

Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Social Injustice: Support for Urban Adolescents' Critical Consciousness Development

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This mixed-model study examined the relationship between urban adolescents' perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from peers, family, and community members and their critical consciousness development. These relationships were examined by relating participants' qualitative perceptions of support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice to quantitative data obtained from Likert-type measures of the reflection and action components of critical consciousness. Perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice had a significant impact upon the reflection component of critical consciousness; the significance criterion was supported by effect size estimates. Support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice was not significantly related to the action component of critical consciousness. Participants perceived the most support for challenging racism, moderate support for challenging social injustice, and the least support for challenging sexism. Additionally, female participants perceived more support for challenging sexism than male participants. These results suggest that the informal interactions of urban adolescents play a role in shaping their critical consciousness, and hold implications for psychosocial interventions and research with marginalized populations.

Keywords: critical consciousness, urban adolescents, sociopolitical development

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Critical consciousness, or sociopolitical development, (as per other scholars in this area, e.g., Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999, we will use these terms interchangeably here) is an emerging area of study that focuses upon individuals' capacity to critically reflect and act upon their sociopolitical environment. Recent work has examined critical consciousness as an "antidote" for oppression for urban African American young males (Watts et al., 1999), as a tool for liberation in the work lives for survivors of domestic abuse (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006) and (despite limited external resources) a means of connecting urban adolescents to career development processes (Diemer & Blustein, in press). As relevant theory (e.g., Freire 1973; 1993) and these studies suggest that critical consciousness facilitates the capacity to overcome sociopolitical oppression, the present study is an attempt to further our understanding of this construct through examining the role key social actors in adolescents' lives (peers, family, and community) play in their critical consciousness development. Before reviewing the existing critical consciousness/sociopolitical development literature, we will briefly review the construct of critical consciousness and its origins.

Overview of Critical Consciousness

In essence, critical consciousness represents the capacity to critically reflect and act upon one's sociopolitical environment. Hopper (1999) succinctly described this critical reflection as "learning to think critically about accepted ways of thinking and feeling, discerning the hidden interests in underlying assumptions and framing notions (whether these are class-, gender-, race/ethnicity- or sect-based). It means learning to see, in the mundane particulars of ordinary lives, how history works, how received ways of thinking and feeling serve to perpetuate existing structures of inequality" (p. 210).

Paulo Freire (1973; 1993) developed the concept of critical consciousness in Brazil that he found oppressive to large segments of the

population and in particular, the poor. Freire observed that oppression was reflected in both high rates of functional illiteracy and a lack of critical literacy to "read" social conditions that perpetuate injustice and marginalization among the oppressed, such as the inequitable distribution of resources and access to opportunity. To combat this, Freire developed a pedagogical method focused upon reflection and analysis of the sociopolitical environment (critical literacy) and acting upon the sociopolitical environment. This capacity for critical reflection and critical action was called "critical consciousness."

Social interaction plays a key role in the process of critical consciousness development. Indeed, Freire's pedagogical "culture circle" method involved participatory and collaborative discussion among members of oppressed groups to "problematize" or generate reflectiveness about one's sociopolitical environment and the capacity to act upon that sociopolitical environment. Research supports the importance of social interaction in the process of critical consciousness development as well. For example, the peer interactions of Quecha Indians in Ecuador (Smith, 1975) and the early family interactions among Bulgarian and American adults (Mustakova-Prossardt, 1998) were suggested to have a positive relationship with critical consciousness development.

As urban adolescents also struggle with structural oppression and inequitable access to resources (e.g., Fine, 1991; Diemer & Blustein, 2006), critical consciousness has been theorized to serve as an "antidote" to oppression among urban adolescents (Watts et al., 1999). Our interest in the present study is examining the role perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice have upon the critical consciousness development of urban adolescents. Beginning with the premise that peers, family, and community members are key social actors in the lives of adolescents, this study examines the impact these social actors may have upon critical consciousness development through providing support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice.

The extant literature (e.g., Balcazar, Tandon, & Kaplan, 2001; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Fine, 1991; O'Connor, 1997; Watts et al., 1999) suggests that support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice are the most common “vehicles” by which social actors may influence the critical consciousness of adolescents through problematizing negative aspects of their sociopolitical worlds. Furthermore, the first author’s clinical experiences with urban adolescents suggested that racism, sexism, and social inequality were raised more often than other sociopolitical issues in adolescents’ conversations about their sociopolitical environments. This literature and these experiences were synthesized to create the theoretical model that undergirds the present study.

As can be seen in Figure 1, we theorize that urban adolescents’ critical consciousness development is facilitated by perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from peers, family, and community members. Proceeding from the top of the model downward, our outcome variable, critical consciousness, is portioned into “action” and “reflection” components, following the typology of critical consciousness developed by Diemer and Blustein (2006). The bidirectional arrows indicate that the action and reflection components are theorized to be related.

