What Does it Mean to be Black and Aware? A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of Black Racial Identity and Critical Consciousness

by

Channing J. Mathews

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Doctoral Committee:

       Professor Tabbye Chavous, Co-Chair
       Professor Matthew Diemer, Co-Chair
       Assistant Professor Myles Durkee
       Professor Isis Settles

Channing J. Mathews

cjmath@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4716-2299

Dedication

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Abstract

Black racial identity (i.e., the process and content of developing Black identity) and

critical consciousness (i.e., awareness, beliefs, and actions to challenge structural oppression) are

significant contributors to positive youth development. Yet, little research has empirically

examined how these two processes may intersect to shape Black youth and emerging adults'

identities as American citizens. The integration of these two developmental processes highlights

how Black youth and young adults understand themselves in a race-salient society and engage in

social change.

Paper 1 reviews and integrates Black racial identity and critical consciousness theories

highlighting how these two processes may interact. The theoretical framework posits three

testable postulates that outline associations between racial identity and critical consciousness

development. Paper 2 tested postulates presented in chapter 1 by examining how youths' racial

discrimination experiences related to their critical conciousness beliefs and whether youths'

racial identity beliefs around the importance and meaning of race moderated this relationship.

This study also tested if political efficacy mediates the relationship between critical reflection

and critical action. Five models were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) on a

national sample of Black youth and emerging adults (N=634, ages 15-25) from the Black Youth

Culture Survey. Findings indicate that more reported racial discrimination experiences are

associated with higher critical reflection (structural attributions). While racial identity beliefs

showed significant direct effects with structural attributions in ways that were aligned with the

postulates (lower public regard related to more structural attributions), I found only weak support

for the hypothesized moderation effects. Political efficacy did not mediate the association between critical reflection and critical action. Study findings suggest that racial discrimination plays a critical role in developing systems thinking in Black youth and emerging adults and that racial identity beliefs may facilitate this connection for some youth. Findings also suggest the potential utility of future research to consider age and developmental variation in the study constructs and their associations.

Paper 3 tests reciprocal relations between racial identity exploration and critical action in Black college students using a longitudinal cross lagged model over three timepoints. This study tests postulates presented in paper 1 by examining how Black college students' critical action catalyzes racial identity exploration. Further, this study tests how racial identity exploration may promote critical action, as exploration may include participation in social justice oriented activities. Student responses are drawn from the Minority College Cohort Study (MCCS), a 4-year longitudinal survey of Black and Latinx college students. Respondents who self-identified as Black (N=237) were included for this study. Four models were assessed via cross-lagged panel modeling to determine how the two processes associate during the senior year of high school through the first two years of college. Exploration and critical action at Wave 3 were assessed as mediators of Wave 1 and Wave 6 critical action and Wave 1 and Wave 6 exploration, respectively. Findings suggest that racial identity exploration and critical action are reciprocal processes for Black college students. Exploration at Wave 3 (end of freshman year) mediates of the relationship between Wave 1 critical action (senior year of high school) and Wave 6 critical action (sophomore year of college). Findings also suggest that future research should focus on alternative longitudinal methods to consider how racial identity and critical consciousness change over time.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others."-(Black Lives Matter, 2020)

"And the other piece that I would respond with is to say that if you want to see things change, you have to be a part of that change. We don't need any more armchair quarterbacks. What we need is all of those people who are reading on their phones and computers and waxing poetic about what people need to be doing, to actually be doing it."-Alicia Garza (The Black Youth Project, 2016)

Black youth navigate a system that requires them to be unapologetically Black and to combat systemic racism. Youth contend with blatant marginalization and xenophobia aimed at both Black and Latinx groups (Hope et al., 2016; Lipman, 2003; Simmons et al., 2011). In addition, youth develop heightened awareness of hypervigilant policing of Black and Brown bodies in public spaces (Stewart et al., 2009; Wu, 2014). Yet, despite a bleak social landscape, Black youth actively engage and challenge negative perceptions of Black communities through their activism. For example, youth leaders of Chicago's Black Youth Project publicized incidents of police misconduct (e.g., the death of Laquan McDonald), thereby actively resisting the criminalization of Black Chicagoans (The Black Youth Project, n.d.). Through this work, Black youth redefine the meaning and importance of Blackness for themselves rather than internalizing demonizing narratives of Black youth. This positive connection to Blackness likely motivates their activism in support of Black communities. In this work, I consider the roles of Black identity, social context, and activism, and pose the following questions: Given a social context that consistently denies their recognition as American citizens, how do Black youth construct

their racial identities? How is youths' activism connected to their racial identity beliefs and explorations of their racial identity?

Racial identity theories suggest that the meaning of Blackness is inextricably connected to Black liberation (Cross, 1991; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Scholars linking Black youth's awareness of social inequity to their overall positive development often point out that race related experiences catalyze such awareness (Cross, 1991; Spencer, 2008). These experiences prompt Black youth to understand themselves as racialized beings (Anyiwo et al., 2018b; Mathews et al., 2019; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Simultaneously, exposure to the group's history of racial marginalization, coupled with activism exposure, may also forge connections between racial identity and critical action behaviors. Modern Black social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) and #SayHerName expose the connection between the Black experience and social inequities. These movements bring attention to how society criminalizes and kills Black people. Further, these social inequities reflect the history often erased by authors of mainstream textbooks. Black families and communities often fill the gap in mainstream schooling with positive messaging and pride around one's Black identity (i.e., racial socialization) to foster youth agency in the face of anti-Blackness (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015) Yet, this disconnect between Black student schooling around race and their lived experiences leaves a critical gap for youth to forge unique understandings of what it means to be Black. Social movement organizations draw deeply upon the creativity, excitement, and liberation beliefs of Black youth to redefine what it means to be Black in America (Black Lives Matter, n.d.; Dream Defenders, 2018) In doing so, youth voices are elevated as they actively contend with issues of race, identity, and power.

Scholarly work highlights the key implications of social movements in the wake of their initial introduction to the cultural zeitgeist. Recent work focuses on youth's actions to challenge race-based social inequities (Cohen, 2010; Hope et al., 2016; Taylor, 2016.) Yet, *little empirical work tests the ways racial identity and awareness of power disparities will overlap in Black youth*. Considering the current sociopolitical context, scholars must interrogate how Black youth make sense of themselves in a paradoxically "post-racial" society (Cohen, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Black racial identity (i.e.,, the process of developing one's Black identity, as well as the content, or importance and meaning of Black youth's race-based self-concept) and critical consciousness (i.e.,, awareness of structural oppression plus the tools, beliefs, and actions developed to challenge such oppression) are significant contributors to positive youth development (Chavous et al., 2003; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2011). Yet, little research empirically examines how these two processes may interact in Black youth and emerging adults. Examining the interconnectedness of racial identity and critical consciousness could help explain how Black youth understand themselves in a race-salient society and engage in social change. In this dissertation, I draw from racial identity and critical consciousness theories to elucidate the ways racial identity and critical consciousness reciprocally inform youth's critical action.

My theoretical framework maps the overlaps of racial identity and critical consciousness theories. Emergent theory suggests racial identity critically informs youth's social analysis of inequalities, specifically in helping Black youth to recognize, interpret, and cope with experiences of racial discrimination (Anyiwo et al., 2018a). Recent empirical studies support these claims, as Black youth use identity-based social analysis to take action in the face of

school-based discrimination (Lozada et al., 2017). Hope and colleagues (2019) found that Black students who endorsed a Black Nationalist worldview (i.e., racial lens emphasizing the unique experiences of Black communities relative to other groups) and saw their Blackness as an important component of their self-concept (i.e., high racial centrality) were more likely to engage in both low and high-risk forms of activism. Aligned with current research, the final two dissertation studies empirically test overlaps between racial identity and critical consciousness, underscoring the nature of their association. Importantly, both racial identity content and process components are theorized and assessed in the throughout this dissertation. Content and process components likely work in tandem with one another as youth mature. Specifically, the process of one's racial identity development may help Black individuals come to understand what their identity means to them (Scottham et al., 2010; Wang, Douglass, & Yip, 2017; Yip, Seaton, Sellers 2006). Thus, both elements of racial identity are assessed to capture the full spectrum of Black racial identity in youth and young adults.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework examines how Black youth connect their Black identity to their activism. I examine how connections to the Black community translate into Black youth's engagement with inequitable social conditions. Black youth today grow up in a society where the slogan "Make America Great Again" has repackaged the racialized "law and order" language that defined the political zeitgeist of the 70's and 80's (Goldstein & Hall, 2017; Duvernay, 2016). Such framings resulted in the mass incarceration of thousands of Black and Brown bodies, reflecting the racist infrastructure evident in our governing institutions. As Black youth grapple with the reemergence of this racist rhetoric, they resist these narratives through critical action. Given the variety of perspectives and experiences that shape Black individuals'

connections with the Black community (Dow, 2019; Lacy, 2007), scholars must investigate how community affiliation shapes Black youth's responses to societal racism. As such, my second chapter outlines how existing theories inform scholars about how youth link their racial identities to their activism within and beyond the Black community. Two questions drive my second chapter: (1). How do racial identity and critical consciousness development interact during adolescence? (2). How do these salient processes shape other domains of Black youth's development?

Chapter two describes the reciprocal influences between racial identity and critical consciousness theories, adding nuance to the function of these processes in Black youth. I first review Black racial identity theory, focusing on process and content models that capture Black American experiences. I then highlight empirical work that demonstrates each model's relationship to positive youth outcomes and pose open questions to suggest next steps in racial identity research. Next, I review critical consciousness theory, outlining its three tenets (i.e., critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action), specifically focusing on ways critical consciousness theory informs positive outcomes for Black youth. Mirroring the racial identity review, I also raise open questions in critical consciousness development to suggest next steps in future research. I explain how integrating racial identity and critical consciousness theory is useful to examine the lived experiences of Black youth. After reviewing the literature, I introduce testable empirical postulates for future research to examine the intersections of racial identity and critical consciousness development.

Chapter 3: Racial Discrimination, Racial identity and Critical Consciousness: How Do Experiences of Racial Discrimination Catalyze the Critical Consciousness Process?

My third dissertation chapter empirically tests the relations between perceived discrimination, racial identity beliefs, and critical consciousness. Specifically, I test the following research questions: (1) Do experiences of racial discrimination predict one's level of racialized social analysis (critical reflection)? (2) Is the relationship between perceived discrimination and critical reflection moderated by Black youth's racial identity beliefs (e.g., centrality, public regard and private regard)? (3) Does political efficacy mediate the pathway between critical reflection and critical action? Although racial identity frameworks theorize racial discrimination is a central tenet to understanding Black identity, few studies test how this process unfolds after racial discrimination experiences. Some models suggest that a discriminatory experience may serve as an awakening to one's racial identity process (Cross Jr, 1991; Helms, 1990). If discrimination is an entry point for racial identity exploration, it may work similarly with the critical consciousness process. Racial discrimination may lead youth to question why such events occur, which may translate to into higher critical reflection. Such a line of inquiry may lead youth to investigate Black sociopolitical history, potentially fostering connections between experiences of racial discrimination and awareness of Black oppression. These connections may increase critical reflection, particularly as Black youth observe instances of a larger system of racism beyond their interpersonal discrimination experiences. However, racial discrimination alone is not enough to help youth make connections between their personal experiences of racism and the systemic racism that limits Black opportunity. While an accumulation of discrimination experiences may result in deeper thinking about the systemic roots of racism, exposure to programming and youth-adult partnerships that help youth think through and

articulate these connections facilitate critical thinking (Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Watts et al., 1999).

Further, though racial identity is considered a protective factor from the negative effects of discrimination (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2004; Sellers et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015), few studies have examined how racial identity serves an interpretative lens that engenders more structural attributions (i.e., higher critical reflection) when individuals experience discrimination. For example, a large body of research demonstrates that discrimination has negative implications for Black youth's well-being (Anderson et al., 2015; Sellers et al., 2006), physical health (Hope et al., 2015; Mouzon et al., 2017) and school engagement levels (Benner & Graham, 2013; Smalls et al., 2007). Studies of racial identity beliefs, particularly centrality, private regard, and public regard demonstrate how racial identity mitigates the negative effects of racial discrimination across these domains (Chavous et al., 2003; Sellers et al., 2006). Racial centrality describes how important race is to one's individual self-concept. Private regard highlights individuals' affective connection to Black people. High endorsement of centrality and private regard beliefs suggest that Black individuals derive meaning from understanding themselves as Black and from their connection to other Black people. Such positive affiliations may buffer against negative effects of discrimination by fostering higher critical reflection. As discriminatory experiences conflict with Black individuals' positive understandings of and connections to Black people, higher critical reflection may help to mitigate this dissonance. Low public regard, or the belief that others view Black people negatively, may function similarly to high centrality and private regard. As those with low public regard may anticipate discrimination given their beliefs, higher critical reflection may be a subsequent step to interpret multiple instances of discrimination.

The buffering roles of these racial identity dimensions may suggest that these individuals use a racialized lens to process the racial discrimination encounters which lend themselves to positive adjustment and reduced psychological distress. Despite a proliferation of studies examining the role of racial identity as a moderator that bolsters positive outcomes, few studies demonstrate how such lenses may help youth make structural attributions for discrimination, which may ultimately support coping practices (Lozada et al., 2017). In addition, few studies have empirically tested how racial discrimination initiates the process of critical consciousness, eventually leading to youth's critical action.

Chapter 4: Testing Reciprocal Relationships Between Racial Identity Process and Critical Action: A Cross-lagged Panel Model Analysis

Critical action is likely a salient aspect of Black college students' racial identity development, but little scholarly work explores the role of critical action in college students' racial identity exploration. Additionally, though racial identity processes are linked to a myriad of activities (e.g., participating in cultural traditions or having race-related discussions with peers and family), few studies examine if racial identity processes are associated with increased critical action. Thus, this chapter explores the directional relationship between critical action and racial identity exploration. I examine if racial identity exploration is associated with increases in critical action in Black college students. I also consider how critical action behaviors are associated with increases in racial identity exploration. In exploring both pathways, I analyze mechanisms that potentially reinforce both racial identity development and critical action for Black college students.

In addition, little work investigates racial identity exploration in Black college students, whose experiences in the college context may reinitiate racial identity processes (Harper &

Quaye, 2007). Black college students' engagement behaviors are often overlooked due to their use of non-mainstream methods, such as protest, to engage social issues (Ginwright, 2007, 2010). Despite the fact that many Black youth are civically involved in challenging racial disparities, little work investigates how such behaviors influence how they explore what it means to be Black. According to racial identity process models, racial identity exploration (i.e., the process of examining one's racial group membership) may require participation in cultural activities, such as attending performances that explore racial groups' political history in the United States (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). For Black youth, such activities may involve activism on behalf of Black communities. Theoretical and empirical work proposes that learning about one's racial group and history may motivate Black activism, suggesting potential for a reciprocal relationship between racial identity development and activism (Ginwright, 2007; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Aligned with this body of work, chapter four examines the following question: Does racial identity exploration precede critical action or does critical action occur prior to racial identity exploration?

Chapter four is another empirical test of the relationship between racial identity and critical consciousness. I use a racial identity process model to examine racial identity exploration's reciprocal relationship with critical action. Scholars theorize that racial identity exploration processes may include engagement in various cultural activities that encourage individuals to think about their racial/ethnic heritage (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). However, little empirical work explores how such activities might overlap with Black young adults' critical action. Helms' (1990) review of Nigrescence theory asserts that sociopolitical participation is one outcome of experiencing the immersion/emersion stage, the conceptual equivalent of active racial identity exploration. In an empirical test of these

theoretical assertions, Syzmanski and Lewis (2015) suggests that active exploration stages examined in Nigrescence models (i.e., immersion/emersion) is positively associated with Black emerging adults' activism. Youth's critical action may also prompt some sort of exploration, particularly if such behaviors support members of their racial group. For example, research with Asian-American youth suggests that they develop more complex understandings of ethnic-racial identity upon engagement in social justice-oriented programming (Hope et al., 2019; Suyemoto et al., 2015). My work addresses this gap with a longitudinal examination of racial identity exploration and critical action in a sample of Black college students. As the majority of research on both racial identity and critical consciousness processes focus on adolescent youth this study expands the literature by examining these processes in the transition to adulthood. Further, longitudinal perspectives show how racial identity and critical consciousness processes dynamically interact across time, unlike cross-sectional work (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Ultimately, this work demonstrates how the college transition may serve as a unique context to initiate both racial identity exploration and critical action behaviors during the transition to adulthood.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter five synthesizes the theoretical and empirical conclusions outlined in chapters 2-4. I discuss implications and future directions of the overall dissertation study, while contextualizing the limitations of the work. The goal of this dissertation is to theorize and empirically assess points of overlap between racial identity and critical consciousness development in Black youth. In doing so, I highlight racial identity and critical consciousness as interactive and integral tools for Black youth see their strengths and successes in a society that

consistently frames them as unworthy of opportunity. In doing this work, I contribute to a body

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Chapter 2: Weaving the Tapestry: How do Black Racial Identity and Critical Consciousness Process Function in the Positive Development of Black Youth?

"People have said that I am too young to have these thoughts on my own. People have said that I am a tool of some nameless adult. It's not true. My friends and I might still be eleven, and we might still be [in] elementary school, but we know. We know life isn't equal for everyone, and we know what is right and wrong. We also know that we stand in the shadow of the Capitol, and we know that we have seven short years until we, too, have the right to vote. So, I am here today to honor the words of Toni Morrison: 'If there is a book that you want to read but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it.'" -Naomi Adler, 11-year-old March for Our Lives speaker and activist. (*Naomi Wadler, 11, | Democracy Now!*, n.d.)

As the United States holds the tensions of anti-Blackness, xenophobia, and white supremacy, youth of color name and challenge these tensions through their activism. As Naomi Adler stated, youth may be uniquely positioned to identify and challenge social inequality. Youth grapple with issues of race, place, and identity by raising their voices, engaging in social protests, and discussing racial issues with peers and family. Further, youth of color are continuously exposed to racial issues as mainstream and social media capture contentious race relations and social movements. These repeated exposures inspire critical thinking and action as these youth negotiate their role and contribution to society. As youth of color lead the country in social movements their experiences position them as experts in the push for racial equity.

Black youth may be uniquely positioned to both critically think about and act against racial inequality due to their racial identity. Although a majority of youth of color are exposed to issues of race and racism throughout their lifetime, they draw strength and resilience from their Black identities (Grollman, 2012; Jones & Neblett, 2017; Seaton et al., 2008). Black racial identity—the meaning, importance, or connection one has to their racial group—is a critical

component of Black youth's development that informs how youth recognize and engage racial inequity. For example, Black youth's connection to success and struggle within Black social movements may inform the ways that youth approach social inequality (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). Further, Black youth's unique connections to the Black community may motivate youth to challenge racial prejudice and discrimination (Hotchkins, 2017). In addition to Black racial identity development, Black youth undergo critical consciousness development (i.e., one's awareness of and challenges to social inequality), another salient process in Black youth's positive development. Both racial identity and critical consciousness processes likely contribute simultaneously to Black youth's civic engagement, but few consider how these developmental processes may overlap to inform Black youth's development. As Black youth lead racialized social movements (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter, DreamDefenders), it is important to investigate how their racial identity and critical consciousness development inform the ways Black youth engage in civic life.

Examining how Black racial identity and critical consciousness work in tandem can help scholars better explain how Black youth identify, negotiate, and resist structural oppression. Investigating how these two processes intersect will better inform the strategies scholars, policymakers, and interventionists use to foster positive outcomes among Black youth. Given the variety of positive outcomes associated with both racial identity and critical consciousness development for Black youth, such as academic engagement (e.g., Chavous et al., 2003), mental health and well-being (Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014), and civic engagement (Diemer & Li, 2011b; Hope et al., 2019), scholars should investigate how these unique processes reinforce one another across time and context.

Defining Racial Identity

Definitions of racial identity reflect a transition from deficit-based to strengths-based perspectives of Black experiences. Although biologists reinforced false racial hierarchies through false narratives of genetic White racial supremacy, social scientists rejected the notion of inherent biological differences between races, arguing race as a social construction (Graves, 2004; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). However, early social construction arguments incorrectly assumed Black individuals internalize inferiority due to experiences of racial discrimination and social stigma (Allport, 1954; Myrdal, 1944). This assumption emerged from the misapplication of psychological theory's definition of self-concept as both personal (referring to stable traits situated in individuals) and group identity (referring to social identities with which an individual identifies). Though personal identity and group identity were theorized as separate constructs, scholars believed that societal perceptions of group identity informed one's personal identity (Cross, 1991). This interpretation overstates social stigma's influence on Black children's self-esteem, suggesting that Black children will inevitably develop negative self-concept due to awareness of societal racial stigma. Further, race-blind theories such as the "social looking glass" (Cooley, 1902) suggest that Black people see Whites as the model of American success, rather than members of the Black community. However, as scholars tested stigma's impact on Black children's self-esteem, they found that Black children maintain high self-esteem despite experiencing racial stigma. This finding is consistent across studies and reoriented scholars to explain how Black children maintain their self-esteem despite experiences of racial marginalization.

Yet scientists failed to examine the discrepancy between prominent theory and self-esteem outcomes for Black children. Psychologists assumed the inevitability of Black self-hatred because Black communities could never reach White success amidst inequitable social

conditions. Early racial identity research underscored these assumptions by conflating a child's ability to identify skin color (i.e., racial identification) with a child's knowledge of the social implications of race. Horwitz's (1939) wishful thinking hypothesis assumed that Black children who preferred images of White children over Black children reflected their personality (i.e., personal identification) and a racial stigma consciousness (i.e., an awareness of an inferior racial status). Horowitz assumed that Black children who identified images of White children desired Whiteness as a symbol of high social status and achievement.

However, Horowitz's research failed to consider the developmental abilities of nursery school children to assess social stigma. It is unclear that young children, regardless of racial group membership, evaluate Whiteness as "good" and Blackness as "bad" (Clark & Clark, 1939, 1950; Cross, 1991). Kenneth and Mamie Clark challenged the wishful thinking hypothesis, highlighting that Black children were more likely to choose images of Black children as they age, indicating a developmental progression that was overlooked in Horowitz's study. However, dominant racial preference method coupled with political pressure to promote a Black self-hatred hypothesis led to the burial of such findings (Cross, 1991).

Early racial preference methods such as the Show Me Test, the Coloring Test, and the Doll Test were studies of racial identification, rather than racial preference. Some items from the Show Me Test generally assessed racial preference with ambiguous results. It was unclear if racial preference items assessed children's personal affect toward Black and White dolls or if items assessed children's reflections of societal messaging around race (Clark & Clark, 1950; Cross, 1991). It is possible that Black children's interpretations of social norms reflected their personal affect. Yet, it is also possible that Black children maintained positive self-concept while simultaneously recognizing how society undervalues Black people. These hypotheses were not

explored through the Clarks' work. Subsequent empirical work examining Black youth's self-esteem suggested that Black youth did not internalize self-hatred (Cross, 1991). Yet, given theoretical misapplications that conflated youth's social and personal identities, contradictory findings were not fully explored by the empirical literature. The dominant deficit narrative outlined in the racial preference theory suppressed alternative explanations to Black youth's high self-esteem. Further, the political context surrounding the legislation of Brown vs. Board of education pushed early racial identity research to emphasize the direct connection hypothesis between social identities and personal identities. Attorneys used Clark's work and the link between social and personal identities to demonstrate how segregation was harmful to Black youth's mental health (Clark, 1950). As a consequence, the self-hatred hypothesis dominated scholarly literature. This argument was a key tool to challenge inequitable policies that limited opportunities for Black youth.

