new measures tied to structural thinking about and historical attributions for inequity should be incorporated into the measurement of critical reflection.

Part II: Measurement

In Chapter 7, the first chapter of the measurement section, Luke Rapa, Sarah McKellar, and Erin Godfrey review the history of critical consciousness measurement and provide an overview of its current status within developmental and applied research. The authors suggest that critical consciousness measurement has emerged through four distinct phases: (1) proxy measurement; (2) scale development; (3) scale expansion and (re)specification; and (4) scale refinement and adaptation. Using this review to highlight thorny conceptual, theoretical, and practical measurement issues, Rapa et al. also point to

a number of opportunities for the advancement of critical consciousness measurement, highlighting new directions for measurement work and previewing some of the innovative approaches that are suggested in the other chapters appearing within this part.

In Chapter 8, Mariah Kornbluh, Jennifer Watling Neal, and Mackenzie Hart argue that the analytical approach known as social network analysis (SNA) might provide new pathways to study and measure the development and operation of critical consciousness among youth. Kornbluh et al. provide an introduction to SNA and specify how SNA can be used to quantify relational power dynamics that manifest within youths' developmental contexts (e.g., the school classroom), and ultimately suggest SNA as a new measurement approach to assess precursors to and specific aspects of critical consciousness at multiple levels: individuals, dyads, and settings.

In Chapter 9, Corine Tyler, Kelly Chandler, Shauna Tominey, Svea Olsen, Linda Fenske, and Kara McElvaine present a conceptual model and outline a preliminary research agenda for examining how youth engage in critical consciousness and related processes on a daily basis. Tyler et al. offer a roadmap for using daily diary studies to capture more fine-grained, "micro" assessments of critical consciousness. Such an approach, they argue, better accounts for the temporal nature of critical consciousness's development and operation and captures intraindividual variability in important ways – ways that current measurement approaches do not. The authors contend that the expansion of critical consciousness measurement to include "micro" assessments will serve as a necessary complement to the more "macro" assessments that are typical of current instrumentation. Implementing such a two-pronged measurement approach would have clear implications for advancing theory, as new insights gleaned about in-the-moment manifestations of critical consciousness would inform – and may necessitate reappraisal of – current knowledge and theorization about critical consciousness's development and operation.

In Chapter 10, Sara Johnson, Matthew Gee, Autumn Diaz, and Rachel Hershberg consider the complexity of critical consciousness measurement as related to multiple, intersecting, and interlocking forms of marginalization and oppression, as well as related to individuals' self-perceptions and understandings of the marginalizing and oppressive forces that operate in their lives. Like a few other chapters in this volume, Johnson et al. provide very specific recommendations for advancing critical consciousness measurement – in this case, in light of what they refer to as the complexity of "systems" and "selves" and the interaction between them. New insights emerging from their analysis lead Johnson et al. to suggest a number of practical steps for researchers to follow to enhance future quantitative critical consciousness measurement.

Finally, in Chapter 11 Richard Shin, Shereen Ashai, Manuel Teran Hernandez, Yun Lu, Brian Keum, and Sarah Essner present a new brief

measure of critical reflection that emanated from the integration of their two
previously developed measures. The new measure, the Contemporary Critical
Consciousness Measure-Short (CCCM-S), reflects the kind of refinement and
adaptation that Rapa et al. (Chapter 7 [this volume]) highlight as reflective of
the most recent phase of critical consciousness measurement research. The
new 24-item CCCM-S provides its users both a general measure of critical
consciousness and measures of critical consciousness linked to five specific
forms of modern-day oppression: racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism,
and sexism/cis-sexism. Drawing on intersectional theory (e.g., Crenshaw,
1989), Shin and colleagues push the boundaries of critical consciousness
measurement by developing instrumentation aiming to assess multiple
forms of marginalization and oppression as well as tap understanding of the
sociohistorical and sociopolitical foundations of marginalization and oppres-
sion faced by many within contemporary American society.

NAVIGATING THE CONTENTS OF THIS VOLUME (AND OTHER SCHOLARSHIP ON CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS)

As we have discussed, and as the chapters of this volume further illustrate, the
literature on critical consciousness is diverse and expansive. There has been
tremendous growth in this area of scholarship over the past few decades
(Heberle et al., 2020), and this trajectory of growth does not appear to be
slowing. Beyond this, there is great complexity within the landscape of critical
consciousness scholarship. While not unique to this area of study, there is
wide variation in what scholars have attended to in terms of critical con-
sciousness theory within their work. This variation also manifests in how
critical consciousness and its subdimensions have been operationalized and
measured.

Through this volume, we hope to make the terrain of critical conscious-
ness scholarship more easily navigable, even while adding to its complex
landscape. We do this through a collection of chapters that: (1) name com-
plexities as they exist; (2) clarify core issues related to those complexities; and
(3) contribute new insights, advance new knowledge, and set new directions
for future research.