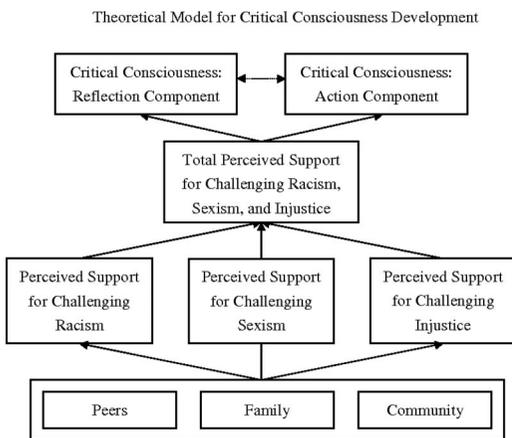


Figure 1. Theoretical model for critical consciousness development.

Per Freire’s (1973; 1993) theory of critical consciousness development, the unique impacts support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice have upon critical consciousness are not specified by the model. Rather, these three domains represent mechanisms by which urban adolescents’ sociopolitical worlds may be problematized and support for their critical consciousness development provided by key social actors. As such, the total perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice is theorized to be associated with both the reflection and action components of critical consciousness. Additionally, relationships between the perceived support variables are not specified in the model.

The model specifies peers, family, and community members to be the key social actors in the lives of urban adolescents that provide this support. As the unique contribution peers, family, and community members make to critical consciousness development are not considered in the model or in the present study, they are grouped into a larger box representing “key social actors.” We next review literature that illustrates the theoretical model, highlighting the suggested impact of social interaction upon the reflection and action components of critical consciousness.

Support for Challenging Racism and Critical Consciousness Development

Structured intervention programs designed to facilitate critical consciousness development have utilized peer discussions to provide support for challenging racism. Bryant (2000) led Black female adolescents in discussions about the impact of race upon participants’ school experiences with the intention of facilitating critical consciousness development. The “Young Warriors” program of Watts et al. (1999) aims to stimulate the reflection component of critical consciousness through discussing and critically analyzing aspects of the sociopolitical environ-

ment, such as representations of race in mass culture, among urban African American male adolescents. Correspondingly, although not a structured intervention program, O'Connor's (1997) qualitative study of urban African American adolescents suggested that participants whom had observed a family member actively resisting racism and/or social injustice were more invested in collective struggle and demonstrated greater levels of both the action and reflection components of critical consciousness development.

Support for Challenging Sexism and Critical Consciousness Development

The Bryant (2000) intervention also utilized challenging sexism as a vehicle for critical consciousness development among Black female adolescents through peer-based discussions of differential standards for men and women and unrealistic standards for beauty. Similarly, Campbell and McPhail (2002) found that Black South African adolescents in a peer-led intervention program challenged sexism through engaging in a process of dialogue and reconstruction of gender roles in a manner facilitative of critical consciousness development.

However, some recent work has also demonstrated the manner in which peers may also not provide support for challenging sexism, (at times) instead providing support for gender inequity. Houser and Overton (2001) argue that adolescents often "unconsciously and uncritically" socialize themselves and their peers to uncritically accept inequalities in relationships between men and women. Among a sample of predominantly Mexican-American young women, Denner's (2001) qualitative study observed participants competing with each other, rather than collaborating, and reinforcing existing gender roles rather than challenging sexist norms and practices.

While recognizing the differing conceptions of gender inequity across nations and

cultural groups, this evidence suggests that adolescents often do not provide support for challenging sexism in their informal interactions, but under the direction of a leader in a structured intervention program, can and do provide support for challenging sexism in their lives.

Support for Challenging Social Injustice and Critical Consciousness Development

Zubrow (1993) revealed that the peers of urban adolescents often do provide support for challenging social injustice that appears to facilitate the reflection component of critical consciousness. However, their support for challenging injustice did not appear to be related to adolescents' perceived capacity to act upon their sociopolitical environment. Mustakova-Prossardt's (1998) qualitative study of middle-aged adults in the United States and Bulgaria suggested that families that provided support for challenging social injustice early in life appeared to facilitate the reflection component of critical consciousness of participants in adulthood. Similarly, the structured intervention program of Balcazar et al. (2001) "assigned" urban African American participants to discuss issues of fairness, equity, and social injustice with their families. Incorporation of family support for challenging social injustice, as was the case with O'Connor (1997), was associated with the action and reflection components of critical consciousness. The predominantly female urban adolescents in Valaitis' (2002) qualitative study perceived social inequities (particularly within their community) and perceived some support for challenging social injustice from their families and school environment. However, this support did not appear to influence the action component of critical consciousness, as these participants felt disempowered and unable to take effective action upon their sociopolitical environment. In sum, the literature suggests that support for challenging social injustice from key social actors

generally has a positive relationship with the reflection component of critical consciousness, while this support has a more mixed relationship with the action component of critical consciousness development.