Despite multiple attempts to confirm the self-hatred hypothesis, Black children consistently reported self-esteem levels equivalent to or higher than White children (Cross, 1991). The discrepancy between self-hatred theory and empirical findings led scholars to question how Black children maintained such high levels of self-esteem despite awareness of racial stigma. Racial identity scholars shifted their methods to directly ask Black children and youth to describe their identity. These descriptions revealed that Black children saw Black adults as identity models, rather than the White communities suggested by the self-hatred hypothesis. Thus, racial identity theory shifted with these findings and incorporated the truth that Black children used Black people as their reference group. This shift in perspective transitioned racial identity research from deficit based to strengths-based narratives of Black identity development. Further, Black youth's identity descriptions emphasized that identity is not only one's personal

connection to Black people, but also an analysis of how the world evaluates Black communities. This racialized analysis remains largely unexplored within racial identity theory presenting an important opportunity to expand this line of research.

Categorizing Racial Identity: Process versus Content Models

Racial identity is defined as both the developmental process and qualitative meaning of race. It also refers to the extent to which individuals incorporate racial meaning into their self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998). Two theories, Nigrescence and the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) explore the process and content, respectively, of Black racial identity development (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998). While both represent different approaches to examining Black racial identity, taken together these theories emphasize the multifaceted nature of racial identity development across the lifespan. Further, both approaches underscore how a positive connection to and clear understanding of one's racial group leads to positive outcomes for Black communities. This positive connection is particularly important when Black individuals experience the negative impacts of racial discrimination (Becarese et al., 2015; Hope et al., 2015). These connections protect individuals in the face of discrimination, allowing them to draw strength from the resilience of Black communities (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, Umaña-Taylor, 2012, Rivas-Drake et al., 2014)

Racial Identity Process. Grounded in identity formation theory (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), process models show how individuals understand their racial self-concept over time. Black youth actively question the meaning and significance of Blackness due to how race is often salient for Black youth in school, neighborhood, and household contexts. Further, adolescence is a critical time for identity development as youth demonstrate the cognitive complexity to contend with abstract questions such as "Who am I?" (Seaton, 2010). As racial

identity is a salient component of Black youth's adolescent development, such questions may lead them to participate in various activities that help them to explore and gain clarity about their racial self-concept.

Phinney's (1989, 1991) model of ethnic identity development integrates identity formation theory with ethnic-racial identity development. While this serves as a theoretical "roadmap" to examine identity developmental similarities across ethnic groups, Phinney's model did not consider how unique contextual experiences may lead to variation in developmental processes. For Black children, that context includes the legacy of slavery and the fight for full citizenship, an experience unique to Black Americans. Given these contextual differences, scholars must consider how Black youth's developmental trajectory shifts as a result of current structural barriers related to a history of racial marginalization. Black racial identity theories incorporate the impact of structural racism as foundational components of Black identity development, highlighting the unique experiences of American Blacks.

Nigrescence theory is a Black racial identity process model that delineates the "mechanisms by which individuals explore, form, and maintain their [racial] identity" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), p. 24). Initiated by an awakening event (e.g., racial discrimination), individuals undergoing Nigrescence transition from an unexplored Black identity to a clear understanding of Blackness (Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The transition, sometimes referred to as the "Negro to Black experience"(Cross, 1991) has five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. *Pre-encounter* describes individuals who lack critical experiences to deeply reflect upon their racial identities. *Encounter* describes the moment when such a critical experience occurs, initiating the meaning making of racial identity. *Immersion/Emersion* describes individuals' active engagement with the

meaning of their racial identity. Black individuals in this stage embrace extreme pro-Black attitudes and endorse strong anti-White beliefs. *Internalization* characterizes individuals who resolve the identity conflicts of the immersion/emersion stage and accept a "balanced" view of Blackness. Individuals in this stage maintain positive views of Black people but simultaneously engage issues affecting other racial groups. Nigrescence scholars consider internalization-commitment as the healthiest and most advanced form of Black racial identity. Individuals in this stage understand what Blackness means to them and commit to the uplift of Black communities (Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Subsequent revisions of Nigrescence theory transitioned from this linear, stage-like progression of racial identity. Status models allow more flexibility for individuals to revisit various phases of Nigrescence as they encounter new race-related experiences. Parham (1989), labeled the return to other statuses at different points across the lifespan as identity recycling. Individuals may re-explore their racial identities due to new contextual encounters (e.g., attending college, participating in identity-based programming). This new exploration may lead to more complex understandings of racial meaning and self-concept. In Nigrescence, the encounter and immersion/emersion stages correspond with racial identity exploration (the process of engaging activities to understand what it means to be Black). Encounter characterizes experiences that initiate racial identity exploration, while immersion/emersion describes individuals resolving conflicts of intense anti-White and extreme pro-Black attitudes (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990). During this time of identity conflict, Black individuals likely participate in Black oriented activities, such as Afrocentric cultural events or race-based protest movements. Such activities allow for greater exposure and connection to one's cultural heritage (Helms, 1990; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). These activities may also lead

Black individuals to gain clarity about their Black identity, potentially resulting in positive self-acceptance.

The internalization/internalization-commitment phases of Nigrescence correspond with identity resolution (i.e., clarity around the meaning of Blackness and the extent to which a Black identity is meaningful to self-concept). During identity resolution, Black individuals appreciate Black culture while acknowledging mainstream culture's contribution to their identity. Resolved Black individuals form a positive Black identity and commit to Black success (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). This commitment may manifest in Black activism to challenge deficit-based narratives of Black existence.

Though Nigrescence theory delineates the developmental trajectory of racial identity beliefs, there is less focus on the content of these identity beliefs (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Yet, as the content of racial identity beliefs can vary across individuals in ways that shift racial developmental trajectories, it is important to consider the relationship between racial identity process and content in youth's adolescent development.

Racial Identity Content. Black racial identity content models focus on the meaning and significance associated with racial group membership in one's overall self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998). Grounded in social identity theory, racial identity content models suggest that self-concept relates to individuals' identification with specific social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Race is likely a salient social identity for Black Americans given the legacy of American anti-Blackness. Black individuals likely draw upon their racial identity beliefs to understand their role in a racialized society. The ways Black individuals draw upon racial identity beliefs, and their racial attachment, likely informs their actions to support Black communities.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) outlines a content model of Black racial identity and delineates four dimensions (Sellers et al., 1998). *Salience* refers to the importance of race at a given moment in time. It is linked to how Black youth understand and commit to their racial identity (Douglass et al., 2016.; Wang et al., 2017). Similarly, *centrality* describes the importance of Black identity to one's self concept but remains stable across time and context. *Ideology* describes the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that guide Black individuals' engagement with society. The MMRI outlines four ideologies—nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist—that fall along a continuum of colorblind approaches (e.g., assimilationist and humanist ideologies) and race-conscious approaches (e.g., nationalist and oppressed minority ideologies) (Sellers et al., 1998)

The MMRI defines racial regard with two subcategories: *private regard* describes one's personal feelings towards the Black community and *public regard* highlights individuals' perceptions of mainstream society's evaluation of Black populations. High private regard is associated with Black youth's numerous positive outcomes, such as academics and mental health (see Rivas-Drake, et al., 2014a,b for a review). In contrast low public regard (i.e., belief that society perceives Black people negatively) buffers against negative outcomes related to racial discrimination of Black youth. Low public regard suggests that youth anticipate racial bias and may be less vulnerable when negative racial incidents occur (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2016; Sellers et al., 2006).

Racial Identity as a Promotive and Protective Factor in Black Adolescence

During adolescence, Black youth develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of race in their lives. Such development is associated with a myriad of positive psychosocial, mental health, and academic outcomes (Rivas-Drake, 2014 a, b). For example, Zaff and

colleagues (2002) found that African American middle school students with positive connections to their racial identity were more likely to seek social support when faced with academic challenges. Black youth who positively connected to their racial group reported fewer depressive symptoms (Settles et al., 2010). Further, Black college students who explored and gained clarity regarding the role of race in their lives reported fewer depressive symptoms than students who felt unclear about their experience of race (Yip et al., 2006). Finally, Black youth who incorporate race as a central component of their self-concept and maintain strong connections to Black people experience a variety of positive academic outcomes, including greater intrinsic motivation for school (e.g., Byrd & Chavous, 2011), high GPA (e.g., Adelabu, 2008), and greater likelihood to finish high school and attend college (e.g., Chavous et al., 2008).

Empirical work also suggests that dimensions of racial identity inform the ways Black youth engage beyond classroom contexts. Harper & Quaye (2007) found that Black college men who internalized a positive racial identity used campus life leadership to provide social support to other Black college students. Subsequent work supports this finding, suggesting that college students seek out identity affirming organizations to connect with other Black students, particularly at predominately white institutions (PWI) (Chavous, 2000; Harper, 2006; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Finally, current sociopolitical issues related to the racialized experiences of Black communities may motivate student activism to cope with marginalizing experiences (Hope et al., 2016).

Defining Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is a theory based on conscientização, the process by which marginalized individuals identify, relate to, and act against social inequities in society. Paulo Freire developed conscientização, or conscientization as an instructor for Brazilian peasants

(Freire, 2000). Freire taught critical thinking skills to foster his students' critical evaluation of their social conditions. In his practice, Freire recognized that the key to shifting the power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed was to create self-awareness within the oppressed. This awareness centers an analysis of problematic social conditions and empowers the oppressed with the tools to change such conditions. The recognition of and connection to social inequity serve as the foundation to challenge such social inequities (Freire, 2000). Freire theorized that conscientization occurs through critical reflection (i.e., identification and analysis of the sources of social inequality) and critical action (i.e., behavioral engagement in social change). Freire also offered a third component, critical transitivity, as the continuum between critical reflection and action. Critical transitivity involves believing in one's individual ability to enact social change (Freire, 2000; Shudak & Avoseh, 2015). Critical transitivity is operationalized as political efficacy, a mediating dimension between critical reflection and action. Political efficacy represents the cognitive and affective transition point between reflection and action that motivates social change behaviors.

Critical reflection. Critical reflection is individuals' awareness and analysis of social inequities (Watts et al., 2011a). Critical reflection is a cognitive process that initiates subsequent dimensions of critical consciousness, political efficacy, and critical action. Critical reflection is also one of the most theorized components of critical consciousness and is most often incorporated in interventions aimed toward youth of color (Watts et al., 1999; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Youth of color must be critically aware of social issues prior to engaging social change behaviors. For example, portrayals of social movements through mainstream and social media outlets fail to depict the reflective planning required to organize unique identity groups around a common cause. However, social movements manifest from organizers deeply engaging

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in the motivation for, and their agency around, a common social issue (S. Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Roholt & Baizerman, 2019). As Black youth experience racism, Black youth are likely examining their connection to their racial group. Simultaneously, racist experiences inform the ways Black youth think about, engage, and challenge racial inequities (Anyiwo et al., 2018). However, little work connects how race-salient experiences inform systems-thinking. Further, Black youth's agency for social change may depend on if they attribute racism to individuals or to systems of oppression.

Political efficacy. Political efficacy describes an individuals' self-beliefs about their ability to address social inequity; it captures one's personal agency in social change (Beaumont, 2010; Watts et al., 2011). Empirical research demonstrates that Black youth with high political efficacy are more likely to be civically and politically active (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Hope et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2016). Additionally, political efficacy is linked to multiple forms of civic involvement such as voting and donating money for a specific cause (Diemer & Li, 2011; Moore et al., 2016). Scholars primarily examine the direct effect of political efficacy to critical action, but emerging work suggests political efficacy and critical action have a reciprocal relationship (Bañales et al., 2019). Political efficacy also bridges the gap between reflection and action. It is the intermediate step where action leads to more reflection by strengthening individual agency to create social change (Freire, 2000; Shudak & Avoseh, 2015). Thus while political efficacy may initially motivate critical action, meaningful engagement may strengthen individuals' political efficacy, particularly if such actions successfully address social issues (Christens & Dolan, 2011).

Critical Action. Critical action describes the variety of behaviors individuals engage to challenge societal inequity (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Critical action covers a range of

behaviors such as social protest, political discussions with peers, or posting about relevant issues on social media (Checkoway, 2011; Ginwright, 2007; Pancer et al., 2007; Watts et al., 2011). Regardless of the type of action, Black people use critical action to challenge systemic oppression within their communities (Gasman et al., 2015; Ginwright, 2007). Black youth's critical action may serve as a coping mechanism from recurring experiences of discrimination (Hope & Spencer, 2017).

Critical Consciousness as a Promotive and Protective Factor in Black Adolescence

Career attainment (e.g., Rapa et al., 2018), community service (e.g., (Hope & Jagers, 2014), political participation, and academic engagement (Diemer et al., 2015) are just a few positive outcomes associated with critical consciousness development. Emerging scholarship explores the relationship between critical consciousness and mental and physical health outcomes (Campbell & Macphail, 2002; Chipungu et al., 2000). Studies of Black youth's critical consciousness focuses primarily on critical consciousness' association with civic and academic outcomes (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Hope & Jagers, 2014).

Critical reflection is promotive of critical action in Black youth. Black scholars typically focus on critical reflection from a racial lens (e.g., racial social analysis, or race consciousnesses) but critical reflection occurs along multiple axes of oppression (e.g., race, gender, and social class) (Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997; Watts et al., 2011a,b; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Yet, a racialized critical reflection is an important tool for youth to make sense of (and prevent internalization of) racial discrimination experiences in their lives. Individual instances of discrimination may not immediately lead to critical thinking about structural racism if they are considered to be unique occurrences. Opportunities that help youth link their individual discrimination experiences with systemic racism may prepare youth to cope with racial

discrimination. One potential form of coping is through civic engagement or social activism (Hope & Spencer, 2017). For example, Black youth who are aware of systemic racism and experience discrimination may be more civically engaged to actively challenge inequities evident in Black communities (Hope et al., 2019; Hope & Jagers, 2014). Further, curriculum that emphasizes a positive connection to ethnic identity and racial awareness is associated with higher participation in social activism among Black youth (Thomas et al., 2008). In becoming racially aware, youth draw upon civic engagement strategies to challenge inequalities they experience across social contexts, such as schools (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Thomas et al., 2008).

O'Connor (1997) suggests that Black youth use their racial awareness to persist in school, using academic success as an act of resistance. Carter's (2008) work on critical racial consciousness expands upon the education-as-resistance concept by specifically highlighting the role of racial identity and critical race consciousness in student achievement outcomes. Emerging empirical work focuses on other components of critical consciousness associated with academic outcomes for Black youth, such as critical action. First year high school students engaged in critical action showed higher SAT scores and GPA than those who were not engaged in such activities by high school completion (Seider et al., 2020). These emerging findings suggest that critical action promotes academic engagement among Black youth. Given the opportunity gap that Black youth face as they advance through secondary and post-secondary education, it is important to document the tools that youth use to curate their success in spite of academic barriers (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012).

Integrating Black Racial Identity and Critical Consciousness: Bridging Gaps and Making Connections

As demonstrated by the above review, it is likely that Black youth's racial identity and critical consciousness development interrelate. The following sections present examples of how such relations between Black racial identity and critical consciousness might operate (see Figure 2.1 for an overview). Within these sections, I draw from the above review to propose various claims for researchers to bridge the gap between racial identity and critical consciousness research. The connections between racial identity and critical consciousness are not limited to the claims I propose. This work is a generative space for future work, as little work to date has explicitly considered the integration of these two concepts. I begin by examining how Black youth's race salient experiences (e.g., discrimination and cultural socialization) may lead to critical reflection and how that relationship strengthens through racial identity exploration (e.g., pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion as described in Nigrescence) (Postulate 1). I continue by examining how racial identity resolution stages (e.g., internalization/internalization-commitment) lead to Black youth's critical action, specifically when their identities are connected to the politicized history of American Blacks (Postulate 2). Finally, I highlight how racial group perceptions connect to Black youths' beliefs about social change (Postulate 3). Following the presentation of these postulates, I suggest opportunities for future work. Such work should consider how other social identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality, play a role in how racial identity and critical consciousness work in tandem to support the positive development of Black youth. Scholarly attention to overlapping social identities suggests that an intersectional approach, which is critical to capture the ways youth authentically experience the world.

Bridging Racial Identity Exploration with Critical Reflection

Postulate 1: Black youth's salient race-based experiences (e.g., discrimination or cultural socialization) may predict critical reflection, and these relationships are likely strengthened by youth's level of racial identity exploration. (See Figure 2.2).

Black youth who encounter interpersonal racial discrimination may engage in critical reflection by making structural attributions to explain the roots of this behavior. Though interpersonal discrimination may not immediately lead to youth's awareness of structural racism, various factors (e.g., peers, engagement in social justice programming, youth-adult partnerships) influence the ways youth think about the link between individual and institutional discrimination. Black youth report higher levels of perceived discrimination when compared to other youth of color, and this discrimination relates to negative outcomes across numerous domains including well-being (Seaton et al., 2008), academic motivation (Thomas et al., 2009), problem behaviors (Martin et al., 2011), and overall socioemotional health (Assari et al., 2017). While some youth may attribute these discriminatory forces to individual perpetrators, some may also attribute their experiences to structural forces, particularly with respect to interactions with police and the health care system (Cohen, 2010). Such external attributions can be protective of self-concept and well-being especially under conditions of threat (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998; Hunter, Stringer, & Watson, 1992; Major, Kaiser, McCoy, 2003). For example, Black youth who experience negative interactions with the police may extend this thinking to a larger system of racism. As youth accumulate shared experiences of negative police interactions (through discussions with peers or family), youth develop a general mistrust of the police force as an institution. These shared experiences help youth to make connections between their individual police interactions and a larger system of police surveillance in Black communities (Fine et al.,

2003; Payne et al., 2017). Black youth may also make connections between personal

discrimination and larger social systems through their daily experiences in schools (Hope &

Bañales, 2019). As these experiences occur across time and context, youth may realize that their

experiences are a part of the collective experience of Black communities (Seaton et al., 2009;

Stewart et al., 2009). Black youth who attribute their discriminatory experiences to structural

factors, such as government institutions, rather than individual behaviors may question why such

institutions work against members of their racial group. Additionally, racial discrimination may

catalyze Black youth's exploration of racial identity, which may help youth understand and cope

with such negative experiences (Neville & Cross, 2017).

Racial socialization helps Black youth to understand and cope with discrimination.

Further, racial socialization messages may help Black youth to make connections between

individual discrimination experiences and a larger system of institutional discrimination. For

example, preparation for bias messages (i.e., racial or messages used to foster awareness among

Black youth about the reality of inequality) can help you develop systemic thinking about race

(Hughes et al., 2006). As youth discuss race and discrimination with peers and family, they form

the racialized lens that informs the ways they interpret race-related events. Through racial

socialization, Black youth develop racial toolkits that help them to recognize and cope with

discrimination. Harper (2013) found that same-race peer racial socialization helped Black college

students process racist events and develop various strategies to combat racial distress.

Participants felt supported to cope with racist events and were more likely to share racial coping

strategies with future students attending a PWI (Harper, 2013).

However, negative race-based experiences are not the sole entry point for Black youth's

critical reflection. On the contrary, continuous exposure to positive cultural socialization

experiences (i.e., positive messages associated with one's racial group such as cultural traditions and expressions of racial pride) may also lead Black youth to think about systemic forces that undermine Black brilliance and social mobility. Cultural socialization messages emphasize critical engagement with one's historical legacy. Such engagement likely includes discussions of Black resilience in the struggle for full citizenship, fostering a sense of racial pride (Evans et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2006). Many African American parents emphasize racial pride through exposure to Black art and literature. This exposure directly highlights the cultural achievements of Black people, demystifying abstract discussions or concepts of racial pride (Hughes et al., 2009). As one of the most frequent racial socialization messages transmitted by Black parents, cultural socialization promotes positive racial identity and critical thinking around the meaning of Blackness (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Rivas-Drake et al., 2008, 2009; Stevenson, 1995). Such critical thinking may lead to youth questioning how systemic forces limit the social and economic mobility of Black communities. In doing this work, youth equip themselves with tools to challenge racism while simultaneously gaining deeper insight into their racial identity (Hughes et al., 2009; Joseph & Hunter, 2011).

Recent work explores how positive racial socialization may catalyze youth's critical reflection development (Anyiwo et al., 2018). Anyiwo and colleagues (2018) proposed that factors such as discrimination, racial socialization, and racial identity could all contribute to Black youth's social analysis. Examining these connections, Bañales and colleagues (2019) found that Black adolescents who received both preparation for bias and racial pride messages had more structural attributions (i.e., higher critical reflection) across adolescence. As Black youth grapple with critical questions related to their racial experiences, they may deeply engage with the meaning of race through racial exploration. Such exploration likely prompts Black

youth to build connections between their individual racial experiences and the broader ways that race shapes the life outcomes of the Black community.

In Nigrescence theory, racial identity exploration is defined by the immersion/emersion stage, which describes the most active engagement with the meaning and significance of one's Blackness. Black individuals experiencing exploration actively contend with their feelings about members of the Black community, and the Black community's relationship to mainstream society (Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). As youth examine their relationships to Black and White communities, critical questions about the racial status quo (e.g., Why are Black people treated differently than people of other races?) encourage racial exploration. As youth question the meaning of Blackness and where Black people fall on the racial hierarchy, there is an active shift in their worldview. As youth have more experiences with race, they may use the lessons learned from their racial exploration to navigate daily racial events (Cross, 2012; Cross et al., 2017).

Bridging Racial Identity Resolution with Critical Action

Postulate 2: High levels of racial identity resolution (e.g., internalization, internalization-commitment) may lead to more critical action.

Racial identity resolution, or personal clarity around the meaning and role of Black identity, likely plays an integral role in youth's critical action. Racial identity resolution represents internalization or internalization commitment in Nigrescence theory. Internalization is the acceptance of positive Black identity and may be a central factor in Black youth's involvement with Black or mainstream communities (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Importantly, internalization incorporates a positive connection to the Black community as a required step to reach racial identity resolution. This positive connection to the Black community distinguishes

internalization from general conceptualizations of resolution that emphasize that clarity around one's social identity group, and can include positive, negative, or neutral connections to the social identity (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1991). This distinction is important to examine critical action in Black youth because it emphasizes that those who find a positive connection to their racial group will be more likely to engage in critical action compared with those who have neutral or negative affect towards Black people.

During internalization, Black youth engage their rich cultural history, fostering links between Black marginalization and social movement strategies. In a strengths-based school intervention for Black students, Thomas and colleagues (2008) used experiential learning techniques to facilitate Black students' connections between Black activists' historical narratives and present day Black social movements. By linking historical marginalization to present-day engagement, students encountered a variety of strategies to challenge racial oppression. In addition, students applied these acquired strategies to support Black communities through civic engagement. Culturally relevant programs geared for positive development of Black youth teach themes of pride and resilience through African-American history. This emphasis on cultural pride through critical reflection fosters a strengths based clarity about one's Blackness and encourages future sociopolitical activism (Jones & Neblett, 2017; Thomas et al., 2008).

Another useful historical lens to connect identity resolution and critical action is an analysis of Black activism during the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s characterizes the "push and pull" between social protest and policy. Black communities' protests bring public attention to issues of race, racism, and segregation, while simultaneously pressuring lawmakers to examine how policies reinforce structural inequality (Rogers, 2012; King, Bentele, & Soule, 2007). Modern day narratives of Black identity often connect the

sociopolitical challenges of Black communities to the meaning of Blackness. Black identity is partially defined by overcoming challenges through active political resistance. If an internalized identity connects to a politicized history of Black people (e.g., a deep engagement with the political history and social movement actions of the group), then it is likely that Blackness represents a politicized identity. For those who consider political or civic engagement as a central part of Black identity, participating in social activism may naturally follow.

For example, in a 2008 meta-analysis, van Zomeren and colleagues found that individuals who identified with a social movement (i.e., politicized identity) were more likely to be involved in collective action. Ginwright's (2007) work on Black youth activism emphasizes how Oakland's history of Black political organizing—shared through intergenerational storytelling in community organizations—is deeply connected to issues that Black youth engage in modern day, particularly around police misconduct. Oakland's Black youth felt empowered to reframe deficit narratives of themselves, rejecting the notion that they are a problem to be fixed (Ginwright, 2007). Active engagement with Black history may motivate Black youth to engage in action on behalf of Black communities. For Black youth who have high racial identity resolution, participating in Black social activism may be an expression of their group identity(Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002). Black activism may in turn reinforce Black youth's identity resolution, creating a reciprocal relationship between racial identity resolution and critical action.