To punctuate this, within this last section of our introduction, we briefly
present "schema" that foregrounds some of the most complex issues in the
field – issues related to both theory and measurement – and provides a few
waypoints that might guide readers through the complex terrain of critical
consciousness research. We hope this schema is useful to hold in mind while
engaging with the contents of this volume (and other critical consciousness
scholarship). The complex issues we call out are represented in our schema as
five different axes, or continua, with each axis holding implications for theory
and measurement. We view these axes as orthogonal. That is, scholarship that

is close in some respects – theoretically aligned or similar with respect to one axis or another – may not necessarily be close or theoretically aligned on other axes.[1] We frame these axes as: (1) unidimensional–multidimensional; (2) individual–collective; (3) person-focused–systems-focused; (4) domain specific–domain general; and (5) singular axis of oppression–manifold axes of oppression.

Axis 1: Unidimensional–Multidimensional

One complex issue in the landscape of critical consciousness scholarship is variation in the representation of dimensionality – that is, the extent to which critical consciousness is theorized about, operationalized, and/or measured as unidimensional versus multidimensional (for helpful discussion of this issue, see Jemal, 2017). As of this writing, and as noted earlier, the field seems to have matured to the point where the general consensus is that critical consciousness comprises three distinct, but interrelated dimensions: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Heberle et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). While consensus is building theoretically about what critical consciousness entails, measurement has not yet caught up with theory in terms of dimensionality (see Burson et al., Chapter 6, [this volume]; Rapa et al., Chapter 7 [this volume]). For example, most critical consciousness instruments only account for one or two of critical consciousness's canonical dimensions, and only two instruments include all three (i.e., Diemer et al., 2022; Rapa et al., 2020). Notably, even if a study is grounded theoretically in the multidimensional nature of critical consciousness (or if a researcher holds the position that critical consciousness has tripartite dimensionality), a given study may be directed empirically toward the examination or measurement of just one or two dimensions. This reality is not inherently problematic, but our field of study is made more complex by – and even more so when we fail to acknowledge – this continuum of dimensionality. Recognizing where on this axis of unidimensional–multidimensional a given study falls (or where a set of studies fall, or even where an instrument falls) can be useful in accounting for how it aligns with prior research and/or critical consciousness theory, or how it does not.

Axis 2: Individual–Collective

Another complex issue in the landscape of critical consciousness scholarship is variation in the extent to which critical consciousness is foregrounded as a characteristic or attribute of, or a process related to, an individual versus a collective. As we have noted elsewhere (Heberle et al., 2020), most critical

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[1] While the focus of his writing was entirely different, we acknowledge Philips (1995) for insights that inspired our consideration of these various "axes" as pertaining to critical consciousness.

consciousness scholarship focuses on the individual level; virtually all measurement is targeted at the individual level as well. However, many have highlighted the need to reexamine how critical consciousness may also be a characteristic or attribute of a group or may be more of a collective phenomenon (e.g., Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015). As highlighted within a number of chapters of this volume, scholars are just beginning to contend more directly with this individual–collective axis, both in terms of theory (e.g., Suzuki et al., Chapter 2 [this volume]) and in terms of measurement (e.g., Kornbluh et al., Chapter 8 [this volume]).

Axis 3: Person-Focused–Systems-Focused

Complexity also manifests in terms of an axis we characterize as person-focused–systems-focused. Most scholarship to date has focused squarely on marginalized individuals (or, perhaps, individuals experiencing marginalization; see Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, 2018) as opposed to marginalizing systems (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). Yet, as Godfrey and Burson (2018) have argued, there is the need for increased attention on examination of the systems that marginalize as opposed to continued focus (solely) on individuals themselves. This, they contend, is more in line with critical consciousness theory's focus on the systemic, structural nature of inequity, and the resultant marginalization and oppression faced by people and people groups. Johnson et al. (Chapter 10 [this volume]) clearly bring this issue to the fore in their chapter on the complexity of "systems" and "selves" in critical consciousness research. Expanding the focus of critical consciousness scholarship toward systems in addition to individuals may prompt further reformulation of critical consciousness theory and measurement as, again, all existing measures of critical consciousness are person-focused. Heberle et al. (2020) also call for renewed focus on consciousness-raising systems in order to better align critical consciousness scholarship with theory (see also Godfrey & Rapa, in press). Expansion to critical consciousness measurement must follow. Kornbluh et al. (Chapter 8 [this volume]) are among the first to detail how this might be done, as they provide specific ways to advance critical consciousness measurement to better account for critical consciousness at the systems level. As new measurement approaches are developed, to align better with critical consciousness theory, continued attention to this person-focused–systems-focused axis will be merited.

Axis 4: Domain Specific–Domain General

Another complex issue in the critical consciousness landscape relates to how critical consciousness is theorized about, characterized, or accounted for along the domain specific–domain general continuum. This issue has been