The present study tests the theoretical model and explores the type of support for critical consciousness development that urban adolescents receive through five research questions. The first two questions assess the relationships between perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and injustice and the reflection and action components of critical consciousness. The last three research questions examine the perceived support for critical consciousness development that urban adolescents receive in more detail.

1. Is support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from key actors in urban adolescents' social context associated with the reflection component of critical consciousness?
2. Is support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from key actors in urban adolescents' social context associated with the action component of critical consciousness?
3. Do urban adolescents perceive greater support for challenging racism than for challenging sexism from key social actors?
4. Do urban adolescents perceive greater support for challenging racism than for challenging social injustice from key social actors?
5. Do urban adolescents perceive greater support for challenging sexism than for challenging social injustice from key social actors?

Method

A mixed-model (the term "mixed-model" refers to the integration of both qualitative and quantitative research procedures across

all phases of research design; Hanson, Plano Clark, Pestka, Creswell, & Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) study allowed us to explore a new area of inquiry from a qualitative perspective, while also employing a complementary set of quantitative analyses. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) argue that mixed-model analyses can "measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon" (p. 258) while also providing a means of both methodological and data triangulation (Patton, 1990), enhancing the rigor of research. The present study was designed as a mixed-model research project wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed in a complementary manner (Greene et al., 1989; Hanson et al., 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; 2003).

Procedures

The data from this study were obtained as part of the larger Diemer (2003) study of the relationships between critical consciousness and career development among urban adolescents. Participants were recruited from students who attended two urban high schools in the Northeastern United States. Participants who obtained parental consent and assented to the research process were eligible to participate, although the percentage of students who did obtain parental consent was not calculated. The difficulties in conducting research in urban schools (such as the numerous students who received a consent form but were not in school on the day data were collected to return the form) clouded the estimation of a consent rate. However, all participants who obtained parental consent and assented to the research did complete a data collection packet. Participants completed a survey composed of Likert-type items regarding critical consciousness and career development; at the conclusion of the survey was a series of open-ended questions that invited participants to

write about their perceptions of support from their peers, family, and community for thinking about and discussing sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice.

Participants

Ninety-eight students at two urban high schools in the Northeastern United States served as the sample for this study. These participants attended inner-city high schools that are composed predominantly of Students of Color from poor and working class urban neighborhoods; the final sample consisted of 56 females and 42 males. The mean age for all participants was 15.44 ($SD = .96$); 48 of the participants were in the ninth grade (49%) and 50 in the tenth grade (51%). The ethnic and racial self-identifications were as follows: 18.4% (18) self-identified as Black/African American/African/Cape Verdean, 20.4% (20) as Black/Caribbean, 35.7% (35) as Latino/a, 5.1% (5) as White, European, or European-American, 4.1% (4) as Asian, 2% (2) as Middle Eastern/Arabic, and 14.3% (14) as multi-ethnic/racial. The racial/ethnic demographics of our participants correspond to the racial/ethnic demographics of these two schools.

Predictor Variables: Support for Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Social Injustice

Participants were invited to respond to a series of (written) open-ended questions to assess their perceptions of external support for challenging sexism, racism, and social injustice. Participants were first asked if they discuss racism (or sexism) with friends, family, or community members and then asked an open-ended follow-up question regarding the type of conversations they have regarding racism (or sexism). These follow-up questions were intentionally open-ended to avoid leading participants; the amount of support they receive for challenging racism

(or sexism) was then inferred from their response. Support for challenging social injustice was assessed in a different manner. Based on the first author's experiences in urban schools, we assumed that participants would need more invitation to respond to questions regarding social injustice, and the question assessing perceived support for social injustice was asked in a more directed way (by asking if the participant perceived support for thinking about and talking about injustice). Whether participants perceived support and the type of support they perceived for challenging social injustice was then inferred from their response.

Although we recognize that the questions assessing perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice were not completely parallel, our perception of the qualitative data regarding support for challenging social injustice was that these data were as qualitatively rich as the data regarding support for challenging racism and sexism. Further, analytic memos completed during our coding of the social injustice data indicate that participants provided narrative data that afforded coding of both whether they perceived support and the quality of support they received for challenging social injustice. In short, although the questions were not asked in parallel form, they provided (relatively) parallel data.

Following the mixed-model design, the obtained qualitative data were coded by the research team and "quantitized" (e.g., Miles and Huberman, 1994) for subsequent quantitative analyses. In the first step, the first author developed an initial set of codes (similar to Miles and Huberman's [1994] notion of a 'start list') that was provided to the research team. Using these initial codes as a guide, we then developed a numerical coding system that evaluated the quality and amount of support participants perceived for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice (the same metric was used for coding across the perceived support variables).