Bridging Racial Identity Content with Political Efficacy: The Potential Role of Regard
Postulate 3: 3A) Black youth with high levels of private regard will demonstrate more political efficacy towards issues affecting Black people. 3B) Black youth with low public regard will demonstrate higher critical reflection, which will, in turn, lead to higher political efficacy.

Black youth's private regard may foster their political efficacy in the face of racial oppression. Youth with high private regard feel a strong sense of belonging and pride in the Black community. Such pride may be associated with an awareness of Black racial oppression; some youth find racial pride in the narrative of Black , while others find pride through positive relationships within Black communities (Cross, 1991; Gurin & Epps, 1975). Regardless of the source of Black private regard, encounters with racial oppression will lead Black youth with high private regard to confront the discrepancy between their positive connection to the Black community and the existence of racial oppression. Youth with high private regard may foster beliefs that challenge such social conditions to protect their positive connection to Black people (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998; Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003). Positive connectedness coupled with the threat of anti-Black racism fosters social change beliefs. Black youth who are aware of the legacy of Black resistance may emphasize this positive connection, reinforcing a drive for social change. These youth are likely driven by the ideals of racial uplift to challenge Black racial oppression. The tension between racial oppression and a positive connection to the racial group is the space where political efficacy begins. It is within this space that youth contend with the discrepancy between their positive feelings and the oppression they experience. In contrast, those with low private regard may not endorse strong political efficacy regarding issues related to the Black community because they have less positive affect towards Black people. Those who have negative or neutral feelings towards the Black community may be less invested in positive outcomes or relevant social issues for the Black community. Interest in and knowledge relevant social issues is a well-documented factor that fosters political efficacy (Beaumont, 2010, 2011; Levy, 2013). If a lack of positive affect fosters disinterest in Black social issues, it is unlikely

that those with low private regard will develop political efficacy on behalf of Black communities.

Social identity theory states that social identity group members feel a deeper connection to their group under experiences of threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). For Black individuals, the shared experience of racial oppression is a salient threat embedded within social and governing institutions. Deeper racial connectedness may protect Black youth against the consequences of racial oppression, as youth use their connections to oppose false racial narratives. In seeking connection with one another, Black communities create counternarratives to mainstream societal messaging that emphasizes Black inferiority.

Literature focused on Black consciousness development supports the connection between private regard and political efficacy. Gurin & Epps (1975) and Shingles (1981) suggest that Black people's awareness of collective racial oppression leads to systemic attributions of blame for Black social conditions. For Black youth, awareness of collective racial oppression may be associated with more positive feelings toward the racial group (Chapman-Hillard & Adams-Bass 2016). Awareness and pride in Black youth may foster their political efficacy as they are exposed to their legacy of Black activism and transformative justice. Further, this systemic thinking and positive affect stands in direct contrast with the victim-blaming narratives commonly used to explain inequitable conditions among Black communities. In this transfer of blame, Black political efficacy can protect positive connections to the Black community, suggesting that the private regard and political efficacy may reinforce one another in Black youth.

Black youth's public regard, or their perceptions of how society evaluates Black communities, might also promote political efficacy through critical reflection. Conceptually, public regard is a potential entry point for critical reflection on race. Critical reflection requires

that individuals are both aware of social inequity and critically analyze the roots of such inequity. Public regard requires an analysis of how society positively or negatively evaluates Black people. Black youth who believe society maintains a negative racial perception of Blacks may question the roots of such perceptions, fostering high critical reflection. For example, Carter (2008) found that high achieving Black students at a predominately White school link negative stereotypes of Black intellectual achievement to historical barriers to Black achievement in the struggle for equal citizenship. Higher critical reflection may translate into higher political efficacy due to awareness of the causes and mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequity. Being unaware of the sources of inequity may lead to self-blame that stifles the growth of political efficacy. The similarity between critical reflection and public regard suggests these may function in similar ways in relation to political efficacy. Aligned with critical consciousness theory that outlines high critical reflection (i.e., greater awareness of structural inequity) is associated with high political efficacy, I suggest that low public regard (i.e., greater awareness of racial stigma or negative views of one's racial group) will also promote political efficacy in Black youth.

Low public regard likely works in tandem with private regard to promote Black youth's political efficacy. Whereas private regard protects individuals' positive connection to Blackness in situations of racial threat, public regard considers individuals' awareness of broader societal perspectives of Black people. For Black youth with low public regard, (i.e., they believe society perceives Black people negatively) such awareness may prepare them for future encounters with racial oppression.

This awareness, coupled high private regard, may prevent the internalization of negative racial messages Black youth receive (e.g., interpersonal or school-based discrimination, portrayal of Blacks in the media). Similar to the relationship between critical reflection and political

efficacy, Black youth's awareness of racial inequity may foster stronger beliefs in their capabilities to impact social change. Such beliefs (i.e., high political efficacy) help combat negative societal messages and prepare youth to act against inequitable social conditions.

Public regard literature related to academic motivation contextualizes how the association between political efficacy and public regard may unfold. Low public regard is associated with positive academic self-efficacy among African American youth (Carter, 2008 a, b). Although academic and political self-efficacy are unique psychological processes, youth of color may draw upon their academic efficacy beliefs to resist negative race-related experiences in educational contexts (Carter, 2008 a,b). Members of stigmatized groups who develop positive educational and sociopolitical efficacy may be more motivated to create positive change in their communities (Oyserman et al., 2001; Watts et al., 1999). Black youth who feel academically efficacious combat racial stigma about Black intellectual abilities. Simultaneously these youth may develop a more critical stance of why such negative stereotypes exist (Carter, 2008a; McGee & Martin, 2011).

Considerations for Developing an Integrative Research Agenda

In addition to the associations discussed above, other identity dimensions may inform different aspects of critical consciousness development. Levels of centrality among Black youth likely play an important role in their critical action on behalf of the Black community. Black youth who define race as central to their self-concept (i.e., high racial centrality) may be more motivated to protect positive representations of their racial group. When negative racial events occur, high racial central youth may use social movement tools to make visible racial inequities that maintain deficit perceptions of Black communities. In turn, Black youth engaged in social action may reinforce their racial centrality. Identity formation and social movement scholars

demonstrate how collective identity is often reinforced through social movement action. Group members translate their shared values into motivation for community change. In addition, individuals engaging social action can undergo racial exploration as a consequence of their participation. For example, Black youth who are building social movement strategies must refer to past social movements, such as the civil rights movement, to determine what strategies were effective in the fight for equal citizenship. Racial exploration may foster racial centrality through Black youth's engagement with their historical legacy (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). As youth reconnect with the resilience and resistance of their ancestors, race may become a more central lens for Black youth to navigate their social contexts.

Similar to racial centrality, Black racial ideologies are an important link between identity and critical action. Racial ideologies reflect individuals' beliefs of how Black people should engage in society. They are grounded in Black communities' approaches to Black liberation and collective resistance. Given these intellectual roots, ideology is likely associated with Black critical action behaviors and is linked to civic engagement beliefs (Sellers et al. 1998; Hope et al. 2019; White-Johnson, 2012). White-Johnson (2012) found that both nationalist and assimilationist ideologies were positively associated with prosocial attitudes among Black college students. Hope and colleagues (2019) also found that nationalist ideology was associated with orientation towards both low-risk and high-risk activism among college students. Links between racial ideology and activism orientations within Black youth may play a role in youth's activism behaviors. Yet scholars must re-center the role of critical action in positive Black youth development to investigate direct links between action and racial identity beliefs.

Racial identity is also just one social identity that may intersect with critical consciousness. Different identity intersections, such as race, gender, and sexuality, might shift

how ethnic-racial identity and critical consciousness processes influence one another. Intersectional perspectives focus on marginalizing systems of oppression rather than individual or group marginalization (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). For example, extant research suggests that Black boys and Black girls receive different socialization messages about dealing with racial conflict and thus may have unique experiences within the same context (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Though Black parents instill messages of independence, achievement, and competence in Black girls, fear of greater racial discrimination and physical harm against Black boys may lead to overprotective parenting behaviors. Such parenting may limit Black boys' ability to independently cope with racism, which stands in contrast to girls' ability to self-soothe (Hill, 2001). Black queer individuals may use their positive connection to Blackness and their awareness of sexuality-based stigma in the Black community to inform their commitment to Black activism (Moore et al., 2016; Pender et al., 2019; Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015). Scholars investigating the experiences of Black youth through lenses of gender and sexuality have an opportunity to examine how the systems of racism, sexism, and homophobia operate to shape the lived experiences of Black youth (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). Further, scholars must explore how privilege and oppression (e.g., being Black but identifying with high social class status) operate simultaneously to create unique experiences among marginalized youth. This intersectional perspective may translate into different types of oppression awareness and subsequent Black activism (Curtin et al., 2016).

As scholars explore interlocking systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and classism), it is critical to avoid creating "margins within margins" that undermine solidarity across identities (Greenwood, 2011; p. 121). Scholars should approach intersectional perspectives of racial identity and critical consciousness by examining how

awareness of one form of oppression can translate into awareness—and eventual activism—with respect to other forms of oppression. For example, Greenwood (2008) found that individuals enriched by intergroup differences, and who understood the interconnection between multiple social identities, had more affective connection to diverse social issues. These individuals also demonstrated higher levels of activism towards a variety of social issues, even when they did not directly impact their most salient identities. Such an analysis has implications for sustained coalition building across multiple social identities, debunking the narrative that intersectional perspectives divide rather than unite various groups.

Conclusion

Black youth actively explore their racial identities through exposure to racial inequities in their academic, physical, and sociopolitical lives. From campus protests such as #BBUM (#Being Black at the University of Michigan) and #ITooAmHarvard, to global movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, Black youth forge their understandings of Blackness in racially charged social contexts. Yet, despite a long history of social movements that shape Black identity, little work focuses on the empirical connections between racial identity and critical consciousness. This work addresses this gap by posing foundational theoretical postulates for scholars to consider links between racial identity and critical consciousness. Future work should validate these postulates to form a more holistic theories around the positive development of Black youth. As Black youth lead social movements to eliminate racial inequity, it is important for scholars to explore how these links emphasize or undermine positive development in Black youth.

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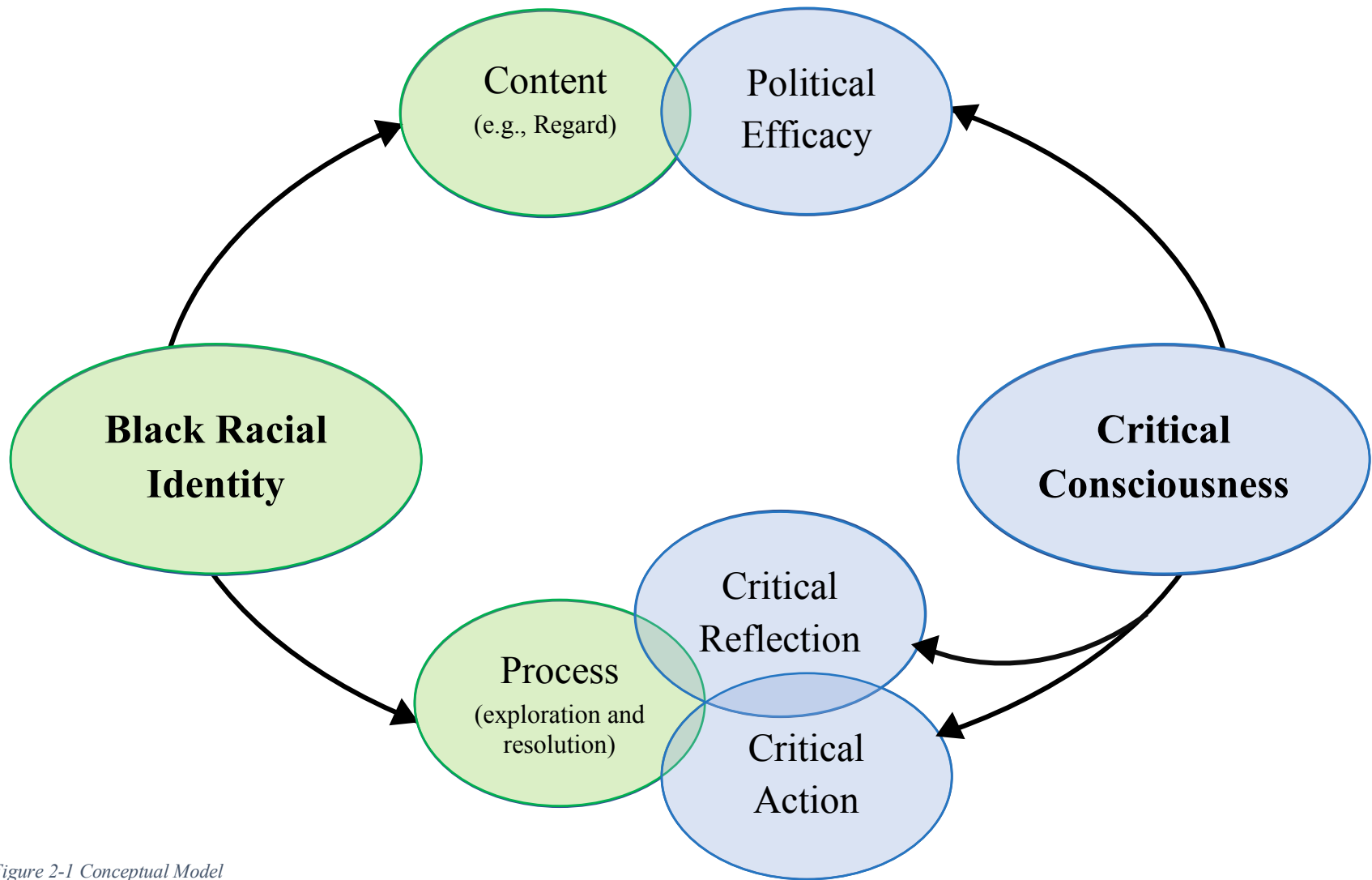
Figure 2-1 Conceptual Model
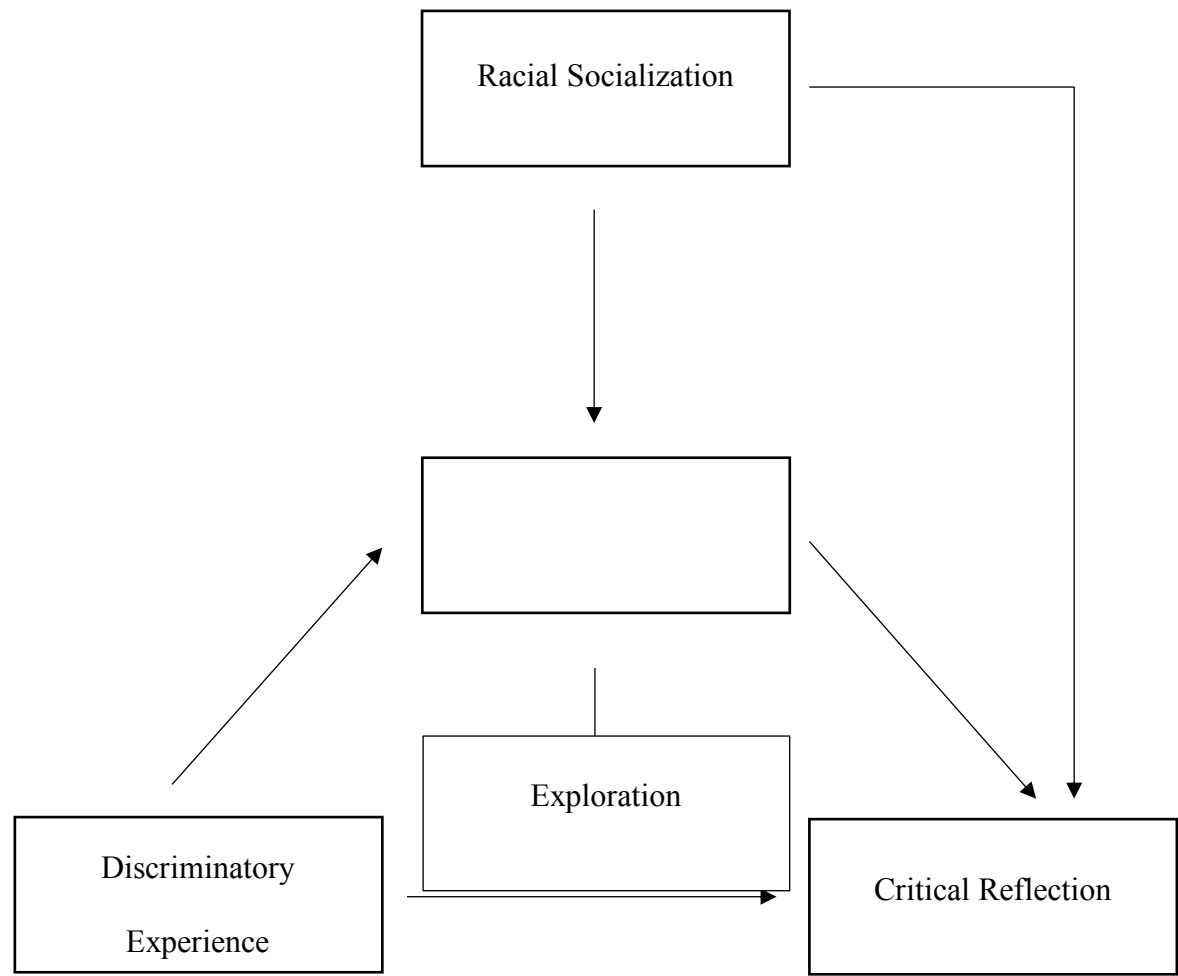
Figure 2-2 Postulate 1

68

Figure 2-3 Postulate 2

Private Regard

Political Efficacy

Political Issues Affecting Ethnic-Racial Group
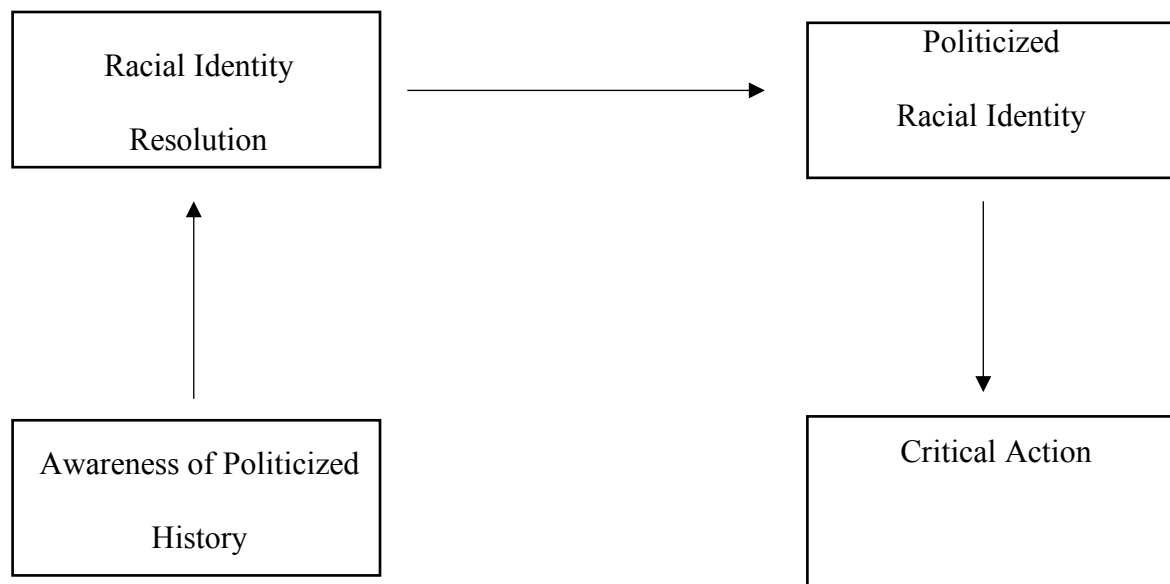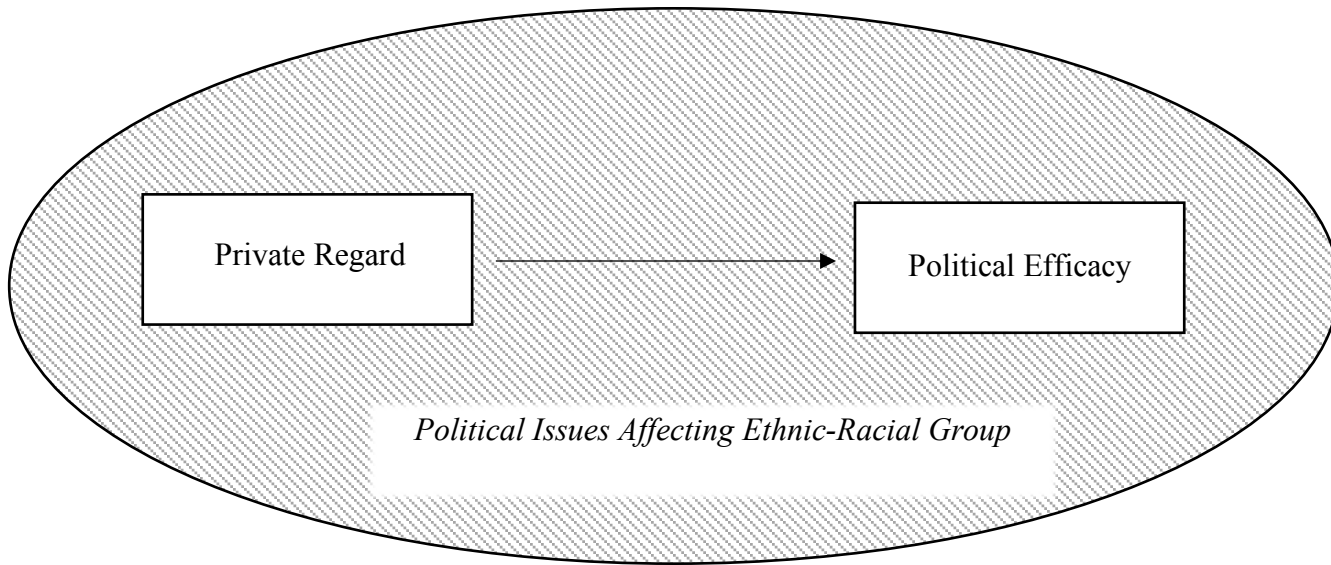
Figure 2-4 Postulate 3A
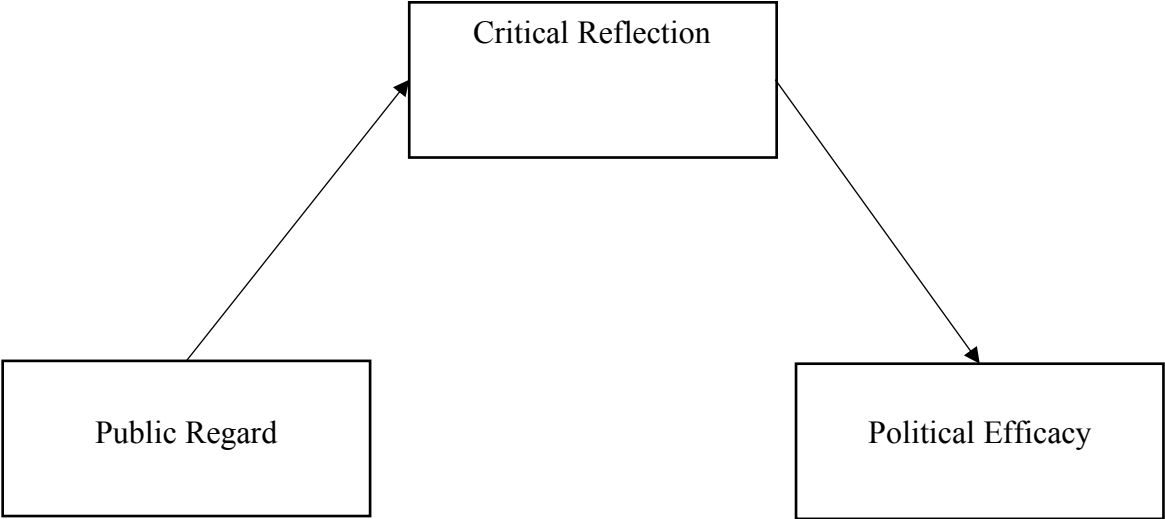
Figure 2-5 Postulate 3B

Chapter 3: Racial Discrimination, Racial identity and Critical Consciousness: How Do Experiences of Racial Discrimination Catalyze the Critical Consciousness process?

