

Investigating Socio-Ecological Influences on Students' Critical Consciousness

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance: Critical Consciousness is correlated with positive developmental outcomes such as greater academic achievement, better well-being, and higher engagement in sociopolitical action among individuals who face oppression or marginalization (Castro et al., 2022; Diemer et al., 2015; Pinedo et al., 2023).

Terms: Critical consciousness (CC) includes three dimensions.

- **Critical Reflection (CR):** An individual's reflection on their own and others' socio-political standing
- **Critical Motivation (CM):** One's commitment to rejecting injustices.
- **Critical Action (CA):** The actions that individuals take to reject injustices.

Specific local, global, & personal events trigger **critical reflection** and **critical actions** that are reinforced or discouraged in their social ecology, which produces 5 critical consciousness schema. Students' may take **critical actions** that are reinforced or discouraged in their social ecology, which can further impact events & their own CC development.

- **Individual:** Individual's identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) affect how urgently they feel about issues & their sense of responsibility for creating change.
- **Social:** Peers, families, & communities discourage (e.g., fear of judgement/punishment) or encourage (e.g., provide knowledge; co-engage in opportunities) for CC development.
- **Institutional:** Course content exposes students to new perspectives beyond their lived experiences/family values; teachers' & administrators' attitudes & responses encourage/discourage **critical actions** within schools (protests, walkouts, etc).
- **Ideological:** Students participate in broader discourses about age, individual vs. collective power, & sense of progress vs. pessimism as they develop their own CC

METHODOLOGY

Participants: 9th graders participated in focus groups about issues that matter to them & their efforts to advocate for those issues (N = 112; 24 focus groups). Students identified as students of color (n = 48) or White (n = 64) & 53% identified as male.

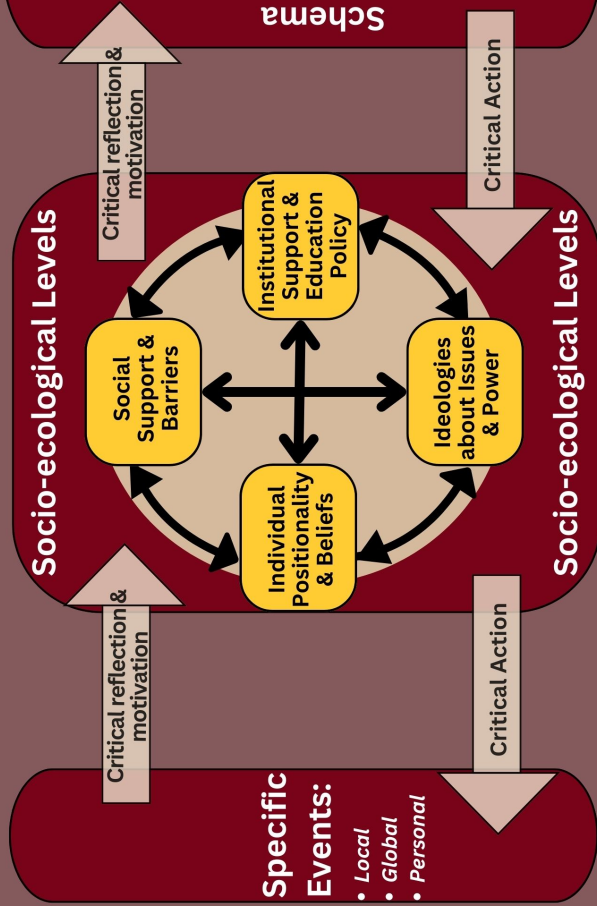
Analysis: • 1st cycle deductive, theory-driven coding using NVivo

- Coded by 1st & 2nd authors: *Asian-American woman & White Jewish-American non-binary*; Verified by 3rd author: *White-American woman*
- 2nd cycle inductive, data-driven coding for patterns of themes & codes
- Consensual discussion & interpretation of all themes through CC theory (Freire, 1970) & ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

RESULTS

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Specific Events:

- Local
- Global
- Personal

Schema	Definition	(- BIPOC students)	~Quotes~ (White Students)
Agent of Change	Actively seeking information and chances to disrupt inequity; critical analysis of complex issues	"if others can get involved outside of school to make a change, they should."	"We've had walkouts & protests organized by people in high school & middle school"
Educate Now; Act Later	High value placed on understanding complex issues. Thoughtful reflection on barriers, but may come at the expense of action.	"A lot of people don't educate themselves and identify issues; identifying something is the first step to making change so I think educating yourself is one of the biggest things you can do"	"Our jobs as minors is to be informed, be aware of the situation so that when we turn 18 we can influence politics, decide & help. But right now, our job is just to gather information"
Just a kid	Emerging understanding of large social issues, strong focus on barriers related to age, and localizes power to government and older generations	"We don't have many opportunities to be involved- like I can't donate because I'm 14."	"I can't really do anything since I'm just a kid. I would tell others differently, but they're not going to listen since I'm just a kid."
Community Push & Pull	Attuned and responsive to social pressures from family/peers either to act or to not act. May learn and become more reflective in the process of acting.	"I feel like my dad wouldn't understand, He'd be mad, that I walk out of school. He would just assume that I'm trying to skip class."	"I went to a women's rights protest w/ my sister and mom. We went to another protest with neighbors."
Disengaged	Disconnected from social issues or perceive involvement to be threatening in some way.	"I don't know. I am not really involved in it... I don't really care for this."	"I just haven't really thought about it right now"

DISCUSSION

Summary: Multiple, interacting levels of the social ecology affect students' development of CC, pointing to diverse areas for intervention & support.

- Cultivating critical consciousness has the potential to empower students (e.g., Agent of Change) in the face of complex & enduring social challenges.

Limitations: Focus group conversations overrepresent perspectives of students who were comfortable speaking up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CC DEVELOPMENT:

- Administrative and teacher support for student activism can foster opportunities for critical reflection and action.
- Curricula that encourage exploration of an individual's positionality & systemic racism can catalyze schema development by offering students opportunities to process local and global events (Dee & Penner, 2016).



Culture and Family Life Lab

REFERENCES