PERCEIVED SUPPORT FOR CHALLENGING RACISM. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions to measure perceived support for challenging racism:

1. Do you talk about racism in your community or with peers and family members?
2. What do they say about racism?

Question one received a binary (0 or 1) code to assess whether any support for challenging racism was perceived. Participants' more open-ended responses to question two were coded based on the degree of support the participants perceived, ranging from 1 to 4, with 4 representing greater quality and amount of support for challenging racism. For example, the following response received a 1 code, from participant 91w: "*I don't talk about racism in my family. They say to forget about it and they are to [sic] shallow to talk like that.*"

PERCEIVED SUPPORT FOR CHALLENGING SEXISM. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions to measure perceived support for challenging sexism:

3. Do you talk about sexism in your community or with peers and family members?
4. What do they say about sexism?

Question three received a binary code (0 or 1) to assess whether any support for challenging sexism was perceived. Participants' more open-ended responses to question four were coded based on the degree of support the participant perceived, ranging from 1 to 4, with 4 representing greater quality and amount of support for challenging sexism. For example, the following response received a 4, from participant 112b: "*I do talk about sexism. Matter of fact, I went to a Women of Color conference in Chicago over the weekend which dealt a lot with sexism in our society.*" Six participants who did not understand the term "sexism" (some conflated it with sexual intercourse and discussed safe sexual practices instead) were coded as missing data for the support for challenging sexism questions.

PERCEIVED SUPPORT FOR CHALLENGING SOCIAL INJUSTICE. As detailed above, participants were asked a more directed question regarding perceived support for challenging social injustice:

5. Do people in your community support you thinking and talking about unfairness in society?

Despite the focused nature of this question, participants' responses detailed whether they perceived support for challenging social injustice and the degree of support they perceived. Accordingly, a binary code (0 or 1) was assigned to assess whether any support for challenging social injustice was perceived. The degree of support the participant perceived was also coded, ranging from 1 to 4, with 4 representing greater quality and amount of support for challenging social injustice. For example, the following response received a 2, from participant 20B, "*Yes, because there is a lot of unfairness in society,*" and the following response received a 3, from participant 34W, "*No, but I know if something goes down in my community, the parents and friends and children will definitely make their voices be heard.*"

CODING OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT DATA. Our qualitative coding process identified missing values; any case with two or more missing values for the (six possible) qualitative perceived support variables was removed from the data set. Each member of the research team then analyzed the same data individually and assigned numerical codes, while also maintaining analytic memos (Patton, 1990) regarding the data analysis. Following the Consensual Qualitative Research method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005), the research team worked to obtain consensus regarding all codes assigned to participant data and discussed the analytic memos to guide data analysis. This process continued until the research team had reached consensus for all of the responses for all participants (therefore interrater reliability would be 1.00, if calculated). The

obtained Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .81$) of these six codes suggests that the measurement of perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice was internally consistent for these participants.

Variables were then computed to correspond to our theoretical model. The two codes (0 and 1, 1-4) assessing perceived support for challenging racism were summed, the two codes regarding perceived support for challenging sexism were summed, and the two codes regarding perceived support for challenging social injustice were summed, resulting in three perceived support variables (perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and injustice) ranging from 1 to 5. To account for missing values, mean imputation was employed for the perceived support variables. The means and standard deviations for perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice are provided in Table 1. Additionally, a variable assessing total perceived support was computed from the sum of perceived support for challenging racism, perceived support for challenging sexism, and perceived support for challenging injustice.

Outcome Variables: Critical Consciousness Development

Diemer (2003) created a typology for critical consciousness derived from Freire's (1973; 1993) theory of critical consciousness and

other critical consciousness scholars (e.g., O'Connor, 1997; Smith, 1975; Watts et al., 1999) in which critical consciousness is composed of two components—the capacity for action and the capacity for reflection upon one's sociopolitical environment. Our operationalization of critical consciousness in the present study also incorporates measurement of the capacity for action (Sociopolitical Control Scale) and of the capacity for reflection (inverted scores on the Social Dominance Orientation measure).

CAPACITY FOR ACTION. Sociopolitical control “refers to beliefs that actions in the social and political system can lead to desired outcomes” (Zimmerman & Zahinser, 1991, p. 736) and is embedded within Freire's notion of critical consciousness (Zimmerman, personal communication, February 21, 2001). Zimmerman and Zahinser (1991) developed the Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS), which captures a key aspect of critical consciousness in that as critical consciousness develops, persons move from being objects of oppression to subjects that act upon their sociopolitical environment (Freire, 1973; 1993). The SPCS measures the capacity for individuals to act upon their sociopolitical environment and as such captures the “action” component of critical consciousness. A sample item reads “People like me are generally well qualified to participate

TABLE 1. Descriptive Data & Zero-Order Correlations Between Perceived Support and Critical Consciousness

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Racism</i>	<i>Sexism</i>	<i>Injustice</i>	<i>TotalSupp</i>	<i>SPCS</i>	<i>iSDO</i>
Racism	2.76	1.12	—	.49**	.30**	.80**	.06	.27**
Sexism	1.98	1.15		—	.26**	.79**	.08	.17
Injustice	2.19	1.00			—	.66**	.13	.28**
TotalSupp	6.94	2.47				—	.11	.31**
SPCS	65.95	10.53					—	.36**
iSDO	83.61	14.95						—

Note. Racism = Perceived support for challenging racism; Sexism = Perceived support for challenging sexism; Injustice = Perceived support for challenging injustice; TotalSupp = Sum of perceived support for challenging racism, sexism and injustice; SPCS = Sociopolitical Control Scale sum score; iSDO = inverted sum scores on Social Dominance Orientation measure.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

in the political activity and decision making in our country.”