Critical consciousness is the process through which Black youth develop awareness and self-efficacy beliefs to challenge social inequality, particularly racial oppression (Watts et al., 1999). A majority of critical consciousness studies center critical reflection at the expense of examining the full critical consciousness pathway (i.e., critical reflection→ political efficacy→ critical action) (Jemal, 2017; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Additionally, few scholars explore potential antecedents for the critical consciousness pathway. Racial discrimination, or behaviors that devalue an individual's worth based on their racial group membership (Benner et al., 2018), may serve as an entry point for Black youth's critical consciousnesses. As Black youth analyze discriminatory experiences, they may ask questions such as "What does this mean?" or "Why did this happen to me?" Through conversation and shared experiences with Black peers, Black youth may see discriminatory events as representations of a system of racism rather than versus individual prejudice (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Yet, not all youth collaboratively process discriminatory experiences to make a larger critique of social inequality. In such cases, other factors, such as racial identity beliefs, may play a role in facilitating the critical consciousness process.

Critical consciousness interventions focused on Black youth outline strategies to navigate racialized environments through critical reflection. Watts and colleagues (1999) Young Warriors Program, Ginwright's work with the Young Black Leaders Program (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002) and Sisters and Brothers United, a youth organizing group located in the Bronx in New

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York City (Fox et al., 2010) are examples of youth programs that challenge youth to critically think through and change the social conditions of their communities. Such programs capitalize on the active cognitive skill development that allow for nuanced interpretations of race-based experiences during adolescence. For example, Hope and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that Black youth, given the opportunity to think about how race operates in school, connected their individual discriminatory experiences to policies that maintain inequitable school environments. Such external attributions can be adaptive for Black youth's school persistence. Black youth who make external attributions for discrimination may be less likely to internalize messages of lower self-worth associated with discrimination, protecting them in situations of social threat (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998, Dietz-Uhler, 1999; Major & Eliezer, 2011).

Other aspects of Black youth's development may also play a protective role in the face of discrimination. Black youth's connection to their racial group (i.e., racial identity), may inform how youth analyze racial discrimination. Historical context often informs how Black youth connect to and understand Blackness. Black historical memory is captured by the collective efforts of the Black community to challenge racial discrimination (e.g., Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, #BlackLivesMatter movement). Black youth who feel connected to and knowledgeable about their racial group may use this historical context to connect individual acts of discrimination to systemic racism. Way and colleagues (2008) demonstrate that Black youth draw upon the Black's post slavery successes (e.g., Civil Rights Movement), as a source of racial pride. Racial identity research frequently demonstrates how Black youth's racial pride allows them to challenge negative stereotypes of Black intelligence. These youth use their academic success as resistance to racial barriers in education (Andrews, 2008; Nasir, 2011; O'Connor, 1997). Awareness of Black resistance also extends beyond the educational context, as critical

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Black youth are more likely to recognize and reject stereotypical media portrayals of Black's people, as reflections of reality (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Such findings demonstrate the significance of critical consciousness as a tool for Black youth to navigate a highly racialized existence.

This study explores the associations between racial discrimination, racial identity, and critical consciousness. I examine how racial discrimination may initiate critical consciousness development in Black youth. Using racial identity as a moderator, I also assess how Black youth's racial identity beliefs and awareness of Black racial stigma may strengthen the association between racial discrimination and critical consciousness. This study addresses several important gaps in the literature. First, this study uses an all-Black sample to emphasize the unique experiences of Black populations. Quantitative assessments of critical consciousness often draw upon pooled ethnic samples, potentially masking how critical consciousness functions differently in Black youth (Herberle, Rapa, & Farago, 2020). First, though several precursors to critical consciousness have been theorized, few works test this empirical pathway (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). Further, of the few studies that assess the precursors of critical consciousness, none explicitly test how racial discrimination catalyzes this pathway in Black youth (Diemer et al., 2006; Neville & Cross, 2017). Studies that demonstrate how racial discrimination influences Black individuals' racial identity development (which may include an awareness of racial inequity within society) provide important clues as to how racial identity supports youth in processing experiences of racial discrimination (Neville & Cross, 2017). This process may involve Black youth linking individual discrimination experiences to a larger system of race and racism that permeates modern society. Finally, this study assesses the role of Black racial identity beliefs in analyzing racial discrimination experiences. In doing so, this

study addresses a call for an integration of racial identity and critical consciousness processes that more holistically inform how youth interpret race related experiences (Mathews et al., 2019).

Linking Racial Discrimination and Critical Consciousness: The Roles of Attribution and Racial Identity Theories

Although several precursors to Black youth's critical consciousness development exist, little work considers how racial discrimination catalyzes Black youth's critical consciousness processes, particularly associated with critical reflection (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Diemer et al., 2016; Diemer & Li, 2011b). Racial discrimination is a multidimensional construct defined as the blatant or subtle process by which the actions and beliefs of the dominant racial group result in negative outcomes for minority racial-ethnic groups (Feagin, 1991; Seaton et al., 2009). Scholars operationalize discrimination as interpersonal, but also as cultural, collective, and institutional actions that perpetuate the inequitable experiences of minority racial groups (Utsey et al., 2000). Regardless of the source, racial discrimination is a salient factor in the lives of black youth (Chavous et al., 2008; Hope et al., 2015b).

Extant research suggests that factors such as parental racial socialization, parent and peer sociopolitical support, and school contextual factors (e.g., open classroom climate, critical teaching pedagogy) are associated with the critical consciousness pathway for youth of color (Anyiwo et al., 2018, Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Yet, few of these studies explore how racial discrimination may initiate critical consciousness processes (Diemer et al., 2006; Diemer & Li, 2011; Godfrey et al., 2019). Diemer and colleagues (2006) found that youth who perceived peer and parental support to challenge racism were more likely to endorse higher levels of critical reflection (e.g., more structural attributions). Further, this study indicated that youth perceived the strongest support for challenging racism over other forms of marginalization (e.g., sexism).

While these findings provide perspective for racial salience in critical consciousness development, they fail to consider how individual experiences of racial discrimination can lead to youths' questioning why such events occur.

Attribution and racial identity theories help explain the connection between racial discrimination and critical consciousness. These theories examine individual, group, and systemic factors that influence individuals' responses to racial discrimination. Attribution theory explains how individuals use information to interpret social events. Individuals judge the behaviors of others based on both the environment (i.e., situational attribution) and personality traits of the individual in question (i.e., dispositional attribution). The fundamental attribution error occurs when individuals quickly make dispositional attributions without considering the situational factors that influence the event (Berry & Frederickson, 2015). This bias is particularly salient when individuals describe the behaviors of others versus their own behaviors. Aligned with the theory, youth likely attribute the blame for a discriminatory experience to individuals, rather than to a larger system of structural racism. In a recent study, Mexican and Latinx young men who experienced police violence were less likely to make system-based attributions for the over-policing of their communities; these men justified the policing due to gang violence among members of the Mexican and Latinx communities. Mexican and Latinx men who had significant exposure to White communities blamed a race-based system of inequality, but these men believed they could conquer such barriers through their individual achievement (Rendón et al., 2018). Thus, the question remains as to how Black youth make links between individual events and systems of marginalization.

Attribution theory describes how individuals explain events through situational or dispositional associations of blame. Yet, attribution theory does not consider how group membership may factor into how individuals assign blame for discrimination. Racial group membership is likely a relevant affiliation for Black youth, as their racial beliefs provide a lens to navigate their daily

social contexts. As a consequence, beliefs about one's racial group membership likely play an integral role in the interpretation of discriminatory events. Racial discrimination occurs in part due to negative perceptions of the Black community, rather than the characteristics of one Black individual. Black individuals aware of these negative perceptions may make individual or situational attributions, but could be less likely to self-blame for the incident. Such individuals may be more equipped to reject societal definitions of Black people, given society's history of racial injustice (Cross, 1991; Gurin & Epps, 1975). Social identity theory states that individuals need positive affiliations with their social identity groups, regardless of if such affiliation is voluntary. Social identity group members will work to maintain a positive affiliation, especially when the positive image is threatened (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Discrimination threatens Black youth's efforts to maintain a positive racial self-concept. Thus, Black youth may draw upon their racial identity beliefs to protect their self-concept while analyzing discrimination events. Black youth with a positive connection to Black people may interpret discrimination experiences beyond the traits of the perpetrator. Instead these youth may see multiple instances of discrimination connected to a larger narrative of seeing Black people as less than. Thus, Black youth's level of connection to their Blackness may influence whether they make structural or individual attributions to discriminatory experiences.

Drawing from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers et al., 1998), this work focuses on how Black youth's connection to and understanding of Blackness may influence the relationship between racial discrimination and critical consciousness. The MMRI includes four dimensions including *salience* (i.e., the relevance of race in a given moment or situation), *centrality* (i.e., the importance of race to an individual's overall self-concept), *regard* (i.e., *private regard*, an individual's personal connection to their racial group and *public regard*, an individual's perceptions of how society views their racial group) and *ideology* (i.e.,

one's racial worldview that informs how individuals believe members of their race should engage with society at large). While all of these dimensions inform central aspects of Black identity, two dimensions—centrality and regard—drive the majority of studies that link racial identity, racial discrimination, and positive outcomes including academic adjustment and mental and physical health (Mirpuri et al., 2019). Centrality and regard likely contribute to how Black youth interpret discriminatory experiences. Extant research shows that affiliation with a specific racial-ethnic group fosters positive group esteem in the presence (or threat) of a dominant outgroup (Branscombe et al., 1999a, b; Dawson, 1995; Masuoka, 2006). African Americans who endorse high racial pride often draw upon the Black community's historical experiences as the source of their racial pride (Chavous et al., 2003; Sellers et al., 1998; Way et al., 2008). Black youth who have a positive connection to members of their racial group and who perceive racial discrimination may be more likely to connect individual discriminatory experience to systemic racism, given the history of Black American enslavement and civil rights activism.

Racial identity theory also underscores the role of racialized experiences as the entry point for Black identity awareness (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Neville & Cross, 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). Nigrescence, a racial identity theory that describes the process of knowing and internalizing a Black identity, underscores how discrimination catalyzes racial identity exploration (Cross, 1991; Neville & Cross, 2017). However, Nigrescence theory not only describes the process of internalizing a positive Black identity, but it also highlights the content of such an identity. According to the model, a positive Black identity requires a strong, positive connection to one's racial group. Thus, as Black youth may become critically aware of racial inequity through racial identity exploration, they simultaneously form a positive connection to Black people. Further, as youth process discrimination they may draw upon family and peer discussions and cultural histories to contextualize their experience in relation to other members

of their racial group (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2016). In doing so, youth recognize that racial discrimination is a shared Black experience. Black youth may draw strength from knowing the collective struggle and resilience of the Black community to navigate racial trauma within their social contexts.

Racial Discrimination as a Catalyst for Critical Reflection

Critical reflection may be an important tool to help youth process the experience of discrimination, due to its implications for how youth attribute blame when experiences of discrimination occur. Critical reflection provides insight into how interpersonal experiences are microcosms of structural issues in society (Gurin et al., 1980; Leadbeater & Way, 2007; Nicolas et al., 2008). Racial awareness can motivate Black youth to challenge negative stereotypes about Black intelligence through their strong academic achievement (Andrews, 2008; Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997). Black students' critical reflection provides pivotal insights in navigating discrimination in schooling environments. For example, Black youth were highly engaged in classroom discussion to disprove prevalent stereotypes about Black students' lack of interest in coursework (Hope et al., 2015b). Students used discussions of racial discrimination in relation to school policies to form links between interpersonal discrimination and larger structural issues unfolding in society (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

Despite emerging theoretical and empirical links of racial discrimination to Black youth's critical consciousness, the majority of discrimination work focuses on negative outcomes related to health, psychological, and physical well-being (e.g., Major & Dover, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2014), as well as poorer academic outcomes for Black youth (e.g., Neblett et al., 2006; Thomas et al. 2009; Smalls et al., 2007). However, despite discrimination's overall negative relationship with life outcomes, it is important to examine how youth reframe discrimination experiences as tools to analyze and question their racialized social contexts (Hope et al., 2015; Hope & Bañales, 2019). A

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key factor in reframing discrimination lies within how youth determine the source of discrimination as either an interpersonal or a systemic issue.

Studies on Black individuals' attributions for racial disparities suggest that Black people tend to attribute blame for racial disparities to racial discrimination rather than dispositional factors within Black communities (Hewstone & Jaspers, 1982; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Mondak, 2017). This attribution stands in direct contrast to both White and Latinx communities' greater likelihood to place blame on Blacks' personal characteristics, rather than blame a larger system of institutional racism. Peffley and colleagues (2017) suggest that the association between Black's negative interactions with the criminal justice system shapes their ability to perceive racial discrimination. In contrast, as a majority of Whites report more positive interactions with the police, they cannot see (and often deny) racial disparity as a function of an unjust system. Latinx individuals were less likely to deny racial discrimination given their own experiences with the criminal justice system but aligned with Whites' assessments of the dispositional faults of Black individuals. As such, Black individuals may be better positioned to see systemic disparities as compared to other groups, given their all too frequent interactions with the criminal justice system.

Racial Identity as a Moderator Between Racial Discrimination and Critical Reflection

The conceptualization of centrality and regard racial identity dimensions explain how racial identity might influence the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Centrality and regard constructs tap into Black individuals' beliefs around common fate and connectedness to the racial group (Sellers et al., 1998). If individuals endorse centrality and regard beliefs that emphasize collective Black identity, they may be inclined to shift racial blame away from individuals to systems given the collective experiences of racial discrimination. Further positive connections to the Black community leads individuals to protect their positive image. Thus, positive connections to the Black community may lead to more

systems thinking to prevent internalizing negative messages around one's race from a given individual. Yet, as centrality and regard are distinct constructs, their roles in the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection may vary.

Centrality

Racial centrality as outlined in the MMRI describes the importance of an individual's Blackness to their self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998). A prominent aspect of centrality is the concept of common fate—the belief that one's individual success is connected to the success of members of their racial group. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)—the scale that operationalizes the MMRI—emphasizes this shared experience through the item: "My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people." Common fate is a prominent theme in Black identity given the shared experience of Black enslavement and racial oppression, and is the aspect of centrality that is the focus of the current study. This theme has also been central to the study of Black critical action during the Black Power and post-civil rights movements; scholars used the theme of common fate to explain Black college students' commitments to social change (Gurin & Epps, 1975).

Common fate beliefs emphasize that the achievements of one individual cannot overcome a system of oppression affecting the collective. Rather, Black communities must stand united against institutional racism. The messaging of common fate is apparent in Black collective efforts across history. The Reconstruction era, Civil Rights Movement, and Black Power Movement drew upon common fate messaging to motivate Black individuals to work toward collective racial uplift (Dawson, 2003; Rojas, 2007; Shelby, 2002). This messaging has translated into the current #BlackLivesMatter movement which emphasizes Blacks' common fate while simultaneously recognizing the myriad of identities that exist within Black

communities. Thus, individuals who see their Blackness as central to their self-concept likely also see themselves as a member of the collective Black community.

Due to their awareness of collective experiences of racism, this collective identity may motivate youth to understand racial discrimination through a lens of systemic racism. Individuals with higher centrality may compare their personal experiences with their understandings of discrimination towards the Black community to make meaning of the discrimination event. In contrast, youth with lower racial centrality may be more likely to see personal racial discrimination experiences as isolated events. Low-central individuals may have limited connections to a collective memory of discrimination to interpret personal discrimination as a systemic rather than individual problem. Such individuals may be more likely to focus on other factors based on other relevant social identities (e.g., gender, sexuality) to explain the discrimination experience.

Public Regard

Black youth may also make structural attributions for discrimination due to their public regard beliefs. During a discrimination encounter, individuals who endorse low public regard beliefs likely interpret such racial events from the perspective that Black people are viewed negatively in society (i.e., awareness of racial stigma). Thus, Black youth with lower public regard may be more likely to make structural attributions for discrimination as a consequence of how society devalues Black communities. Outten and colleagues (2010) demonstrated this trend in a sample of Black Canadians. Those who endorsed low public regard beliefs were more likely to attribute ambiguous negative treatment to racial discrimination. However, it is unclear if this study operationalized discrimination as interpersonal or structural given the contexts (e.g., workplace and restaurant) of where the negative treatment took place. For Black youth with

lower public regard, structural attributions for discrimination are more consistent with youth's existing public regard beliefs (Baber, 2012; Hope & Bañales, 2019; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, Way, 2009). In contrast, individuals with higher public regard may be more likely attribute personal experiences of discrimination to the individual perpetrator. Black youth who maintain high public regard beliefs can protect these beliefs by labeling the individual perpetrator as an anomaly. Such labeling allows those with higher public regard to maintain their view that society views Black people positively. In doing so, those with high public regard avoid the cognitive dissonance that occurs when being confronted with discrepancies between one's personal beliefs versus their experiences.

Private regard

High private regard (i.e., racial pride) towards one's racial group may contribute to structural attributions of racial discrimination. Social identity theory suggests that individuals who draw pride from their group membership protect their positive image of the group, particularly under conditions of social threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Thus, Black youth with more positive views of their group will more likely respond to racial discrimination by engaging in meaning-making that supports their positive group view. Black youth with higher private regard can protect themselves from internalizing negative messages about the Black community through systemic attributions. In doing so, Black youth can explain discriminatory events and maintain a positive attachment to Black people. In contrast, those with lower private regard may make less structural attributions given that they may feel less positive about the Black community. This negative connection to their racial group may result in less motivation to analyze racial discrimination as systemic to support a more positive connection or image of Black people. However, empirical work has not assessed how private regard plays a

role in how Black individuals attribute blame after experiencing discrimination, leaving this relationship as an open question in current scholarship.

Political Efficacy and Black Youth: Sample Considerations

Political efficacy describes youth's beliefs in their ability to make meaningful social change (Watts et al., 2011). In critical consciousness theory, political efficacy is a consequence of critical reflection and an important precursor for critical action. Yet, recent empirical work suggests the mediation pathway may not always be consistent across youth populations (Diemer & Rapa, 2016). Regardless of mixed findings, political efficacy is likely an important mediator between critical reflection and critical action in Black youth. Previous work focused on Black only samples suggests that political efficacy is an important precursor for critical action, but they do not assess political efficacy as a consequence of critical reflection (Hope, 2016; Hope & Jagers, 2014; Leath & Chavous, 2017). Further, critical reflection is included as a precursor to political efficacy alongside factors such as political knowledge or interest (Levy, 2013). Given that Black youth's critical reflection may include awareness of racial inequity through the successful collective resistance of Black communities, such an awareness may foster stronger beliefs in Black youth's ability to challenge racial oppression due to a legacy of resistance (Chapman-Hillard & Adams-Bass, 2016).

Political efficacy is assessed through two dimensions: internal and external. Internal political efficacy describes individuals' personal abilities to influence social change, whereas external political efficacy refers to individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness to their needs. Though both forms of efficacy are important in the operationalization of critical consciousness, this study focuses on the role of internal efficacy. Internal efficacy emphasizes how individuals feel about their individual and collective ability to influence key political actors

through social action (Watts et al., 2011). As Black youth become aware of racial inequities, they may explore Black communities' fight for recognition and access as American citizens (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016; Ginwright, 2007, 2010). In turn, Black youth develop positive attitudes about their ability to create social change (i.e., high internal efficacy), given the impact of Black social movements. Research on the antecedents of political efficacy suggest that awareness of one's social status, exposure to an active political community, and opportunities to build skills for political action build positive political efficacy (Anderson, 2010; Beaumont, 2010). For example, Ginwright (2007) demonstrates how youth-adult partnerships foster political efficacy. The intergenerational ties expose youth to past activism, while simultaneously building capacity within Black youth to face complex social issues within their immediate environments.

Yet, current work with Black college students presents a mixed picture of how internal political efficacy motivates critical action. A study of Black and Latinx college students involved in the #BlackLivesMatter and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) movement finds that internal political efficacy is not associated with Black students' involvement in either movement (Hope et al., 2016). Another study determined that high internal efficacy is associated with more action for Black women who perceived a negative racial climate, and for Black men who endorsed beliefs in an equitable society (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Thus, though there may be a unique link between Black youth's racialized social analysis and development of internal political efficacy, it is unclear how such efficacy relates to critical action in Black communities. While experiences of racial discrimination may make Black youth aware of their marginalized social status, it is unclear if such experiences alone translate into motivation for social change.

Current Study

In the present study, I investigate the associations between racial discrimination, critical consciousness, and racial identity beliefs. I test these associations using structural equation modeling. First, I examine how racial discrimination catalyzes the critical consciousness pathway through critical reflection. Next, I assess how racial identity beliefs moderate the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Finally, I test the theorized critical consciousness pathway by assessing if political efficacy mediates the association between critical reflection and critical action.

I test the aforementioned models guided by the following five hypotheses:

1. Black youth who experience more racial discrimination will have higher critical reflection compared to those who experience less discrimination.

2. Political efficacy will partially mediate the positive relationship between critical reflection and critical action.

3. Centrality will moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection such that those reporting higher race centrality will have a stronger positive association between discrimination and critical reflection than those with lower centrality.

4. Private regard will moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection such that those with higher private regard will have a stronger positive association between discrimination and critical reflection than those with lower private regard.

5. Public regard will moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection such that those with lower public regard will have a stronger positive

association between racial discrimination and critical reflection than those with higher public regard.

In assessing these relationships, I test if racial discrimination functions as an antecedent to critical consciousness development in Black youth. Further, by examining the moderating role of racial identity beliefs (i.e., centrality, private regard, and public regard), I empirically test theorized connections between race-related experiences, racial identity beliefs and critical consciousness processes (Watts et al., 2003; Watts & Guessous, 2006). My final hypothesis addresses mixed findings regarding political efficacy's role in the association between critical reflection and critical action in Black samples. As recent work suggests political efficacy may not serve a mediating or moderating role in the critical consciousness pathway, it is important to test how such relations may vary across distinct ethnic groups.

Method

Procedure

This study uses data from the Black Youth Project- Youth Culture Survey (BYP; Cohen, 2005). The central aim of this project captures the political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of Black youth in the United States. The BYP Youth Culture survey contains responses from a 45-minute telephone survey with youth ages 15-25. Survey administrators used random digit dialing (RDD) techniques to identify eligible households for survey participants, recruiting a nationally representative sample of individuals across White, Black, and Latinx racial-ethnic groups. Two oversamples of Black and Latinx individuals were recruited in the study as supplements to the national sample, with one sample focused on Black and Latinx youth living in the Chicago metropolitan area. Data collection occurred between July 20th, 2005, and November 10th, 2005, where eligible households were determined by having at least one youth aged 15-25 as a

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resident. A total of 1590 Black, Latinx, and White respondents were eligible for the study. Youth

included in this study were those who self-identified as African-American or Black. For further

information regarding the methodologies used in the administration of this survey, please visit

the project website at www.blackyouthproject.com.

Participants

Participants in this study were 634 Black youth ages 15-25 years old (M=19.22;

SD=3.12). Females comprised slightly more than half of the sample (54.8%). A majority of the

sample (72.3%) were currently in school, with the majority of participants in high school

(44.9%) or college (18.3%). Further, the majority of students across the sample attended public

institutions (93.1%). Most parents of sample respondents had completed high school and had

pursued some, or completed a postsecondary degree (80.1% of mothers and 74.1% of fathers in

the sample). A wide range of household income ($0-100,000+) was represented, with the slight

majority of respondents reporting a range of total household income from $15,000 to $75,000

Measures

Pearson's correlations, response option, sample items, descriptive and reliability statistics

for measures are indicated in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 below. Cronbach's alpha and mean inter-

item correlations (IIC) were used to assess scale reliability. Both descriptives are included to

address the downward bias of Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a consistently biased

measure of reliability due to its sensitivity to the number of items in a measure. Thus, for

measures with few items, the Cronbach's alpha is downwardly biased (Clark & Watson 1995;

DeVellis, 2003). Unlike Cronbach's alpha, ICCs are not susceptible to bias due to the number of

items in a measure. Acceptable IIC scores range from .15 to .50, with larger values indicating

higher levels of internal consistency.