The SPCS is comprised of 17 items using a six-point, Likert-type format; previous factor analyses revealed that the scale contains two factors, Leadership Competence and Policy Control. Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .76 for Leadership Competence, and .75 for Policy Control from samples of university undergraduates, community members, and members of a local church. Furthermore, the two factors were moderately correlated, ($r = .49$) (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). In the present study, we obtained an alpha of ($\alpha = .74$) as an estimate of internal consistency with our sample of urban adolescents.

CAPACITY FOR REFLECTION. Critical consciousness represents the capacity for critical reflection about and questioning of one's place within the social order, as well as myths and/or ideologies that maintain group-based inequality. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is an ideology that runs counter to that of Freire's (1973; 1993) notion of critical consciousness. SDO is theoretically and empirically related to support for hierarchy-enhancing ideologies such as the myth of meritocracy, belief in a just world, Social Darwinism and racist attitudes toward African-Americans (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). As critical consciousness would entail reflection about and questioning of these ideologies of group-based dominance, we operationalized the reflection component of critical consciousness through inverted scores on the SDO measure (e.g., Diemer & Blustein, 2006). A sample item reads “It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.”

The SDO measure of Pratto et al. (1994) is a 14-item Likert-type instrument. The authors obtained a mean alpha coefficient of .82 across 14 samples of college students; with a test-retest reliability of .81 over a 3-month period for a subsample of 25 par-

ticipants. Scores on the SDO are also independent of measures of interpersonal dominance; these scores are also inversely related to measures of empathy, altruism, egalitarianism, and social tolerance. We obtained an alpha of ($\alpha = .87$) as an estimate of internal consistency with our sample of urban adolescents. The means and standard deviations of the critical consciousness variables are also detailed in Table 1.

Results

Data Analysis

The zero-order correlations depicted in Table 1 show that perceived support for challenging racism, perceived support for challenging injustice, and total support were significantly related to inverted Social Dominance Orientation scores, while perceived support for challenging sexism was not significantly correlated. Neither perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, injustice, or total perceived support correlated significantly with Sociopolitical Control Scale scores.

To examine the potential impact demographic characteristics may have had upon the variables of interest, a series of Bonferroni-adjusted t-tests (where $p = .002$) compared participants by school, by gender, and by grade on the SPCS, inverted SDO, perceived support for challenging racism, perceived support for challenging sexism, perceived support for challenging injustice, and total perceived support. Only one significant difference was detected, as young women perceived more support for challenging sexism than young men.

We also computed partial correlations to examine the relationship of demographic factors available from the data set with the total perceived support, capacity for reflection, and capacity for action variables. While controlling for age, gender, school attended, race/ethnicity, and grade, the relationship between total support and Sociopo-

litical Control scores was $r = .10$, a nonsignificant relationship, and the relationship between total support and inverted Social Dominance Orientation scores was $r = .28$, which is significant at the .01 level. The values of these partial correlations are very similar to the zero-order correlations reported in Table 1, suggesting that these demographic factors did not play a significant role in the relationships between total perceived support and the critical consciousness variables.

RELATIONSHIP OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT TO CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS. To test the first research question, whether perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from key social actors is associated with the reflection component of critical consciousness among urban adolescents, inverted SDO sum scores were regressed on the total perceived support variable (the sum of perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice). This simple regression was statistically significant, $F(1, 91) = 9.70, p < .01, R^2 = .10$, indicating that 10% of the reflection component of critical consciousness variance was accounted for by total support, a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

To address the second research question, if support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from key actors is associated with the action component of critical consciousness among urban adolescents, Sociopolitical Control Scale sum scores were regressed on the total perceived support variable. This simple regression was not significant, $F(1, 89) = 1.11, p = .30, R^2 = .01$, indicating that total perceived support was not associated with the action component of critical consciousness. (The two SPCS factors identified by Zimmerman and Zahniser [1991], Leadership Competence and Policy Control, were each regressed on the total perceived support variable and were also not significantly associated with perceived support. Given the lack of cross-validation or confirmatory factor analyses of

the SPCS factor structure, we have elected to focus upon the analysis of SPCS sum scores in the present study for parsimony.) Further, an inspection of the residual plots and nonlinear regression analyses did not reveal a curvilinear relationship, either quadratic ($p = .29$) or cubic ($p = .14$), between total perceived support and the Sociopolitical Control Scale.