Perceived racial discrimination was measured by one item that read "How often have you been discriminated against because of your race?" This item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1-*very often* to 5-*never*. Scores on this item were reverse coded for conceptual clarity of interaction terms.

Race-Related Beliefs were measured by three separate items in the BYP survey (Cohen, 2005) used as proxies for racial centrality, private regard, and public regard as outlined by the MMRI (Sellers et al., 1998) and operationalized by the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997). The *centrality* item focused on the collective aspect of centrality with the following item "I believe what happens to most Black people in this country affects me." This item is similar to the MIBI centrality item, "My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people." *Private regard* was captured by the item, "I am proud of Black people," which is conceptually aligned with the MIBI private regard item "I feel good about Black people." Finally, *public regard* was measured by the item "Other racial groups view Black people in a positive manner," which is conceptually aligned with the public regard's assessment of if societal others have positive feelings toward Black people. This item is slightly different from public regard as originally conceptualized in the MMRI as it specifies "other racial groups" rather than "others." This specification focuses solely on outgroup views of Black people, rather than within group perceptions as intended by the wording of the MMRI. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1-*strongly agree* to 5 *strongly disagree*. All scores on the race-related beliefs items were reverse coded for conceptual clarity and interpretation of interaction terms.

Critical Reflection items (α=.76; IIC=.34) assessed the extent to which participants were aware of racial inequalities across various institutions such as school or the government. This

six-item scale was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1-*strongly agree* to 5-*strongly disagree*. Items include "The government treats immigrants better than it treats most Black people in this country" and "On average; Black youth receive a poorer education than White youth." Items were reverse coded so that higher endorsement of an item reflected more awareness of race-based structural inequalities (i.e., higher critical reflection).

The *Internal Political Efficacy* scale (α=.49; IIC=.32) consists of two items that assess participants' beliefs in their ability to create meaningful social change. Each item is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Items include: "I believe that by participating in politics I can make a difference," and "I have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics." Items were reverse coded so that higher endorsement of an item reflected greater internal political efficacy.

Critical Action was assessed with an 8-item scale (α=.49; IIC=.16). Items were dichotomous (1=Yes 2= No) Participants indicated whether they had or had not participated in a listed activity 12 months prior to survey administration. Items were dummy coded such that 1=Yes and 0=No. The composite score represented the total number of activities each participant engaged in over the past year. Sample activities include joining a political group, volunteering for a political campaign, or participating in a boycott.

Methodological Approach

Data Analysis Strategy

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and correlations were conducted as preliminary analyses. The amount of missing data was minimal for this study with 0-2% missingness across items. Missingness was addressed using a full information maximum likelihood maximum (FIML), which maximizes the use of all available data points per

respondent (Cham, Reshetnyak, Rosenfeld, & Brietbart, 2017). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to determine how well observed items captured the latent constructs. Racial discrimination and racial identity belief items were not included in the CFAs because they were modeled as single observed items. Next, I used structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess direct and indirect effects between observed and latent variables. Direct effects assessed the association between discrimination and critical reflection. Indirect effects between critical reflection and critical action assessed the mediating role of political efficacy. Finally, moderation was assessed by creating interaction (product) terms between the racial discrimination item and racial identity belief items. SEM is an appropriate methodological tool as it tests various models of relationships between observed and indirectly measurable (latent) variables to determine if the researcher's proposed model is an appropriate fit to the data (Kline, 2011). Further, SEM accounts for measurement error by providing more accurate measures between constructs due to latent variable estimation that depends on multiple items versus relying on a one item observed variable (see Diemer & Li 2011; Schneiger, Carnoy, Kilpatrick, Schmidt, & Shavelson, 2006).

Descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS 24 (IBM Corp, 2016). The CFA and SEM models were analyzed in MPLUS Version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). These analyses used the weighted least square mean and variance adjusted (WLSMV) because items were coded as both continuous and categorical. Continuous items included all single item observed variables (i.e., racial discrimination and racial identity belief items). Categorical items comprised the indicators of the three latent critical consciousness dimensions (i.e., critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action). Indirect effects were computed to assess if political efficacy mediated the relationship between critical reflection and critical action, as outlined by critical consciousness theory.

Model fit for CFA and SEM models were assessed using the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). CFI and TLI values at or above .95 indicate good fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). An RMSEA of .05 and below and an SRMR of .06 and below indicates good fit (Kline, 2015).

Results

Preliminary Data Analysis

The means and SDs for study measures are provided below (see Table 3.2). Bivariate correlations (Table 3.1) indicated moderate to strong associations between racial discrimination and critical reflection items. Racial discrimination was also associated with a majority of critical action items. Racial centrality was positively associated with all critical reflection items. Public regard was also positively associated with critical reflection items with the exception of the item "It's hard for Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination." All items representing racial identity beliefs were positively associated with racial discrimination.

To ensure that there was an adequate sample to conduct the statistical analysis, a priori power analyses were conducted using the Soper calculator (Soper, 2020). These analyses assess the minimum required sample size to detect a small (0.1), medium (0.3), or large (0.5) effect. Power analyses included three latent constructs (i.e., critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action) and eighteen observed items (i.e., racial discrimination and racial identity items + 16 item indicators for latent constructs). Analyses indicated that a minimum sample size of 296 was needed to detect a small effect size (0.2) with a power level of .8. The minimum sample size required for the model structure was 200. Given that N=635 for the current study, the sample size was deemed appropriate for SEM analyses.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After these preliminary data analyses, a CFA (N=635) was conducted to determine how well observed items measure the latent constructs that they were designed to measure: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. According to fit indices, the initial CFA model had acceptable fit to the data: CFI=0.92, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.04. The factor loadings of two of the critical action items were low (below .4) and therefore these items were deleted from the model (Ximénez, 2006). Based on a review of critical action items in the literature, I also removed four items to strengthen conceptual fit with critical action, as they were more strongly aligned with civic engagement behaviors. Two critical reflection items were also removed due to low loadings (below .3). The final measurement model included the three latent constructs of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action measured by six, two, and eight items, respectively (see Table 3.2). The fit of this model was good: CFI (0.98), TLI (0.97), RMSEA (0.03) and SRMR (0.06) (see Figure 3.2). All observed items measured the constructs well with positive and significant loadings ranging from .48 to .72. Given the strong fit indices, I created SEM path models based on this measurement model.

SEM Path and Mediation models

The SEM tested direct and mediated associations between Black youth's racial discrimination experiences, critical reflection, political efficacy and critical action (see Figure 3.3) Model fit indices indicated that the hypothesized model was a good fit to the data CFI=0.96, TLI=0.96, RMSEA=0.03, and SRMR=0.07. Estimates of .10, .30, and .50 are considered to be small, medium, and large effect sizes respectively (Kline, 2015). Aligned with Hypothesis 1, the model estimated a positive direct effect of racial discrimination on critical reflection (β= .31, p<.001). The model also indicated that political efficacy does not mediate the association

between critical reflection and critical action (Hypothesis 2). However, there were positive direct effects between critical reflection and critical action (β= .18, p<.01) and internal political efficacy and critical action (β= .39, p<.001).

Racial Identity Beliefs Moderation Models

Three separate SEM models assessed the moderating effects of the three items that approximated centrality, private regard, and public regard racial identity beliefs. The centrality model (Hypothesis 3) suggested that centrality moderates the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection (β= .19, p<.001). The fit of the model was: CFI= 0.95, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.04, and SRMR=0.07 (see Figure 3.4). Simple slopes analyses were conducted to probe the significant interaction (see Figure 3.7). Though there was a significant interaction, simple slopes analyses were not significant at ± 1SD of the mean of racial discrimination. Thus, there appears to be a difference between individuals who endorse high and low levels of centrality, but the nature of this difference is unclear. Based on trends outlined in Figure 3.7, it seems that centrality likely moderates the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection such that higher centrality strengthens the positive relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection. High central individuals had higher levels of critical reflection on average as compared to low central individuals under conditions of high racial discrimination.

The second model tested Hypothesis 4, which identified private regard as a positive moderator of the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Private regard moderated the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection, but this relationship was negative (β= -.08, p<.01; see Figure 3.5). Model fit improved slightly over the centrality model: CFI= 0.97, TLI=0.96, RMSEA=0.04, and SRMR=0.06 (see Figure 3.4).

Simple slopes analyses were conducted to probe the significant interaction (see Figure 3.8). Though there was a significant interaction, simple slopes analyses were not significant at $\pm$ 1SD of the mean of racial discrimination. Thus, there appears to be a difference between individuals who had high and low private regard, but the nature of this difference is unclear. Based on the trends outlined in Figure 3.8, it seems that individuals with higher private regard were, on average less critically reflective under conditions of high discrimination. Conversely, individuals with low private regard were more critically reflective under conditions of high discrimination than those with high private regard. This model had good fit to the data: CFI=0.97, TLI=0.96, RMSEA=0.03 and SRMR=0.06.

In contrast to Hypothesis 5, the public regard interaction was nonsignificant (β= -.05, p=0.226). As a result of this unexpected public regard finding, an alternative model was conducted to explore the direct effects of public regard on critical reflection. The direct effect was significant and positive (β= -.42, p<.01), indicating that those with low public regard had higher systemic attributions for structural racism than those with higher public regard.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate racial discrimination as a precursor to critical reflection. I also examined the role of racial identity content beliefs—centrality, private regard, and public regard—in the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Finally, I assessed if political efficacy mediated the relationship between critical reflection and critical action in a sample of Black youth. This contributes to existing literature as an empirical test of theoretical work suggesting an integration of racial identity and critical consciousness theory. Integrating the two theories provides a more holistic understanding of how Black youth make sense of their race-related experiences. Further, this work examines the critical

consciousness pathway in an all-Black sample. This stands in contrast with previous literature that uses mixed ethnic group samples, possibly masking the unique race related experiences of Black youth.

This study examines racial discrimination as a potential precursor to critical reflection development. Though there have been studies to the antecedents of critical consciousness, more specifically critical reflection, quantitative work has not focused on racial discrimination as a precursor of critical reflection. This adds to our scholarly understanding of what factors contribute to critical consciousness development in Black youth, which is a protective process in their overall youth development. This work also focuses on an all-Black sample, honoring the unique experiences of Black youth in American society. While discrimination does occur against the multitude of ethnic groups that comprise the fabric of American society, the legacy of anti-Blackness is incorporated into every governing institution due to slavery's role in building America as a global superpower. Despite slavery being abolished, its legacy still remains; Black people systematically experience racial discrimination, police violence, and limited resources (Hannah-Jones & Elliot, 2019). Thus, this study provides an important contribution as to how Black youth can use critical consciousness as a tool to both cope with and challenge the racial inequities they experience in their daily lives.

CFA analyses confirmed that the measurement model had a strong foundation to proceed with analyses of relationships between racial discrimination, racial identity beliefs, and critical consciousness development. In the subsequent SEM models, analyses suggest that youth with more experiences of racial discrimination maintained higher structural attributions for inequality than for those who had fewer discrimination experiences, consistent with the study hypotheses. Racial identity beliefs were associated with the relationship between racial discrimination and

critical reflection, albeit in different ways. Youth with high racial centrality were more likely to make structural attributions in the face of discrimination than those youth with low racial centrality. In contrast, youth with high private regard were more likely to make individual attributions for discrimination than those youth with low private regard. Surprisingly, public regard did not moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Political efficacy did not function as a mediator between critical reflection and critical action, but had a direct effect on critical action.

An important point to note is that the relationship between racial discrimination experiences and critical reflection remained consistent regardless of the moderating relationship of racial identity beliefs. Thus, regardless of one's racial identity belief, greater instances of racial discrimination were associated with higher structural attributions for racial inequities. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests that racial discrimination can lead to more systems thinking of the origins of such discrimination (Hope & Bañales, 2019; Nicolas et al. 2008). This is particularly true in school contexts, where Black youth resist negative race-related events by recognizing larger discriminatory forces at work (Carter, 2008; Noguera, 2003). The positive association between racial discrimination and critical reflection is important because it provides insight into how youth interpret interpersonal experiences of discrimination as connected to a larger system of race and racism. Such a connection can lead to better coping mechanisms for the negative impacts of racial discrimination. Making structural attributions may make youth less likely to blame themselves for discriminatory experiences, challenging the ways that society frames them as a problem versus racism as the problem (Hope & Spencer, 2017).

Racial centrality's (conceptualized as collective fate) likely role in strengthening the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection is aligned with previous work

suggesting that one's understanding of race as a collective identity is linked to the ways that discrimination experiences are common to members of one's racial group (Gurin & Epps, 1975). Understanding your racial identity as a part of a collective may lessen the negative impact of racial discrimination due to your awareness of pervasive experiences affecting your racial group (i.e., you are not alone in your experience). Thus, having a more structural attribution for racial discrimination may be a manifestation of a collective understanding of racial identity; knowing that other members of your racial group share a similar experience may lead you to think about how discrimination works systematically rather than individually within Black communities. However, it is important to note that post-hoc simple slopes analyses were not significant, thus only allowing interpretation of a difference between high and low central individuals, but the nature of that difference is not fully clear.

Private regard moderated the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection but in an unexpected direction. High private regard was associated with *lower* structural attributions in the face of discrimination. That is, those Black youth who felt a stronger sense of pride and belonging with Black people were more likely to have individual attributions for discrimination than those who had low private regard. This finding was surprising because strong affect towards the racial group is theorized to promote systemic thinking about inequity that may translate into action (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013; Tynes, Garcia, Chang, & Coleman, 2011). For example, in a study of race-related social networking groups, scholars found that respondents who endorsed Black pride were associated with respondents questioning the assumption of Black self-hatred as pervasive within the Black community. These individuals pushed back on such assumptions by noting the ways media exacerbates problems within the Black community, demonstrating systemic thinking around a common racial stereotype (Tynes et

al. 2011). Yet, it is important to note that though the interaction effect was significant, the coefficient was close to zero, indicating differences between those with high private regard and low private regard was very slight. Thus, it may be that private regard does not fully tell the story of the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection, but rather that racial discrimination and critical reflection have a positive association regardless of one's private regard level. Further, similar to centrality, post hoc simple slopes analyses were not significant, indicating that while there are differences between high private regard versus low private regard individuals, the nature of such differences may not be fully clear.

Another surprising finding was that public regard did not moderate the association between racial discrimination and critical reflection. This finding was surprising because the public regard construct can be conceptualized as an early stage of critical reflection on race, as it requires an analysis of how other racial groups view Black people. In an exploratory analysis, public regard had a strong direct effect on critical reflection such that those with low public regard were more likely to have more structural attributions for race-related challenges. Thus, it is likely that public regard does serve as a lens to interpret race-related experiences, but its impact is more direct than other identity constructs. Previous work suggests that racial identity may be a manifestation of Black youth's understandings of oppression and racial marginalization (Lozada et al., 2017; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Further, Black racial identity is tied to experiences of oppression; learning to recognize such oppressions across contexts serves as an asset to resist internalizing negative racial messages (Tatum, 2003). Thus, the lack of a moderating effect of public regard may be more indicative of a more direct role that public regard plays in the structural attributions of Black youth.

Finally, contrary to study hypotheses, political efficacy did not function as a mediator of the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. Failure to support a key component of critical consciousness theory—that political efficacy is an intermediate (and necessary) step between critical reflection and critical action—is surprising, particularly within a Black sample. Both political efficacy and critical reflection are conceptualized as important precursors to Black youth's critical action behaviors (Hope, 2015; Hope & Jagers, 2014). Yet, few works examine political efficacy as a consequence of critical reflection; the two are often studied as independent in empirical work. Recent evidence shows that political efficacy may not function as a mediator or a moderator in marginalized adolescents' critical consciousness processes (Diemer & Rapa 2016). One potential factor in this study may be in the measurement of political efficacy. As the construct was only comprised of two items, this may not have been sufficient to capture the complexity of internal political efficacy.

Further, it may be the case that external, rather than internal political efficacy has a stronger relationship with critical reflection in Black youth. External political efficacy, sometimes called political cynicism, assesses individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness to their needs. Some evidence suggests that low external political efficacy (i.e., the government is not responsive) is associated with higher-risk behaviors such as protests or boycotts (Kerrison, Cobbina, & Bender, 2018; Shingles, 1981; Taylor, 2010). Given that Black youth's awareness of racial inequities might include a knowledge of institutionalized racial barriers (both current and historical), such an awareness might foster greater distrust of government forces, rather than foster beliefs in creating social change.

Limitations and Future Directions

A notable limitation of this study was the reliance on single item indicators to represent racial discrimination and racial identity beliefs. Further the items representing racial identity beliefs were only proxies for racial identity beliefs as theorized by the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), and thus cannot fully capture the racial identity beliefs indicated. Single item measures cannot fully capture the complexity of these constructs, leading to some challenges related to analysis. The lack of significance from the post hoc simple slopes tests of centrality and private regard may be a consequence of this measurement limitation as one item does provide full coverage for the construct. However, the fact that significant effect still remained despite these limitations suggests that these patterns may be salient given a more inclusive operationalization of the construct. Finally, two scales internal political efficacy and critical action had low to moderate internal consistency as reflected by each scale's alpha values (.49 and .57 respectively). However, the inter-item correlations for this measure were acceptable (.16 and .32), and items had strong conceptual alignment with the constructs being measured. Clark and Watson (1995) indicate that inter-item correlations may be a better indicator of internal consistency, suggesting that both scales assess some meaningful aspect of the construct. However, findings related to political efficacy must be interpreted cautiously due to its proximity to the lower bound of acceptable IIC range. Future work should consider a more robust operationalization of political efficacy in order to more holistically capture the construct's meaning.

Future work should examine the direct effects of racial discrimination on other aspects of critical consciousness. Though this work focused on racial discrimination's association with critical reflection, modification indices in the SEM analyses suggested a robust link between

racial discrimination and critical action. This finding aligns with previous work that suggests experiences of racial discrimination are associated with critical action for Black communities. For Black college students, perceptions of institutional discrimination (e.g., systemic forms of racism and discrimination) are associated with stronger activist orientation on behalf of their racial group (Hope et al., 2019). Further, theoretical and empirical work suggests that critical action may be a strategy used to cope with negative race related experiences (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Hope, Thomas, & Hoggard 2015; White-Johnson, 2012). Thus, scholars should continue examining how racial discrimination functions as a catalyst in other critical consciousness domains, such as critical action among Black youth.

In addition, scholars should examine how perceptions of institutional discrimination relate to critical consciousness components. Most discrimination studies focus on the impact of interpersonal discrimination, without assessing to what extent individuals perceive systems of discrimination (Benner et al., 2018). Yet, as youth increase in their abilities to critically reflect and recognize systemic oppression, instances of perceived institutional racism will also increase. This potential association between critical reflection and institutional racism may reflect a cyclical aspect between discrimination and reflection that is not captured by measures of interpersonal discrimination. Thus, expanding the types of discrimination that youth perceive may also expand our knowledge of the impacts of different types of discrimination encounters throughout the lifespan.

Finally, future work should consider different associations between racial identity and critical consciousness. For example, though public regard was not significant as a moderator, post-hoc exploratory analyses suggested a strong direct association between public regard beliefs and critical reflection. Previous work has incorporated private regard and centrality racial

identity beliefs as a form of oppression analysis, suggesting that such beliefs may be an entry point for critical reflection (Lozada et al., 2017). Further, postulate 3 from study 1 of this dissertation highlights how public regard specifically may serve as precursor of critical reflection due to one's awareness of racial stigma. Stigma awareness alone may not be enough to recognize systems or structures of inequality, but this awareness may be a precursor to more complex understandings of systemic oppression.

Conclusion

Although several theoretical frameworks suggest the importance of studying racial identity and critical consciousness as overlapping rather than parallel processes, few studies have examined this overlap as an empirical question (Cross, 1991; Watts & Guessous, 2006; Aniywo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). Identifying the ways that these two processes overlap can help inform researchers, practitioners, and policymakers of best practices to support and maintain the positive development of Black youth in a racialized society. Further, this work expands current scholarship by identifying how race-related experiences (e.g., racial discrimination) can catalyze critical reflection in Black youth. As critical reflection can help youth to resist the systemic oppression that they face in their day to day contexts, it is important to see how youth make sense of their experiences in ways that empower them to resist rather than resign themselves to racial marginalization and anti-Blackness.