EXPLORING SUPPORT FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT. To examine the support for critical consciousness development that urban adolescents perceive, differences in perceived support for challenging racism versus sexism versus social injustice (research questions three through five) were then examined. The mean level of perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice for all participants were compared using paired-samples *t*-test analyses. Using a Bonferonni-corrected alpha level of 0.02, participants perceived significantly more support for challenging racism ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.12$) than for challenging social injustice ($M = 2.19, SD = 1.00$), $t(97) = 4.46, p < .0001$, or for challenging sexism ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.15$), $t(97) = 6.77, p < .001$. Participants did not perceive significant differences between support for challenging social injustice ($M = 2.19, SD = 1.00$) and support for challenging sexism ($M = 1.98, SD = 1.15$), $t(97) = -1.62, p \leq .11$.

The results of research questions three through five converge with our qualitative analyses, as participants' narratives suggested more and higher quality support with regard to racism than for social injustice or sexism. As an example, participant 2W's response reflects the greater support for challenging racism than sexism or injustice that participants perceived, "*Yes, I'm currently a member of the National Black College Alliance and we often have meetings about such topics. We all still believe it exists and want to get rid of it.*"

As noted above, young women ($M = 2.34, SD = 1.26$) perceived significantly more support for challenging sexism

than young men ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .76$), $t(91) = -3.83$, $p < .001$. This finding converged with our qualitative coding of the perceived sexism support narratives. Our analytic memos suggested that participants tended to perceive less support for challenging sexism than for other forms of injustice. As an example of how unmindful participants were of sexism, six participants confused the word "sexism" with "sexual intercourse," and instead discussed support they receive regarding safe sexual practices, such as participant 88W's response, "*Yes, you shouldn't do it unless you and your mate are sure,*" rather than support for confronting gender inequality. We discuss the implications of this finding and our primary research questions below.

Discussion

These findings partially support our theoretical model and suggest that support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice from key social actors in the lives of urban adolescents is associated with the reflection (inverted Social Dominance Orientation scores) component of critical consciousness, but was not associated with the action (Sociopolitical Control Scale scores) component. Secondly, examining the support for critical consciousness development that urban adolescents do receive, our participants perceived the most support for challenging racism, then social injustice, and the least support for challenging sexism. Thirdly, young women perceived more support for challenging sexism than young men did. While acknowledging limitations germane to the research design, these findings contribute toward our understanding of critical consciousness development among urban adolescents and the support for critical consciousness development that they receive.

This study converges with O'Connor (1997) and Zubrow (1993) who suggest that support for challenging racism, sexism, and

social injustice from peers, family, and community members may facilitate the reflection component of critical consciousness among urban adolescents. The structured support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice provided by the intervention programs of Balcazar et al. (2001), Bryant (2000), and Watts et al. (1999) appeared to influence the reflection component of critical consciousness among urban children and adolescents in the United States and Black South African adolescents living in poverty (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002).

In the present study, we observed no relationships between support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice and the capacity for action, although our qualitative coding of narratives indicated that some participants were involved in social action groups and were working to alter negative sociopolitical aspects of their environment. By contrast, O'Connor's qualitative study (1997) suggested that urban adolescents who perceived more support from and/or observed a family member effectively resist injustice perceived a greater capacity to act upon their sociopolitical environment. Morsillo and Prilleltensky (in press) also observed that providing support for challenging social injustice in an intervention program for adolescents was associated with increases in the action component of critical consciousness. However, the urban adolescents in the Zubrow (1993) and Valaitis (2002) studies did not perceive support for challenging racism, sexism, or social injustice from key social actors and did not perceive the capacity to act upon their sociopolitical environment, suggesting a relationship between external support and the capacity for action. We offer three explanations for this pattern of relationships.

First, the lack of association between external support and the capacity for action may be partially explained by the real-world constraints that adolescence has upon the capacity for action. For example, adolescents are left out of some traditional mechanisms of sociopolitical action (such as voting, running for office, or membership in

many community organizations) and lack opportunities to engage in transformative sociopolitical action (Morsillo & Prilellentzky, in press). Similarly, the urban adolescents in the Valaitis (2002) study perceived having "low status" in the eyes of adults and (despite an interest in effecting change) felt that social and political systems were unresponsive to them because of their age. Although it may be that external support is related to the capacity for action, the developmental constraints of adolescence may cloud or otherwise obfuscate this relationship. That is, external support may in fact be associated with the capacity for action, but the lack of responsiveness from adults (and/or social and political systems) to adolescents or the lack of avenues for adolescents' sociopolitical participation may attenuate the capacity for action that adolescents feel. Future research could tease out these relationships and may consider incorporating the real-world constraints of adolescence in examinations of sociopolitical action among adolescents.

Second, these findings suggest that providing guidance regarding effective sociopolitical action may play a role in urban adolescents' capacity for action. The participants in the Zubrow (1993) study expressed a desire to act upon their sociopolitical environments, but utilized ineffective strategies (such as individualistic approaches) that left them feeling frustrated and powerless. Although the participants in the present study did not discuss the use of ineffective strategies, the Valaitis study suggests that in addition to providing support for challenging racism, social injustice and sexism, providing clear strategies for effective sociopolitical action (such as the utility of collective action or recruiting support from adults) may facilitate the capacity for action among urban adolescents.

Finally, it may be that aspects of urban adolescents' school context play a larger role in influencing adolescents' perceived capacity for action than support from peers, family, and community. Fine (1991), Houser and Overton (2001), and Lynn, Has-

san, and Johnson (1999) have suggested the impact the school context (both positive and negative) may have upon the critical consciousness development of adolescents. Fine's (1991) qualitative study suggested that urban schools may constrain students' capacity for action and that critically conscious students may view schools as reproductive of societal inequality and elect to drop out of school. In contrast, the urban adolescents in the Valaitis (2002) study perceived the capacity to act upon their sociopolitical environment while in school, as they were able to act collectively and perceived more trust from adults in the school environment. This suggests that some urban school environments serve as sites where students perceive the capacity to act upon their sociopolitical environment. Although the first author delivered a career-related psychoeducational intervention in one of these schools and collected data for this study from both of these schools, systematic observation (such as field notes), or data regarding the potential impact of each school's climate upon critical consciousness development could not be obtained. Future studies of external supports for critical consciousness development could utilize quantitative measures (e.g., Diemer, Hsieh, & Pan, 2006) or ethnographic field methods to examine the relationship between school climate and urban adolescents' critical consciousness development.

Our qualitative and quantitative analyses converged to indicate that participants perceived the most support for challenging racism, then social injustice, and the least support for challenging sexism. The qualitative data of (predominantly Persons of Color) participants widely viewed racism as problematic and expressed support for challenging racism and racist practices from their peers, family, and community members. The qualitative data indicates that support for challenging social injustice was more mixed, with some participants expressing limited support while others were actively involved in social action groups based in their community. Finally, the qualitative

data indicated that participants perceived the least support for challenging sexism, with several participants conflating sexism with sexual intercourse.

It may be that participants do not receive consistent and strong support for challenging sexism from their peers, family, and community members. On the other hand, if some participants do not perceive sexism to be inherently problematic, they may not perceive support for challenging it. That is, some participants may actually receive ample support for challenging sexism, but because sexism is not viewed as a negative aspect of their sociopolitical environment to be challenged, may not perceive receiving support from peers, family, and community members for challenging it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, qualitative and quantitative analyses converged to reveal that the young women perceived more support for challenging sexism than the young men did. Continuing the preceding argument, it may be that female participants perceived more support because they viewed sexism to be a problematic aspect of their sociopolitical environment, while male participants may not (on the aggregate) have viewed sexism as problematic. Alternatively, peers, family, and community members may not problematize sexism in a manner that leads young urban males to confront the status quo of gender inequality. This suggests further study to identify whether support for sexism is "in the eyes of the beholder" or whether it reflects real gender differences in the social contexts of urban adolescents.

Practice Implications

First, the present study suggests that psychoeducational interventions designed to facilitate critical consciousness may be augmented by (1) incorporating the informal support that urban adolescents receive, (2) tailoring intervention goals and methods with the social contexts of urban adolescents in mind, and (3) consistently attending to

the component parts of critical consciousness. That is, in addition to structured and targeted intervention, critical consciousness intervention programs should consider incorporating the informal support for challenging racism (in particular), social injustice, and sexism that participants receive from peers, family, and community members. For example, family and community members were actively involved in the Balcazar et al. (2001) critical consciousness intervention by challenging aspects of participants' sociopolitical worlds. The inclusion and strengthening of these informal supports may create more comprehensive and powerful intervention programs.

As critical consciousness theory emphasizes the role of one's peers in the process of critical consciousness development (Freire, 1973; 1993) and our participants' qualitative data suggested that they do perceive peer support for challenging racism, critical consciousness interventions could utilize peer-based methods (such as discussion or peer education) to problematize and challenge racism. By contrast, because of the mixed support for challenging sexism that participants perceived and students' conflation of sexism with sexual intercourse, discussions of sexism may be more effective if delivered in a "top-down" format and guided by a trained facilitator.

Third, although qualitative evaluations of critical consciousness interventions broadly suggest that these programs may have impacted critical consciousness development in a general sense, subsequent intervention programs may be enhanced by a specification of what component parts of critical consciousness will be addressed and evaluated by the intervention. For example, programs addressing critical consciousness development (e.g., Balcazar et al., 2001; Watts et al., 1999) have focused upon spirituality, racism, resource inequality, and social inequity as vehicles for the facilitation of critical consciousness and have suggested the potential impact of these programs in broader brush strokes, such as by an increase in the number of responses that re-

flect critical consciousness over the duration of an intervention.