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Table 3.1 Bivariate Correlations Table for Study Items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1.WhtAIDS	-																			
2.BlacksUnfair	.54**	-																		
3. Ahead	.25**	.34**	-																	
4.ActWhite	.31**	.38**	.42**	-																
5.PoorerEd	.33**	.38**	.32**	.30**	-															
6.PoliceDiscrim	.32**	.40**	.28**	.29**	.40**	-														
7.SkillsForPol	-0.04	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.08	.11**	-													
8.MakeDiffPol	-.12**	-0.06	0.03	-0.05	-0.04	-0.04	.32**	-												
9.ContactGov	-0.06	-0.07	-0.07	-.11**	-.12**	-0.06	-0.03	-0.04	-											
10.Petition	-0.03	-0.05	0.01	0.01	-.10*	-.01*	-.11**	-0.03	.19**	-										
11.Protest	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03	.12**	.16**	-									
12.Boycott	0.03	-0.01	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04	0.01	-0.06	-0.01	.22**	.17**	.17**	-								
13.JoinPolGroup	-0.02	-0.04	-0.07	-0.06	-0.04	-0.03	-.11**	-.08*	.18**	.23**	.39**	.13**	-							
14.WebPol	-0.06	-0.06	-0.02	-0.03	-0.06	-0.05	-.09*	-.12**	.15**	.18**	.21**	.16**	.20**	-						
15.Campaign	-0.05	-0.06	0.01	-0.04	-0.02	-0.07	-.09*	-0.04	0.06	.14**	.15**	0.06	.20**	.17**	-					
16.TalkPol	-0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	-0.06	-.14**	-.22**	-.16**	.11**	.18**	0.05	.09*	0.08	.16**	0.02	-				
17.PersonalDiscrimRace	.25**	.27**	.25**	.28**	.29**	.34**	0.07	-0.05	-.13**	-.09*	-.10*	-.10*	-0.05	-0.06	-.01*	-.14**	-			

18.RaceLinkedFate	.01*	.21**	.16**	.19**	.17**	.19**	0.06	0.06	-.01*	-0.06	-0.06	-0.04	-0.07	-0.07	0.00	-.17**	.30**	-		
19.ProudOfRace	0.04	0.03	.11**	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.06	.13**	-0.04	-0.01	0.00	0.02	-0.03	-0.03	0.04	-0.08	.09*	0.04	-	
20.OtherViewRace	.01*	.17**	0.04	.14**	.14**	.18**	-0.02	-.13**	-0.08	-.15**	-.11**	-0.06	-0.05	-.08*	0.00	-.11**	.11**	.12**	-.26**	-

Table 3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Factor Loadings for Study Items

Latent Variable/Indicators	N	M	SD	% Missing	Standard Loading	SE	Skewness	Kurtosis
Critical Reflection								
α=.76 IIC=.34								
Scale 1-5, 1=Strongly Agree -5=Strongly Disagree								
1. If more White people had AIDS the government would do more to find a cure	628	2.41	1.17	1.1%	.57	.04	.56	-.83
2. In the healthcare system, Blacks are treated less fairly than Whites	627	2.62	1.12	1.3%	.72	.03	.31	-1.13
3. It's hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination.	633	2.65	1.09	0.3%	.51	.03	.42	-1.07
4. Sometimes young people have to act White to get ahead.	631	3.05	1.21	0.6%	.58	.04	-.07	-1.37
5. On average, Black youth receive a poorer education than White youth	630	2.83	1.16	0.8%	.67	.03	.18	-1.28
6. On average the police discriminative against Black youth much more than they do White youth.	631	2.13	1.01	0.6%	.67	.03	.99	.31
Internal Political Efficacy								
α=.49 IIC=.32								
Scale 1-5, 1=Strongly Agree -5=Strongly Disagree								
1. I believe that by participating in politics I can make a difference	631	2.03	.67	0.6%	.48	.08	.40	.42
2. I have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics.	632	2.13	.67	0.5%	.82	.13	.21	.06
Critical Action								
α=.57 IIC=.16								
Scale: Yes=1 No=0								
Question Stem: In the last 12 months have you…								
1. contacted a public official or agency	634	.08	3.86	0.0%	.60	.08	3.13	7.83
2. signed a paper or email petition	633	.16	5.46	0.3%	.62	.06	1.81	1.3

	N	Mean	SD	Missing			Skew	Kurtosis
3. attended a protest meeting, demonstration or sit-in	635	.08	0.27	0.0%	.66	.07	3.1	7.61
4. participated in a boycott	635	.03	0.17	0.0%	.62	.11	5.7	30.55
5. been active in or joined a political group	634	.09	0.28	0.2%	.73	.06	2.29	6.68
6. written and sent an email or written blog about a political issue, candidate or political party	635	.17	0.37	0.0%	.63	.06	1.79	1.21
7 worked or volunteered on political campaign for a candidate or party.	635	.08	0.27	0.0%	.51	.80	3.18	8.12
8. talked with family or friends about a political issue, party, or candidate	635	.68	0.47	0.0%	.54	.06	-0.78	-1.4

Observed Variables/Indicators

Racial Discrimination
Scale 1-5, 1=Very often -5=Never

	N	Mean	SD	Missing			Skew	Kurtosis
1: How often were you discriminated against because of your race?	635	3.48	1.14	0.0%	-	-	-.38	-0.55

Centrality/Collective Fate
Scale 1-5, 1=Strongly Agree -5=Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	SD	Missing			Skew	Kurtosis
1: I believe that what happens to most people in my racial group in this country affects me.	634	2.49	1.01	0.1%	-	-	.68	-0.7

Private Regard
Scale 1-5, 1=Strongly Agree -5=Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	SD	Missing			Skew	Kurtosis
1. I am proud of Black people.	633	1.92	0.8	0.2%	-	-	1.17	1.83

Public Regard
Scale 1-5, 1=Strongly Agree -5=Strongly Disagree

	N	Mean	SD	Missing			Skew	Kurtosis
1. Other racial groups view Black people in a positive manner.	625	3.05	1.07	1.6%	-	-	.10	-1.33

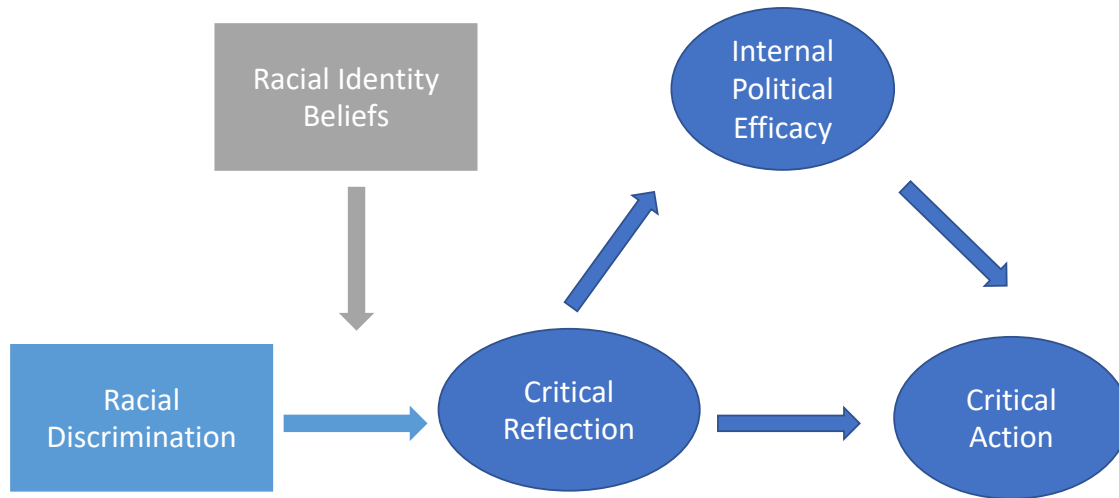Note: All standard loadings were significant at p<.001
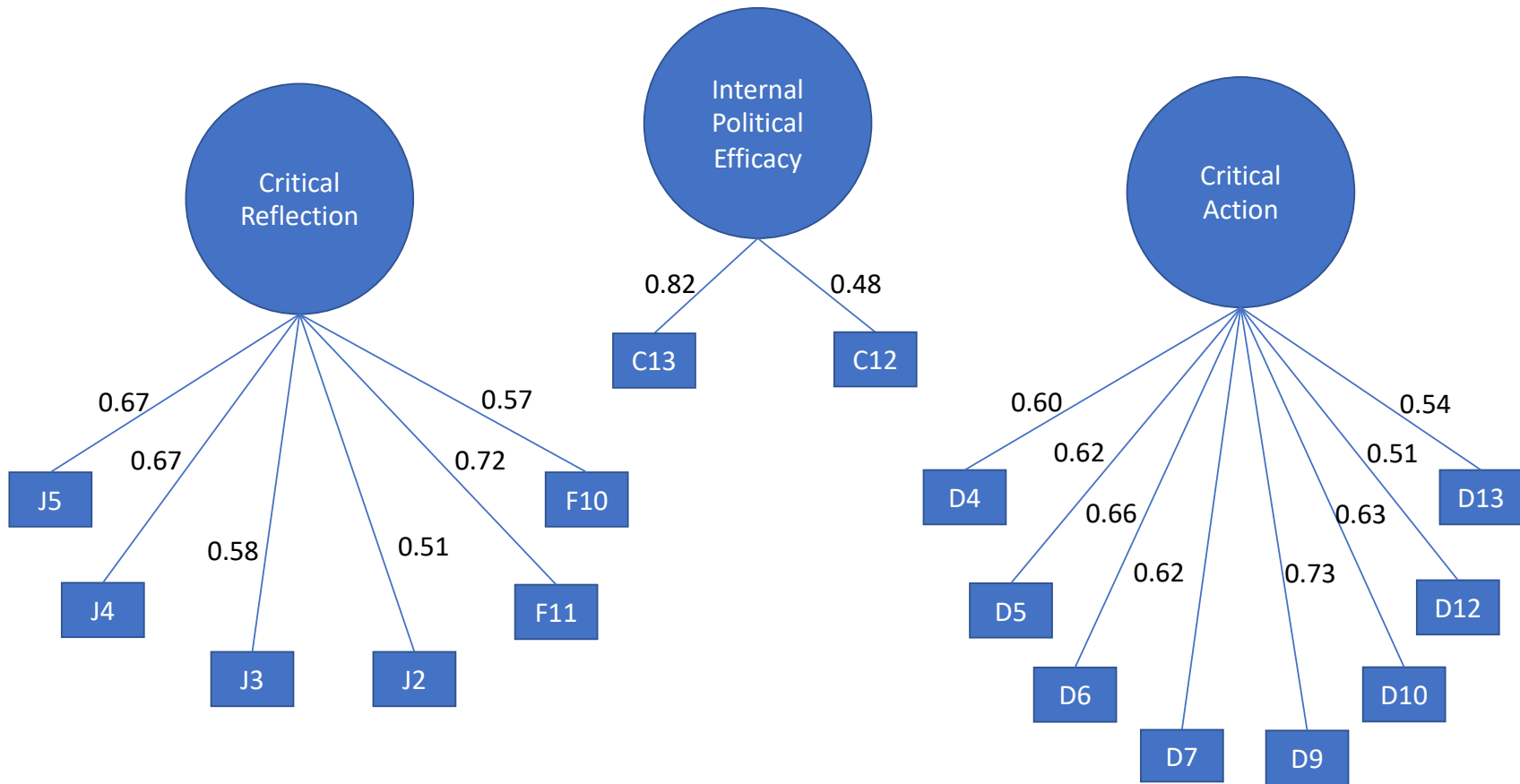
Figure 3-1: Conceptual Model

Figure 3-3: CFA Factor Loadings for Critical Reflection, Internal Political Efficacy and Critical Action Latent Variables

Note. All factor loadings significant $p < .001$***

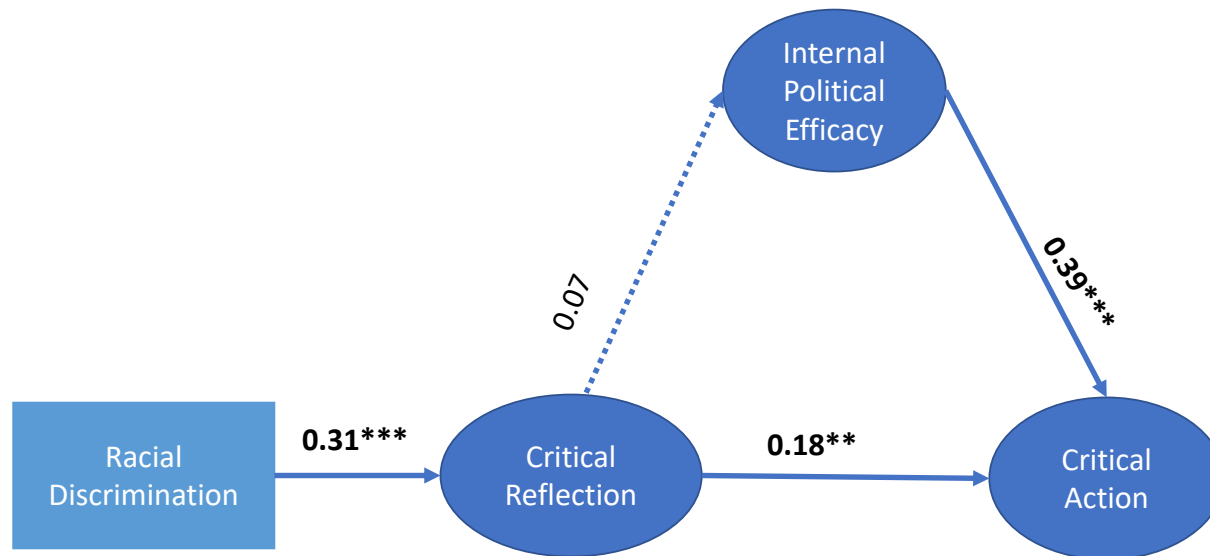*Figure 3-5 Critical Consciousness Mediation Model with Racial Discrimination as a Predictor of Critical Reflection*

*Note: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001*

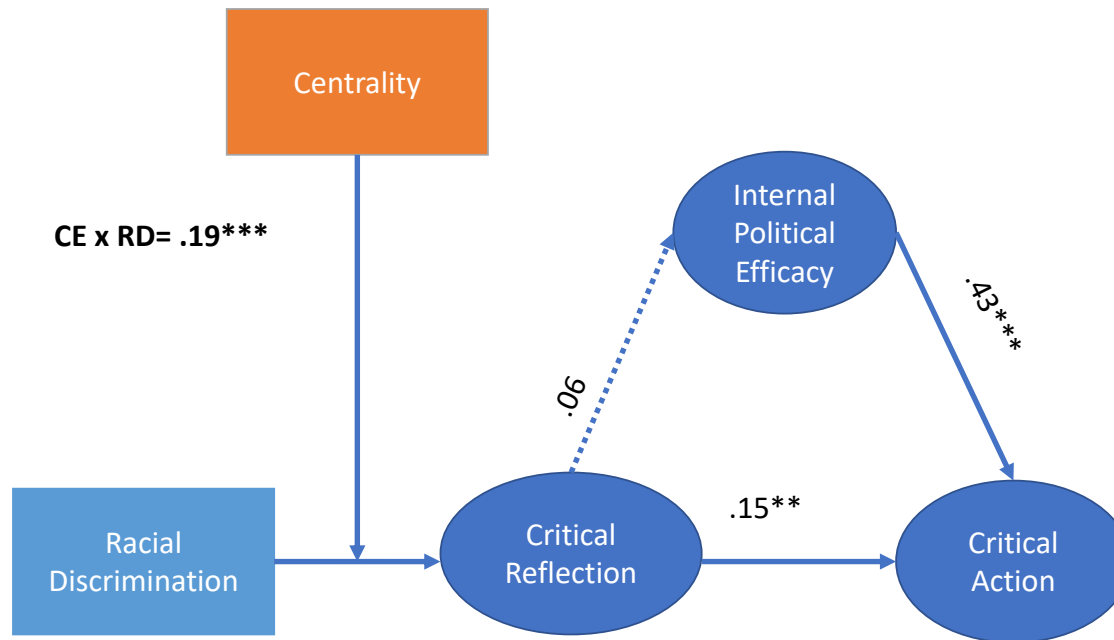*Figure 3-6 Racial Centrality as a Moderator of Racial Discrimination and Critical Action*

Note: Dotted lines are non-significant and bold lines are significant. *p*<.05* p<.01 ** p<.001***

Figure 3-7 Private Regard as a Moderator of the Relationship between Racial Discrimination and Critical Reflection

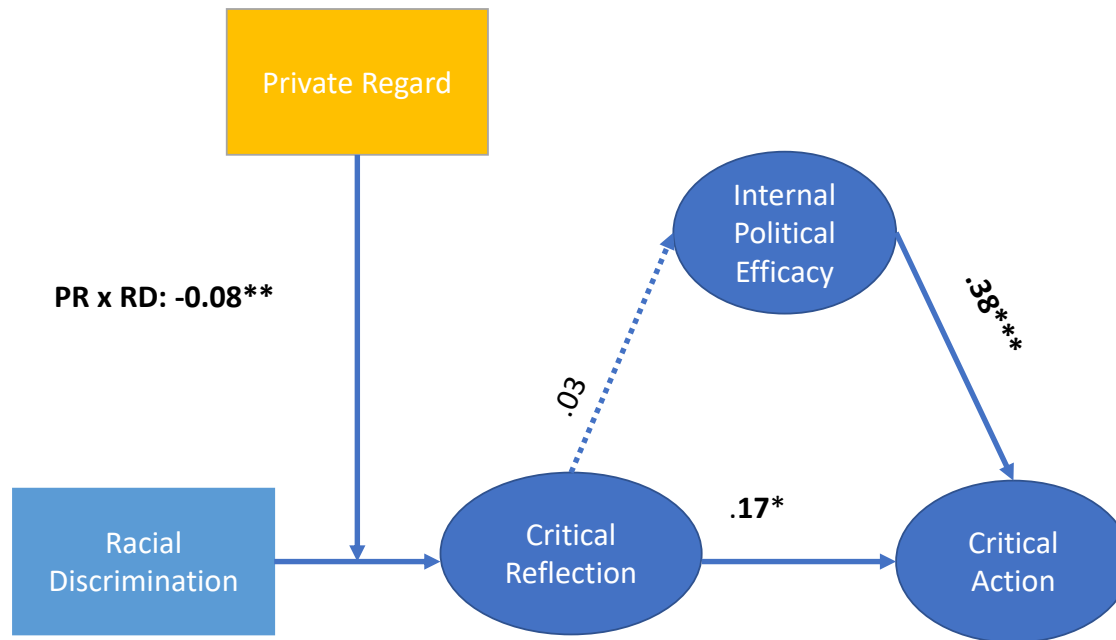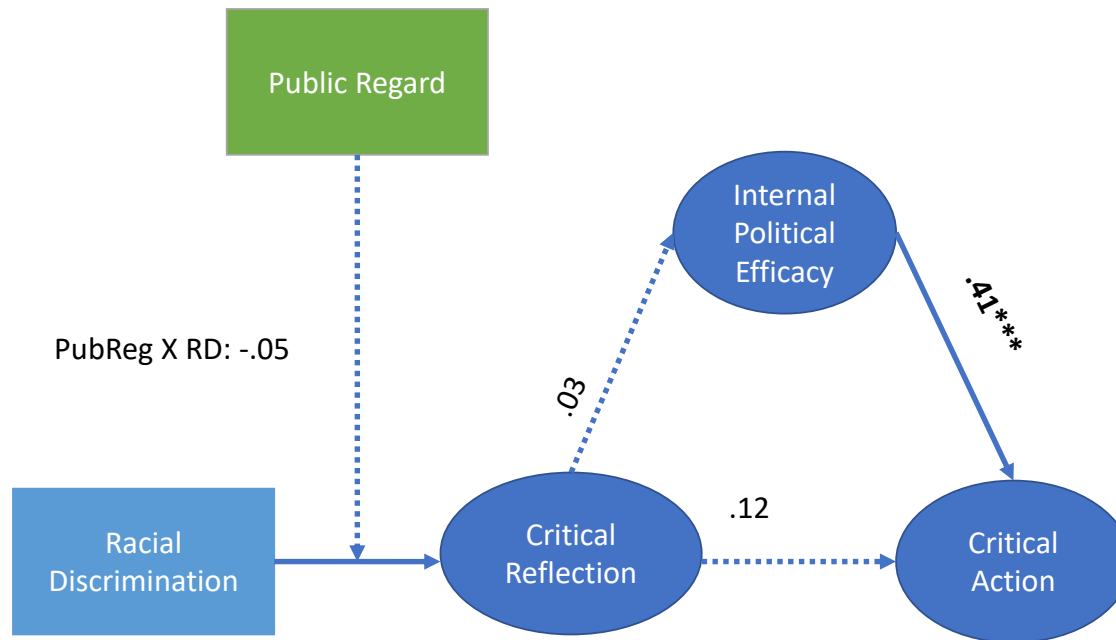Note: Dotted lines are non-significant and bold lines are significant. *p*<.05* p<.01 ** p<.001***

Figure 3-8 Public Regard as a Moderator of the Association Between Racial Discrimination and Critical Reflection

Note: Dotted lines are non-significant and bold lines are significant. *p*<.05* p<.01 ** p<.001***
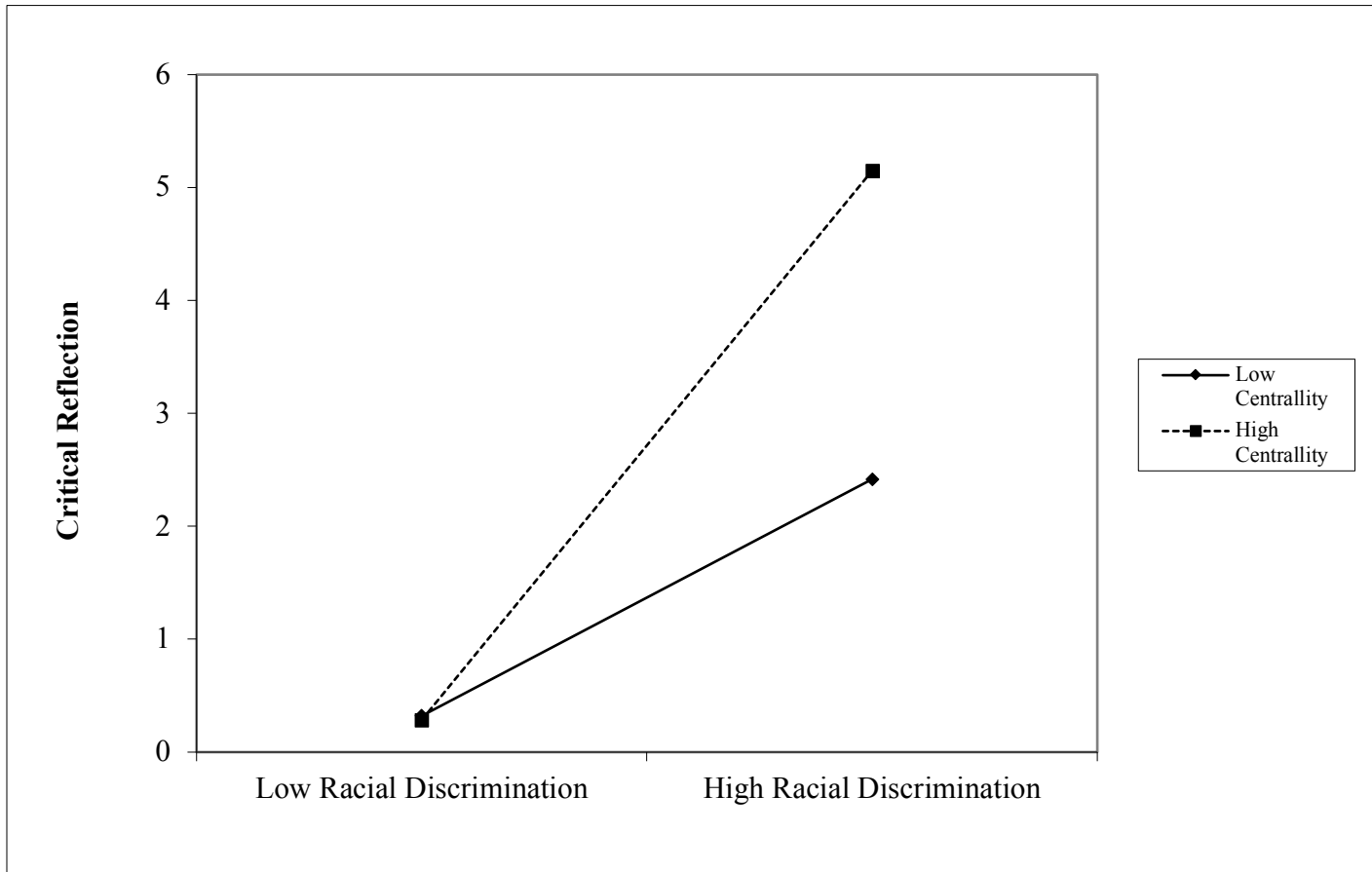
Figure 3-9 Simple Slopes Probe for Centrality Interaction

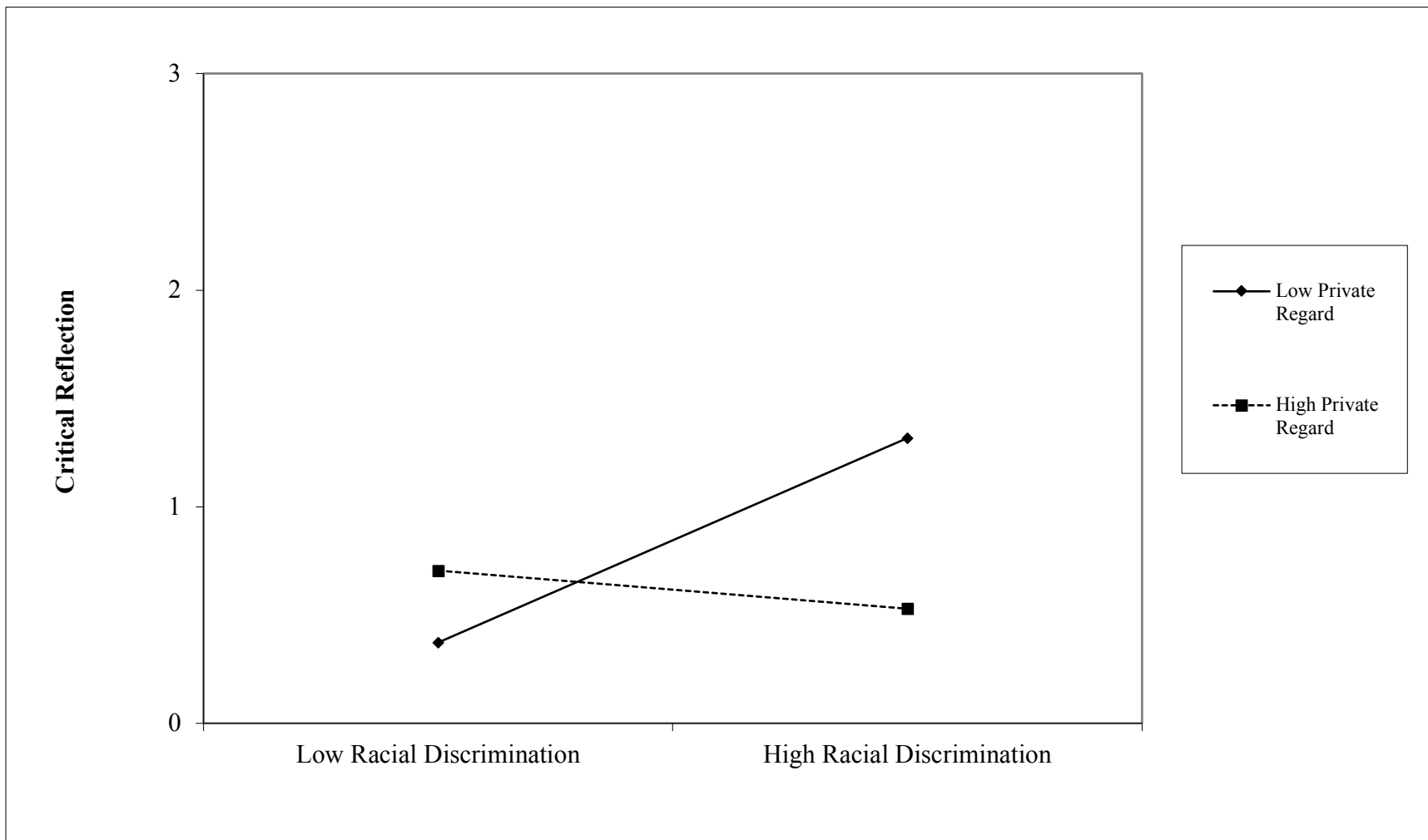*Figure 3-10 Simple Slopes Analysis for Private Regard Interaction*

Chapter 4: Racial Identity and Critical Consciousness at the College Transition: How Do Racial Identity Exploration and Critical Action Reinforce one another in Black College Students?

College students are at the forefront of civic issues, and bring visibility to social inequities nationwide (Hope et al., 2016; Rhoads, 2016). Modern collective movements such as #OccupyWallStreet, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and #BlackLivesMatter reinforce the central role of social identity in the critical action of young adults, particularly college students (De Angelo et al., 2016; Miller & Schwartz, 2016; Smith et al., 2015). The study of Black college students' action highlights the contrast between their positive connection to Black identity and negative racialized experiences on college campuses (Carson, 2009; Harper, 2015). Their shared experiences suggest Black college students' critical action (i.e., individuals' actions to participate in sociopolitical activity) is motivated by their exploration of a positive Black identity (Glasker, 2002; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Rogers, 2012). Further, Black students' critical action behaviors may reinforce identity development as certain activities (e.g., engaging in political discussion about the state of Black communities) prompt deeper thinking about the meaning and role of race (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Syed & Azmitia, 2010). In a society built on Black marginalization, scholars must examine how Black communities' sociopolitical action both asserts their rights as American citizens, and positively affirms their Black identity. The reciprocal process of racial identity exploration through critical action sheds light on potential pathways that sustain critical action as Black youth transition into adulthood.

Black racial identity development and critical action may co-occur in Black college students (Glasker, 2002; Rogers, 2012; Rojas, 2007), but little empirical evidence verifies this claim. Moreover, little work explores the directionality of such relations, to explore if Black racial identity and critical action reinforce one another (i.e., maintain bidirectional relationships) during emerging adulthood. Mitchell and Dell (1992) found that Black college students actively exploring their racial identity were more likely to be involved in Black oriented student organizations. Subsequent research suggests that specific types of civic activity may prompt racial identity exploration in Black college students (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Other scholars suggest that the relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action reinforce one another as students become more involved in campus life (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Recent research focuses on how racial identity content beliefs are associated with Black student involvement and activism (Chavous, 2000; Hope et al., 2019; White-Johnson, 2012). Yet, without further examining the role of racial identity process and critical action, we miss a unique opportunity to understand positive development of Black college students. By examining how racial identity exploration and critical action reinforce one another, we can deepen our understanding of factors that motivate consistent critical action during adulthood.

Given that racial identity development processes are particularly salient during the adolescent years, Black college students may enter college having explored some part of their racial identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Such exploration may involve engagement in specific activities that link Black identity to prosocial behaviors in Black communities (Chapman-Hillard & Adams-Bass, 2016; Way et al., 2008). If racial identity exploration includes an awareness of Black communities' history of civic engagement and community uplift (e.g.,Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016), Black students may enter college seeking opportunities for critical action as

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a way to further explore their racial identity in a college context. Current research should explore the links between racial identity exploration and critical action as motivators for engagement during the transition to adulthood.

In the present study, I examine how Black college students' racial identity exploration relates to their critical action. I propose a bidirectional relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action where racial identity exploration fosters critical action and critical action fosters racial identity development over the college years. This study fills several gaps in the existing racial identity and critical consciousness literatures. First, this study empirically tests racial identity theory that suggests racial identity exploration may initiate awareness of social inequalities, and subsequent action to challenge such inequalities (Cross, 1991; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Second, this work examines racial identity and critical consciousness processes in a college student population, as little work focuses on how identity and critical consciousness processes unfold in emerging adulthood versus adolescence (Herberle, Rapa, & Farago, 2020; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Third, I use longitudinal methods to address methodological gaps examining how relations between racial identity and critical action may change over the college years. As a majority of racial identity and critical consciousness work is cross-sectional, I expand scholarship on Black identity and critical consciousness development during the college transition.

Overview of Conceptual Framework

The theoretical integration of racial identity and critical consciousness processes advances a framework that bridges how Black young adults' understandings of group marginalization relate to the ways they think about and engage their identities as Black individuals (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). Black racial identity formation and

critical action are linked in Black communities' fight for full recognition as American citizens.

Yet Black racial identity and Black critical action are not typically examined together as

intersecting contributors to Black college student development. Considering both Black racial

identity and critical action simultaneously will lead to a more holistic understanding of how

Black emerging adults' practice and engage their rights as citizens in the United States.

Racial Identity Process Theory: The Role of Racial Identity Exploration

Racial identity process theory highlights the tools Black individuals use to explore the

meaning of Blackness (Syed & Azmitia, 2009). This theory considers how specific behaviors,

events, or traditional practices emphasize the cultural strengths of the Black community. Within

a college context, racial identity process theory explains how Black college students analyze

their Blackness in connection to the Black community's fight for full access to American

citizenship (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). During racial identity exploration (i.e.,

individuals' search for the meaning and representation of racial identity in their lives) Black

college students may engage in discussions or cultural activities associated with the Black

community that expose them to ideals and practices considered traditional to the Black

community, such as communalism and social responsibility. Further, during racial identity

resolution (i.e., one's commitment to and internalization of a specific understanding and role of

their racial group), Black students may integrate an understanding of community uplift that they

must uphold as a member of that community. Such understandings may trickle into a macro

understanding of critical action as a practice of formal citizenship. Though racial identity process

theory involves both racial exploration and resolution, I focus this work on racial identity

exploration, as exploration is an especially salient developmental process during the college transition (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; Syed & Juan, 2012; Syed & Mitchell, 2010).

Racial identity process theory also accounts for how contextual changes, such as school transitions, spark racial identity development (Azmitia et al., 2008; Benner & Graham, 2009, 2011; French et al., 2006). The majority of work on racial identity and school transitions focuses on the transition from middle to high school (Benner & Graham, 2009). Yet, racial identity exploration continues during the college transition, where students are often exposed to a diversity of peers, curricula, and engagement opportunities that shape their identity processes (Wilkins, 2014).

Overview of Racial Identity Process Theory

Racial identity process theory is rooted in personal identity literature. Personal identity theory focuses on how individuals come to know who they are as they transition to adulthood. Erikson (1968) established identity as a dynamic process where individuals gain clarity about who they are and their role in society by resolving the various conflicts that emerge during identity formation. Marcia (1980) furthered identity development theory by highlighting how identity search (i.e., exploration) and clarity about one's identity role (i.e., resolution/commitment) interact throughout the lifespan as individuals explore different identity domains. Marcia categorizes these interactions into four identity statuses based on individuals' levels of exploration and commitment: diffused (no exploration or resolution), moratorium (high exploration, low resolution), foreclosed (no exploration, high resolution) and achieved (high exploration, high commitment). Each of these models emphasized identity as related to core beliefs and values as well as career choices, but did not extend into ethnic-racial identity experiences.

Drawing from Erickson and Marcia's frameworks, Phinney's (1989) model focused on ethnic-racial identity development as a domain of identity formation. Phinney's identity model addressed a significant gap in the identity formation literature by highlighting ethnic identity processes as unique from general identity processes, especially for people of color. This assumption stands in contrast to Erickson and Marcia's frameworks as these conceptualizations are based on the experiences of White children and men. Unlike other identity domains (e.g., career identity), society assigns ethnic-racial group membership based on physical characteristics, interactions with peers, and family socialization rather than solely being based on individuals' choice. Thus, the process of ethnic-racial identity development has different implications for youth of color due to the societal stigmas associated with the ethnic group membership that contrasts with general identity formation.

Racial Exploration and School Transitions

Phinney's early work also establishes adolescence as a time of dynamic growth in ethnic-racial identity given the rapid sociocognitive development. During adolescence, youth can more readily engage abstract concepts (e.g., identity), and think critically about contextual factors that prompt ethnic-identity search (e.g., experiences of discrimination, family and peer racial socialization, experiences of school racial climate). However, adolescents shifting into emerging adulthood may re-engage identity processes, particularly during the college transition (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Fuller-Rowell, Burrow, & Ong, 2011). College experience comes with a variety of exposures (e.g., diverse coursework, new peer networks, etc.) that may prompt racial identity exploration.

Racial identity exploration categorizes search processes Black individuals use to learn what their race means to them (Syed & Mitchell, 2013; Umaña-Taylor, 2011; Umaña-Taylor et

al., 2014). Such learning may occur through participation in cultural activities, discussions with family and friends about race-related issues, or social media engagement (Torres et al., 2011; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). These discussions and cultural practices may plant the seed that motivates future critical action. Black individuals exploring their racial history see links between their individual racial understandings and a collective Black identity connected to the fight for racial justice (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). Further, racial identity exploration often occurs prior to college entry, indicating that Black students may enter college with an understanding of Blackness associated with critical action. Black individuals' engagement with Black history's narratives of resilience and success empowers Black individuals to challenge political, social, and economic inequality Black communities encounter. Black people's knowledge of Black resilience is also associated with positive outcomes related to mental health and academic self-concept (Beasley et al., 2016; Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016). Yet, little work to date explicitly links Black college students' current racial identity processes and their critical action engagement.

Despite work demonstrating school transitions as a factor in re-initiating the racial identity process, the majority of research on racial identity process focuses adolescence, with little work on emerging adulthood in college (Benner & Graham, 2009, 2011; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). Research on adolescents suggests that the most salient contributors to racial identity formation are racialized experiences such as racial socialization or experiences of racial discrimination (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Seaton et al., 2012). However, college students are exposed to a broader diversity of factors that could catalyze racial identity exploration. Colleges serve as an important developmental context due to exposure to diverse perspectives through various curricula of study, peers, and faculty at a given institution. Such exposure has important

implications for the racial identity development of college students of color. Given the relevance of the college developmental context, it is important to examine how Black college students (re)think their racial identities. Such investigations highlight both positive and negative college factors that impact racial salience and belonging in postsecondary institutions.

Racial Exploration at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Connections to Critical Action

Black college students at PWIs regularly report experiences of tokenization (i.e., forced to represent the race as the only one or one of few Black students), and interactions with racially insensitive faculty and peers that inform their college racial identity formation (Hurtado et al., 2015; Sekaquaptewa et al., 2007). Syed and Azmitia (2010) found that experiences of prejudice initiated the majority of racial identity exploration for college students of color. Identity exploration continued to increase over the college years as a consequence of the discriminatory action. However, racial identity exploration is not limited to negative experiences during the college years. On the contrary, positive connections with diverse Black student communities provide support in the face of negative race-related experiences, while simultaneously catalyzing racial identity formation. Baber (2012) found that Black students at a PWI experienced more heterogeneous Black communities in college than in their home communities, initiating racial identity exploration through their connections with same-race (but highly diverse) peer groups. Black peer connections allowed for a reexamination of the meaning of their Blackness beyond being the "token Black student," providing students a sense of support and belonging in college.

Few studies demonstrate how racialized experiences that initiate racial identity exploration may lead to Black college students' critical action. Recent work highlights associations between identity, discrimination and activism orientations of Black college students.

Szymanski and Lewis (2015) demonstrate how both racial identity beliefs and racial discrimination are positively associated with Black activism behaviors. Hope and colleagues (2019) found similar patterns among Black college students, but distinguished between students' likelihood to engage in high risk (i.e., visible, potentially militant) versus low risk (i.e., passive, conventional) activism behaviors. Students with nationalist identity beliefs (i.e., beliefs that emphasize the unique experiences of being Black) engage in both high and low risk activism. Students who prioritize race as central to their self-concept (i.e., high centrality) engage low risk activism. While these two works provide helpful insight into the connections between racial identity and critical action, both works emphasize racial identity content (i.e., beliefs and attitudes about Blackness) rather than assessing how racial identity process formation relates to various forms of civic activity for Black college students. It is important to capture racial identity process at the college transition given that this is a developmental period where racial identity is likely to change (Pahl & Way, 2008). Examining racial identity process in relation to critical action accounts for how identity content changes as college students embark on new experiences that promote racial identity exploration (Scottham et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2017).

Unlike secondary schools where opportunities for civic activity may be limited by school district resources, college spaces offer a plethora of opportunities to engage the campus and local community through a racialized lens. Black student organizations—particularly those emphasizing racial uplift—allow Black students to deeply explore their identity through service to the Black community and learning the history of their racial group (Guiffrida, 2003; Rojas, 2007). Such interactions likely include sociopolitical discussions around race, especially when salient race-related events occur on campus (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Syed & Juan, 2012). Such discussions, particularly within Black organizations with social justice

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orientations, expose students to new ideas and ways of understanding their racial identities in society.

Yet, do Black youth's critical action behaviors shift in a PWI context? Colleges often facilitate peer and curricular experiences that likely differ from their home environments. Exposure to a diversity of worldviews, coupled with various engagement opportunities (i.e., identity-based organizations, service learning courses) may increase civic activity. Further, negative race related experiences on campus may link racial identity exploration and critical action, as students use critical action to resist racial prejudice and discrimination. Black college students engage in national identity based movements, such as Black Lives Matter (#BLM) and Deferred Action Against Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in addition to local campus movements to challenge negative experiences of racial climate (Hope et al., 2016; Trachtenberg, 2018). Such activities relate to future engagement, particularly with respect to civic leadership, volunteering, and engaging in race-related discussions (Bowman et al., 2015). Yet despite evidence that students may increase their engagement during college years, it is unclear how racial identity processes may motivate such involvement.

Longitudinal Perspectives on Racial Identity

In addition to examining the links between racial identity and critical action, little work tracks how racial identity exploration changes throughout college, and what factors initiate this process (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Recent research suggests that contextual factors such as students attending universities whose racial composition differs greatly from their high school increases racial salience, which is associated with increased racial exploration (Wang et al., 2017). Yet, longitudinal findings regarding racial identity exploration during the college transition are mixed. Syed & Azmitia (2009) found that exploration increased over the college

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years for Black, Latinx, and Asian-American college students. Another study finds initial decreases in ethnic identity exploration at the college transition, with subsequent increases associated with involvement in extracurricular activities and identity affirming organizations (Tsai & Fuligni, 2012). In a review of longitudinal studies of adolescent identity, Meeus (2011) concludes that ethnic racial identity exploration remains stable over time, rather than an overall increase with age.

In addition, only one of the reviewed studies (Yip et al., 2006) uses an African-American sample versus a combined, ethnically diverse sample. This sampling discrepancy may mask unique variation in racial identity process changes for Black populations. For example, the election of President Barack Obama likely initiated ethnic-racial identity exploration across all ethnic-racial groups, given the significance of a non-White President of the United States. However, the election of the former president is especially salient for Black communities given the history of slavery and the collective struggle for recognition as full citizens of the United States. Fuller-Rowell and colleagues (2011) found that the election of Barack Obama was associated with identity exploration for Black students, and this association was stronger for Black students who considered race as a central component of their identity. Thus, given Black populations' unique identity experiences and mixed findings on racial identity exploration across the lifespan, it is critical to apply a longitudinal lens to explore how these processes function in Black communities.

Critical Consciousness in Black College Students: The Role of Critical Action

Critical consciousness is a framework for how individuals come to recognize and challenge social inequities such as racism (Bañales et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2011a). Three dimensions define critical consciousness: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action.

While critical reflection and political efficacy are central to critical consciousness development, this study focuses on the role of critical action in promoting Black college students' racial identity exploration. Critical action captures the behavioral dimension of critical consciousness, and describes how Black college students may use their college involvement as a tool to challenge larger, systemic inequities. Such activities may include participating in Black cultural organizations, mainstream student government, or hosting educational forums to spread awareness about a social issue (Fasset, Priddle, BrckaLorenz, & Kinzie, 2018; Harper & Quaye 2007). Critical consciousness and Black racial identity theory explain the cyclical relationship between Black college students' racial identity development and critical action. These frameworks outline how racial identity exploration initiates from certain types of action, particularly those associated with the uplift of Black communities (Watts et al., 2011a; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Racial identity exploration may, in turn, lead to stronger critical action. Black students who see critical action as a component of Blackness may be more likely to participate in such activities. This participation may be more evident in contexts that foster racial identity threat, such as PWIs. Indeed, Black college students voice the discrepancies between their experiences of campus racial climate and how universities promote mission statements addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Glasker & Glasker, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012). Given this discrepancy, Black college students use critical action to hold university administration accountable to their diversity missions. As students recognize discrepancies in their experiences and college diversity narratives, they may think explicitly about the role of race in their lives. Such exploration enables Black students to advocate for resources that curate an inclusive college experience.

Critical consciousness theory highlights how Black critical action is inextricably tied to the struggle for full access to American citizenship. Black consciousness manifests as academic, economic, and political engagement to ensure social mobility (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016; Mattis et al., 2004; Rojas, 2007; White-Johnson, 2012). Integrating racial identity and critical consciousness frameworks links racial identity formation to the types of civic beliefs and actions that are traditional to Black cultural and sociopolitical practices. Further, the two frameworks suggest pathways of how the college context supports both racial identity exploration and critical action, given the novel opportunities that colleges provide for engagement.

Critical action likely plays an important role for Black students to navigate racial challenges with peers and faculty (Cerezo et al., 2014; Petchauer, 2011). Black college students' critical action is often a central tool that students use to cope with negative racialized experiences on campus and to change in their immediate environments (Hope & Spencer, 2017). College is a unique context to examine critical action behaviors given the variety of structured engagement opportunities that may not be available during adolescence (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). As a "mediating institution" (Flanagan et al., 2011 p. 101) colleges transmit both implicit and explicit messaging about how its future alumni should engage politically, socially, and economically in society. Thus, opportunities for critical action in college likely reflect the marginalization experiences of Black communities in society at large, specifically with respect to equitable access to education, economic, and social mobility (Elon et al., 2018). Reports of racial microaggressions, low enrollment of Black students and other students of color, and lack of Black faculty may contribute to the belief that they do not belong on campus or in broader society (Hope et al., 2016; Solorzano et al., 2000). Students who recognize these experiences of

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marginalization may use critical action to resist discrimination experiences and to cope with race-related stress (Hope & Spencer, 2017; McWhirter et al., 2019). In the process of challenging negative racial encounters, students may explore their identity as it connects to their critical action behaviors. As such, examining how Black students' critical action to respond to marginalizing messages is important, as it may reflect their future engagement in a society built on institutional racism.

Critical action also encompasses political and community involvement, especially when in service to the Black community (Ginwright, 2007, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Black students' critical action may differ from mainstream involvement due to the pervasive marginalization that Black communities face in the United States (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002). Further, Black individuals distrust of government institutions' ability to meet their needs may lead to disengagement in traditional political processes, such as voting or working political campaigns. Instead, non-mainstream forms of engagement (e.g., protests, boycotts) express collective identity and political resistance. In a college context, critical action may take the form of involvement in student leadership or culturally-affirming ethnic organizations that affirm Black students' sense of belonging (Chavous, 2000; Harper & Quaye 2007). Further, critical action may take the form of campus protests or boycotts that highlight Black college students' negative experiences of racial climate both on and off campus (Alzate-Gonzalez, 2015; Williams, 2014). Regardless of the form of critical action, Black college students participate in a myriad of engagement opportunities that inform the ways they think about themselves as a member of a Black collective.

Current Study

This study explores associations between racial identity exploration and critical action behaviors of Black college students (See Figure 4.1). I empirically test the reciprocal associations between racial identity exploration and critical action. Previous literature examines how racial identity content motivates Black student engagement, but little work explores how racial identity may develop through critical action. Critical consciousness theory posits that racial identity can be a precursor for critical action but does not explore a reciprocal pathway for critical action to influence identity. Additionally, few of these studies have examined these processes during emerging adulthood, where the college transition may serve as a catalyst for both racial identity and critical consciousness develop. Further, none of these studies explore how this relationship between critical action and racial identity development may shift over time. Given the racial identity literature's focus on longitudinal approaches during adolescence and the growing need for longitudinal approaches to explore the ontogeny of critical consciousness development across life stages beyond adolescence, a longitudinal approach is warranted in the study of Black emerging adults in the college transition.

Thus, this study explores the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action in Black college students?

2. How does the relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action change over time among Black college students?

I hypothesize that racial identity exploration and critical action will have reciprocal relationships with one another during the college transition. Further, I posit that the reciprocal relationships

between racial identity and exploration will remain stable over time, as the two processes likely reinforce one another for Black students in a PWI context.

Method

Data for this study comes from the Minority College Cohort Study (MCCS), a longitudinal examination of the experiences of 557 Black (N=237) and Latinx (N=320) freshman who entered college in fall of 2013. Students were recruited from five predominately White universities in the Midwest: two urban private institutions, one urban public institution, one rural public institution and one suburban public institution. Only participants who identified primarily as Black or African American were included in this study (N=237). Approximately (73%) of the sample was female. The mean age of the entire sample at initial recruitment was 18.2 years old (*SD*=0.47). Nearly half of the sample of Black students (49%) were first generation college students.

Procedures

University administration distributed an online survey to eligible students in fall 2013. Participants provided informed consent via the survey portal and subsequently completed the questionnaire for each wave of data collection. Students were eligible if they identified as primarily Black (this included multiracial students who held primary identifications as Black) and were a first-time freshman college student. Seven waves of survey data were collected over a 4-year period during each semester of the academic year (fall, winter, or spring), with the final wave collected during participants' fourth year of college. Waves 1 and 4 were collected in the fall at the start of the academic school year. Waves 2 and 5 were collected at the beginning of the winter semester. Waves 3 and 6 were collected in the final (spring) semester of the academic year. Wave 7 was collected two years after Wave 6, in spring of 2017, to capture on time college

completion. Surveys completed in the fall and spring semesters took approximately 45 minutes, and participants received a $25 electronic gift card. Winter surveys took approximately 15 minutes, and students received a $15 electronic gift card as compensation. Data collection was managed using REDcap software administered by the University of Chicago (Harris et al., 2009). Wave 1 consisted of 237 students, and retention remained at 85% and 80% for waves 3 and 6 respectively. Data for this study comes from students' first year (waves 1 and 3; fall 2013 and spring 2014) and end of the second year (wave 6; spring 2015). Students in the first wave were asked to respond to measures thinking about their experiences during their senior year of high school, as they took the survey at the beginning of their freshman year of college.

Measures

Racial Identity Exploration (W1α= .94 W1 IIC=.83; W3α=.90 W3 IIC=.75; W6α=.93 W6 IIC=.81). Racial identity exploration items captured the behaviors participants engaged to understand their ethnic-racial identity. Three items were derived from the revised Multigroup Measure of Ethnic Identity (MEIM, Phinney & Ong 2007). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). Table 4.2 provides a full list of items.