Until consistent and psychometrically sound measurements of critical consciousness exist, future intervention programs should consider clearly articulating and evaluating component parts of critical consciousness. For example, intervention programs could incorporate our finding that support for challenging racism, social injustice, and sexism was associated with the reflection component of critical consciousness by assisting participants in problematizing and challenging these aspects of their sociopolitical worlds. Future interventions, in turn, could identify and target factors that assist in facilitating the action component of critical consciousness not identified in the present study and incorporate the potential impact school climate may have upon critical consciousness development.

Limitations and Future Directions

As this study relied upon self-reported support for challenging racism, social injustice, and sexism, participants' perceptions regarding the importance of challenging racism, social injustice, and sexism may have influenced their perceptions of support. As detailed above, participants may have received ample support for but may not have perceived sexism as problematic and needing to be challenged. Social desirability and other potential limitations connected to self-report, such as problems in retrospective recall, apply in the present study as well. Finally, questions eliciting participants' perceived support were not presented in a counterbalanced order, which could have produced a response set in participants' narratives.

Although the focused qualitative data used in the present study were well-suited to a mixed-model analysis, other forms of qualitative data (interviews/focus groups) may facilitate a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of perceived support for challeng-

ing racism, sexism, and social injustice upon critical consciousness development. However, the anonymous written format for collecting the perceived support data may have provided participants with a private space to voice their perspectives more fully (such as where they feel support is lacking) than they may have felt in an in-person interview or focus group. Nonresponse to qualitative queries regarding participants' perceived support could not be investigated in a systematic manner, one limitation to collecting written qualitative data that may have been addressed if interviews or focus groups had been employed. To build upon the current findings, future research could utilize interviews and/or focus groups to provide a (potentially) richer exploration of perceived support upon critical consciousness development from the perspective of urban adolescents. Finally, although the current study was concerned with the composite of perceived support in challenging the racism, sexism, and social injustice across multiple domains of friends, family, and community members, it would also be valuable for future studies to examine how urban adolescents perceive specific aspects of support within each of these separate domains.

A variable not examined or controlled for in the present study may also explain the relationships between perceived support and the capacity for critical reflection, a limitation which is particularly germane in newer areas of inquiry. For example, ego identity, school climate (as noted above), or supportive and close relationships (in a more general sense) may be related to both the capacity for critical reflection and the perception of external support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice. It may be that the observed association between total perceived support and the capacity for reflection may be "tapping into" a relationship both of these variables share with a third variable not identified. Further research is needed to clarify the potential relationships other variables may have upon the relationship between total perceived

support and the capacity for reflection identified here. However, we should note that the partial correlations suggest that some potential confounds, such as age, gender, school attended, race/ethnicity, and grade did not appear to play a significant role in the relationship between perceived support and the capacity for reflection.

Similarly, the degree of exposure to racism, sexism, and social injustice that participants had experienced was not measured in this study, although the urban adolescent participants were purposively sampled because of the structural oppression that we assume that they face (e.g. Watts et al., 1999). Participants' previous exposure to racism, sexism, and social injustice may influence either their seeking out of external support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice, and/or their critical consciousness development, and should be examined in future research.

Although the obtained regression analysis suggests a relationship between perceived support and the capacity for reflection, a correlational analysis cannot identify the directionality of this relationship. That is, it may be that more critically reflective individuals may seek out more external support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice. Although a cornerstone of critical consciousness theory (e.g., Freire, 1973; 1993) is the notion that perceived support for challenging racism, sexism, and injustice is facilitative of the capacity for reflection, future research can build upon the present study by more clearly delineating the directionality of the obtained association between perceived support and the capacity for reflection. Additionally, the correlational analytic method employed here contains no empirical manipulation, and as such this study only illustrates correlation and not causation. Random assignment of matched participants to "control" and "support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice" treatment conditions and examining the relationship of treatment condition to the capacity for critical reflection could contribute

to clarifying the directionality of these relationships.

As stated previously, we invited participants to report their level of support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice, which we felt captured the most salient aspects of urban adolescents' sociopolitical world. However, we recognize that this does not address participants' support for challenging injustice and discrimination related to disability status, sexual orientation, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. Future research should incorporate these sociopolitical issues in subsequent investigations of critical consciousness.

In sum, the present study supports our theoretical model, and the findings are consistent with the view that support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice may be facilitative of critical consciousness, and in particular the capacity for critical reflection. Examining the support for critical consciousness development that urban adolescents perceive, participants perceived the most support for challenging racism, then social injustice and finally sexism; however, young women perceived more support for challenging sexism than young men. The present study continues the recent trajectory of critical consciousness scholarship (e.g., Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Diemer & Blustein, 2006), and suggests that incorporating support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice may serve as vehicles facilitative of critical consciousness. Future research and intervention should continue to address the inequities in the sociopolitical worlds of urban adolescents and identify internal and external resources that assist them in naming and transforming those sociopolitical inequities.

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