Critical Action (W1α=.82 W1 IIC=.49; W3α=.78 W3 IIC= .42; W6α= .76 W6 IIC=.39). Critical action is captured by six items from the Youth Involvement Inventory (YII; Pancer et al. 2007), which is a 30-item measure that identifies political, community, and service activities in which youth or young adults might be involved. Item responses indicate how often respondents participated in each activity in the previous year. Responses range from 1-5 with 1 being *"Never"* and 5 being *"More than 10 times."* Only items common to all waves and conceptually aligned with Black college students' critical action were included in the analyses. Sample items

included, "How often did you [in the past year] join a protest, march, meeting, or demonstration." Table 4.2 provides a full list of items.

Methodological Approach

Data Analysis Plan

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis were conducted as preliminary analyses. Missing data was low to moderate with a range of 1 to 21% attrition across waves. Missingness was addressed with full information maximum likelihood estimation to maximize all available data across participants and waves. Waves 1, 3, and 6 were used to build CFAs for racial identity exploration and critical action. Wave 1 included responses during the fall of freshman year (college entry) where students were asked to reflect on their experiences during their senior year of high school. Wave 3 included responses during the spring of freshman year, asking individuals to respond based on their first-year experiences. Wave 6 included responses from the spring of sophomore year, with respondents reflecting on their experiences from their sophomore year of college.

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were used to create six latent constructs. Each construct represented racial identity or critical action at waves 1, 3, and 6. Upon completing CFAs, I tested four SEM models to assess autoregressive paths, direct paths between exploration and critical reflection, and full cross-lagged paths between study constructs. A cross lagged panel model is a type of structural equation model that allows for the investigation of reciprocal relationships between two or more constructs (Kline, 2011). This type of model is constructed by first testing the stability of each construct over the available time points, followed by testing the association between constructs across available time points (Kenny, 2014; Oud, 2007). The models are as follows: (a) a baseline model with autoregressive paths, (b) a model with

autoregressive effects and direct paths from racial identity exploration at wave 1 and wave 3 to

critical action at wave 3 and wave 6, respectively (c) a model with autoregressive effects direct

paths from and critical action at wave 1 and wave 3 to racial identity exploration at wave 3 and

wave 6, respectively (d) a fully cross-lagged panel model with direct paths between both racial

identity exploration, and critical action across the three time points. In each of the models, the

baseline latent variables for racial identity exploration and critical action were hypothesized to be

correlated. Error terms were also hypothesized as correlated across three time points.

Descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS 24 (IBM Corp, 2016). The CFA and cross-

lagged panel models were analyzed in MPLUS version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017).

These analyses used the maximum likelihood estimator (MLR) to generate parameter estimates

that best reflect patterns of association between students' responses (Kline, 2011). Model fit for

CFA and cross-lagged panel models were assessed using the comparative fit index (CFI), the

Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized

root mean square residual (SRMR). CFI and TLI values at or above .95 indicate good fit to the

data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). An RMSEA of .05 and below and SRMR of .06 and below indicates

good fit (Kline, 2015).

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Preliminary Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics for study measures are provided in Table 4.1 below. According

to the means across items, respondents were highly likely to be engaged in racial identity

exploration across the three time points. Exploration was generally stable across the three time

points, with a slight increase in exploration at wave 6. A majority of respondents were involved

in at least one critical action behavior, with high variation across items. Black college students in

this sample were most involved in ethnic clubs, or served in a leadership role in an organization. Waves 1 and Wave 6 show the highest levels of involvement in critical action across the three waves.

To ensure that there was adequate sample to conduct the statistical analysis, a priori power analyses were conducted using the Soper calculator (Soper, 2020). These analyses assess the minimum required sample size to detect a small (0.1), medium (0.3), or large (0.5) effect. Power analyses included six latent constructs (Exploration W1, W3, and W6 and Critical Action W1, W3, W6) and twenty-seven observed items (3 indicators per exploration latent and 6 indicators per critical action latent). Analyses indicated that a minimum sample size of 403 was needed to detect a small effect size with a power level of .8. A minimum sample size of 88 was required to hold the model structure. However, a medium effect could be detected with a minimum sample size of 161. Given that N=237 for the current study, I proceeded with subsequent analyses. However, findings must be interpreted cautiously given the small sample size and limited magnitude of subsequent effects.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After preliminary analysis, a CFA was conducted to determine how well observed items represented the latent constructs of exploration and critical reflection across three time points. According to goodness of fit indices, the initial model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data CFI (0.93), TLI (0.91), RMSEA (0.05) SRMR (0.06). Modification indices (i.e., additional parameter estimates that improve model fit within CFA and SEM models) suggested within wave correlations between the boycott and buycott items and the ethnic and leader items. Boycott and buycott items had similar wording (see Table 4.2) and likely reflect a similar construct. For example, if an individual chooses to boycott a particular company because they

dislike the values or political leanings of the company, they may also choose to buycott, or support a company that does demonstrate aligned values. Thus, the correlation was added per wave to reflect this conceptual overlap. Similarly, ethnic and leader items reflect involvement in campus organizations, albeit in different capacities. Given that Black students often use campus organizations to support their social justice orientations and sense of belonging at PWIs (Chavous et al. 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Mitchell & Dell, 1992), it is likely that the behaviors are related and were thus correlated per wave. All items were correlated with themselves across waves. The revised model resulted in six latent constructs of exploration and critical action across three waves (see Figure 4.2). Exploration was measured by three items and critical action was measured by six items (see Table 4.2). The majority of observed items measured the constructs well across waves with positive and significant loadings ranging from .35 to .90. Two items, "Served as a member of an organizing committee or board for a club or organization" and "Participated in an ethnic or cultural club or organization" did not maintain consistently high loadings across waves, but were included due to conceptual alignment with Black students' critical action behaviors. Based on these revisions, model fit indices indicated strong model fit for the final model CFI (0.95), TLI (0.94), RMSEA (0.05) SRMR (0.06). Given the strong measurement foundation based on the CFAs, I proceeded to test four models to examine longitudinal and reciprocal effects between racial identity exploration and critical action.

Cross-Lagged Panel Model

I applied procedures from MPLUS Version 8 to test four models. The baseline model (see Figure 4.3) solely examined autoregressive effects for racial identity exploration and critical action latent constructs. Model 2 (see Figure 4.4) examined the autoregressive effects with racial

identity exploration predicting critical action at a later time point. Model 3 (see Figure 4.5) examined the autoregressive effects with critical action predicting racial identity exploration at a later time point. The fourth final model (see Figure 4.6) tested the full cross-lagged model with autoregressive effects and both racial identity exploration and critical action predicting one another at later time points. Latent constructs were correlated within each wave across models. Error terms for observed items were also correlated across waves in all four models.

Table 4.3 presents the fit indices for tested models. As shown in Table 4.3, all models demonstrated good fit to the data, with Model 4 showing the best model fit. Model 1 (Figure 4.3) is the baseline model that assesses the stability of the constructs over time. The fit indices in Table 4.3 indicated that the measurement model showed good fit to study data, indicating that model foundation was stable to proceed with subsequent analyses. Exploration constructs showed moderate associations over time with the Wave 1 to Wave 3 autoregressive path showing a slightly stronger effect when compared to the Wave 3 to Wave 6 autoregressive path (β=.53 p<.001 W1 to W3; β=.49 p<.001 W3 to W6). Critical action paths showed similar consistency across waves, with the Wave 3 to Wave 6 autoregressive path showing a stronger effect than the autoregressive path from Wave 1 to Wave 3 (β=.38 p<.001 W1 to W3; β=.41 p<.01). Exploration showed more stability over time as compared to critical action. The autoregressive paths for both racial exploration and critical action were statistically significant in the baseline model, indicating that the constructs were stable over the three waves.

Model 2 (Figure 4.4) builds upon Model 1 with the inclusion of direct paths from exploration to critical action in addition to the autoregressive paths. The inclusion of direct paths assessed exploration's association with critical action from Wave 1 to Wave 3 and from Wave 3 to Wave 6. Autoregressive paths remained statistically significant, confirming the consistency of

model stability. The paths from exploration to critical action was also statistically significant, with a slightly larger effect detected from Wave 3 to Wave 6 (β=.16 p<.05 W1 to W3; β=.24 p<.01 W3 to W6). Thus, exploration had a slightly stronger association with critical action from freshman to sophomore year as compared to exploration's association with critical action from high school to freshman year. Overall model fit indicated slight improvement from the baseline model, with a reduction of the SRMR value from .10 to .08. All other fit indices remained the same from Model 2 to Model 1.

Model 3 (Figure 4.5) assesses the association between critical action and exploration with the inclusion of direct paths from critical action to exploration in addition to autoregressive paths. Autoregressive paths remained statistically significant. Both paths from critical action to exploration were significant, with similar effects across Wave 1 to Wave 3 and Wave 3 to Wave 6 (β=.18 p<.001 W1 to W3; β=.17, p<.001 W3 to W6). Critical action was similarly associated with exploration in the transition from high school to college (freshman year) as in freshman to sophomore year in college. Overall model fit was the same as Model 2, indicating that the reversed paths also improved in model fit as compared to the baseline model. Thus, these relationships likely contribute similar explanatory power as those relationships assessed in Model 2.

Model 4 (Figure 4.6) depicts the fully cross-lagged model, inclusive of all paths assessed by Models 1-4. All paths remained statistically significant, with slight variation in path coefficients as compared to previous models. Direct paths from exploration to critical action were statistically significant and followed similar patterns as Model 2 (β=.15 p<.05 W1 to W3; β=.24, p<.01 W3 to W6). Direct paths from critical action to exploration were also statistically significant and followed similar patterns as described in Model 3 (β=.19 p<.01 W1 to W3;

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β=.16, p<.05 W3 to W6). Critical action and exploration are associated with one another among Black college students in the transition from high school to college through their sophomore year. Given the slightly stronger effects indicated in the path from wave 1 critical action to wave 3 exploration and in the path from wave 3 exploration to wave 6 critical action, subsequent analyses probed this as a potential pathway of the relations between critical action and exploration in Black college students.

Wald Tests and Mediation Analyses

Wald tests and mediation analyses were conducted to determine the nature of relations between racial identity exploration and critical action. Wald tests compared the individual paths in the cross lagged model to assess if critical action or exploration were more likely to catalyze one another in this developmental pathway. Figure 4.7 indicates the paths that were compared in the final cross lagged panel model (see Figure 4.6 for path estimates). The Wald test assesses whether the deletion of a path would improve model fit (Chou & Bentler, 1990; Wald, 1943). Significant Wald tests indicate that the path explains variance in the model and should be retained. In these analyses, two Wald tests (one per cross-lagged panel) assessed to identify differences between exploration→critical action paths and critical action→exploration paths. Paths A and B were compared to one another, followed by a comparison of paths C and D. Results for both paths were non-significant (β=.26 p=.61 AB paths; β=.17, p=.68, CD paths), suggesting that there was no difference in the amount of variance each set of paths explained in the model. Thus, both paths contributed the same amount of information to the model. This evidence suggests that racial identity and critical action likely have a reciprocal relationship, despite differences in the magnitudes of each direct path.

An analysis of indirect effects was conducted to investigate the potential mediation effects of exploration and critical action at wave 3 (see Figure 4.8). This analysis was included to compare the two potential mediation paths given the slightly higher coefficients on the critical action→exploration→critical action pathway. Mediation analyses were a subsequent probe from the Wald tests as an alternative assessment of the developmental pathways between exploration and critical action. Mediation analyses assessed if exploration during the freshman year explains some of the relationship between critical action during one's senior year of high school and critical action during one's sophomore year of college. The critical action→exploration→critical action had a small but significant indirect effect via exploration at wave 3 (β=.04, SE=.02 p<.05). The exploration→critical action→exploration pathway was not significant (β=.03, SE=.02 p=.15). Thus, it is likely that exploration mediates the relationship between critical action during the senior year of high school and critical action during the sophomore year of college.

Discussion

The purpose of this final study was to assess the relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action in Black college students. This study used a longitudinal cross-lagged panel modeling approach to determine how these two processes are associated over the first two years of college. A majority of scholarly work examining racial identity exploration and critical consciousness relies on cross-sectional methods to illuminate how these processes function in Black youth (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2006). Further, these two processes are examined in isolation, potentially masking the how these two phenomena inform one another. This study is important because it assesses both racial identity and critical consciousness processes in a sample of Black emerging adults. As a majority of both racial identity and critical consciousness literature has focused on adolescents, this study adds to our

understanding of how these processes unfold in the transition to adulthood (Herbele, Rapa, Farago, 2020; Syed & Azmitia, 2009, 2010). As both racial identity exploration and critical action have been associated with positive outcomes for Black youth in cross-sectional designs (Herbele, Rapa, Farago, 2020; Rivas-Drake et al. 2014), it is important to examine how these two may reinforce one another, particularly during the college transition. My study responds to scholarly calls for a deeper integration of racial identity and critical consciousness processes that contribute to the positive adjustment of Black communities (Aniywo et al., 2018; Mathews et al. 2019).

Racial identity exploration that occurred during Black students' senior year of high school was associated with critical action behaviors during their freshman year. Racial identity exploration during freshman year was also associated with higher critical action during sophomore year. These findings align with previous work suggesting that racial identity exploration during college is often associated with experiences of discrimination and connection to culture (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010). As the PWI context can be a space for both racial marginalization and racial affirmation, there are multiple opportunities for prompting exploration. Exploration prompted by negative racial experiences may lead to critical action as a form of coping (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Hope et al., 2019). Further, those students who enter college in active exploration may intentionally seek academic, social, or sociopolitical opportunities that reinforce their exploration process (Harper, 2013; Syed, 2010; Thelamour, George-Mwangi, & Ezeofor, 2019). These findings are important because they demonstrate how racial identity exploration can be an entry for critical action behaviors in Black college students. As students understand action as a component of their racial identity exploration processes, they may be more involved as they advance through college.

Critical action that occurred during Black students' senior year of high school was also associated with racial exploration during the freshman year. Critical action during freshman year predicted subsequent racial identity exploration in the sophomore year, suggesting a reciprocal pathway between racial identity exploration and critical action over time when considered with the aforementioned exploration findings. Secondary students with opportunities for critical action may be involved in youth activism and organizing projects that tackle issues related to the Black community (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Ginwright, 2007; Ginwright & Cammorota, 2007). By participating in critical action behaviors during high school, Black youth may feel connected to their cultural legacy of activism that may subsequently encourage racial identity exploration (Hart & Gullan, 2010). Further Black cultural events and social movements (e.g., the election of President Barack Obama and the Black Lives Matter Movement) of a given era may emphasize the connection between critical action and racial exploration, leading to a dynamic interplay between the two processes (Franklin, 2016). Such exposures may encourage youth to find similar opportunities as they transition to college. Thus, it seems that racial identity exploration and critical action likely function bidirectionally in the development of Black college students at PWIs, but further examination is needed to assess how these relationships shift or stabilize across contexts.

Although difference tests were not assessed for the mediation findings, the critical action→exploration→ critical action pathway was significant whereas the exploration→critical action→exploration pathway was not. This finding suggests that those who engaged in critical action during their senior year of high school are more likely to engage racial identity exploration during their freshman year of college. Exploration in the freshman year translates into subsequent critical action during the sophomore year. It is important to note how contextual

factors may have influenced this pathway, as the first wave of data collection occurred in the fall

of 2013, one year after President Barack Obama's reelection. Students were prompted to respond

relative to their experiences during their senior year of high school (2012-2013), which, given

the election year, may have provided unique opportunities for critical action. Even if students

were not directly involved in Obama's election campaign, scholarly work suggests that Obama's

presidency served as an encounter experience that stimulated identity exploration in Black

college students (Fuller-Rowell, Burrow, & Ong, 2011). Given the level of racial discourse that

permeated the political zeitgeist during Obama's terms in office, it is not surprising that racial

exploration was active among youth and emerging adults (Fuller-Rowell, Burrow, & Ong, 2011;

Jones, 2010). Beyond contextual factors, opportunities for critical action in adolescence may

foster racial identity exploration for Black college students at PWIs, particularly since race is

likely more salient when Black students are in the racial minority. As many Black students

experience a discrepancy between the racial make up of their home communities versus at PWI

spaces (Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002), critical action may be a way to reconnect with

a local Black community (Baber, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007). As Black students move to a

context where they are in the racial minority, they may actively seek opportunities to explore and

affirm their racial identities in ways that resemble involvement in their local communities.

The reciprocal nature of racial identity exploration and critical action suggested by the

study findings underscores theoretical assertions that racial identity and critical consciousness

processes are intertwined in the development of Black youth (Aniywo et al., 2018; Mathews et

al., 2019). This finding aligns with previous work that operationalizes racial identity exploration

as both identity search and participation, where participation in cultural activities may translate

into a form of critical action (Syed et al. 2013). Further the examination of these processes using

longitudinal methods provides a glimpse into how these processes overlap during emerging adulthood. Previous research, particularly within critical consciousness development focuses on adolescence, with little work focusing on how both critical consciousness and racial identity function during adulthood. Some work explores racial identity exploration processes in college students (Syed & Azmitia, 2009, 2010), but these studies often focus on academic rather than civic outcomes for Black students. Further, current scholarship focuses on the unique contributions of racial identity and critical consciousness rather than examining these processes together. Yet given Black college students' unique race related experiences at predominately White institutions, it is important to examine how both of these processes help Black students to navigate the campus context.

The finding that racial identity exploration during the senior year of high school is associated with higher critical action during the first year of college aligns with previous work suggesting that Black youth may be more likely to engage racial identity exploration during adolescence by learning their racial history (Chapman-Hillard & Adams-Bass, 2015; Way et al., 2008). Learning about the Black communities' cultural legacy of critical action may inspire future action as students define themselves in the college context. Further racial identity exploration may foster a sense of collective identity and responsibility to the Black community as individuals learn about the power of Black collective mobilization. This may be particularly true for Black students who major in Black studies and learn about Black communities ongoing fights for racial justice (Beasley, Chapman-Hillard, McClain, 2016; Glasker, 2002). This finding extends previous work by directly linking racial identity with positive civic outcomes, as the majority of research has focused on outcomes related to academic, social, and mental health factors (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014)

Subsequent racial identity exploration in sophomore year as a result of critical action in the freshman year also aligns with previous work suggesting that racial identity beliefs and race-related experiences motivate activism beliefs in college students (Hope et al., 2019; Syzmanski & Lewis, 2015). However, previous work has shown links between racial identity beliefs and activism orientation, but has not shown how such orientations translate motivate action behaviors. Further, previous work focuses on racial identity content beliefs rather than the exploration process as antecedents for critical action. Thus, this finding extends previous work by linking racial identity processes with behavior, rather than attitudes or orientations towards racial justice.

Critical action during the senior year of high school and its association with racial identity exploration during the freshman year of college demonstrates how behavior plays a central role in racial identity formation. Critical consciousness suggests the reciprocal nature between critical reflection and action, as the two processes likely reinforce one another as youth mature into adulthood. Racial identity exploration for Black emerging adults likely involves some critical reflection on the inequitable experiences that Black people have faced in society (Beasley, Chapman-Hillard, McCain, 2016; Chapman-Hillard & Adams-Bass, 2015). Such motivation to explore their racial identities could be motivated by critical action in high school, especially if such action was inspired by Black events or movements (e.g., the election of President Barack Obama). Further, students who had access to positive or successful critical action opportunities during adolescence may be more likely to seek out similar opportunities as a part of their adjustment process to the college space.

Given that both racial identity and critical action processes catalyzed one another during the college transition, it was surprising that the mediational pathway of exploration→critical

action→exploration was not significant. This finding suggests that critical action may have slightly more catalytic power than racial identity exploration over the college transition, given that the critical action→exploration→critical action pathway was significant. Scholarly work on Black college students at PWIs suggest that racial identity processes may be more salient given the race related events and experiences that students' encounter. Further college students' negative experiences of racial climate at PWIs drives many social identity-based movements (e.g., #BBUM and #ItooamHarvard movements). These experiences highlight how college campuses reflect societal messaging and events around anti-Blackness (Flanagan et al., 2011; Harper, 2015). Previous literature suggests that Black adolescents may be more likely to undergo racial identity exploration as compared to other peers (Pahl & Way, 2006; Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2006). However, it is possible that identity exploration in high school is not explicitly linked with critical action behaviors, particularly when such opportunities are not available to all students.

Contributions

This study expands the body of work on racial identity and critical consciousness literatures with several contributions. Recent work in critical consciousness applies longitudinal techniques given the recent development of quantitative measures of critical consciousness (Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, & Rapa, 2015). However, similar to scholarly work in racial identity much of this work focuses on adolescence (Herbele, Rapa, & Farago, 2020). This work directly responds to recent calls in by developmental scholars to capture multiple developmental periods across the lifespan, as this work centers emerging adulthood at the college transition (Umaña-Taylor, 2014). Given the positive academic, socioemotional, and sociopolitical outcomes associated with advanced stages of both racial identity and critical consciousness, it is important

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to investigate how the transition to adulthood allow for greater cognitive complexity in individuals' understandings of both their racial identity and critical consciousness development (Clark & Seider, 2020; Herbele, Rapa, & Farago, 2020; Scottham et al. 2010).

Another contribution of this work is the use of a Black college sample to examine racial identity and critical consciousness in adulthood. A vast majority of racial identity process research in college students relies on pooled ethnic samples, which can mask the unique experiences of specific ethnic groups (e.g., discrimination for race versus citizenship status). Further, using all-Black samples emphasizes the heterogeneity of experiences within a specific racial group (Chavous et al. 2018; Cox, 2020; Thelamour, George Mwangi, Ezeofor, 2019). Using an all-Black sample also challenges comparative approaches that frame White college students' experiences as the norm, particularly at PWIs (Cox, 2020).

Finally, this study serves as a second empirical test of the conceptual integration of racial identity and critical consciousness development. Aligned with the overall purpose of the dissertation study, this work examines the association between racial identity exploration and critical action at the college transition. Given that both racial identity exploration and critical action are associated with positive outcomes for Black youth and youth of color more broadly, it is important to examine how these processes might reinforce one another to support future positive development. Additionally, by looking at these experiences in the transition to adulthood, we expand the framing of adulthood as a time of stability when compared to adolescence. Adulthood is characterized by numerous transitions that may spark re-engagement with salient developmental processes in adolescence, such as attending college. This is particularly true for Black individuals, as transitions in the sociopolitical context make race and race-related experiences more salient. This salience may lead Black individuals to draw upon

cultural assets such as racial identity and critical consciousness across the lifespan in more complex ways than during adolescence. Thus, scholars should focus on how the complexity of these two intersecting processes expands as youth mature into adulthood.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though this study makes notable contributions, some limitations should be discussed. The baseline model autoregressive model showed reasonably stable relationships (i.e., constructs were strongly correlated across time) with exploration across the three time points, but this was not the case for critical action. Critical action had slightly less stability, with regression coefficients of .38 (Wave 1 to Wave 3) and .41 (Wave 3 to Wave 6). However, relationships between critical action across time may speak to how critical action behaviors vary across time and context. For example, working on a political campaign may have been more relevant to Black college students after the 2012 election of President Barack Obama, given their proximity to voting age and more complex understandings of the political system. Additionally, college potentially provides a wider variety of opportunities to be involved in Black-oriented student organizations or events that may not have been available in high school, particularly given the social autonomy that college provides. Thus, it may be worth noting how these behaviors may change over to contextualize the relative stability of these constructs.

A related consideration includes the tension between the conceptualization and measurement of racial identity exploration and critical action. Although conceptualized as distinct constructs, measures of exploration include participation in cultural activities, which may overlap with measures of critical action (Syed et al. 2013). For example, two racial identity exploration items, "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs" and "I have done things that will help me understand my ethnic

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background better," would likely overlap with the critical action item "I participated in an ethnic club or organization." Given that identity-based groups serve as safe spaces to affirm and explore one's racial identity, the action of exploring may be the same as participating in cultural or ethnic organizations, muddling the distinction between the two constructs. This overlap may have important implications of the future study of associations between racial identity exploration and critical action, particularly given individual differences across Black students. For example, some students may use critical action as an intentional space to explore their Black identities. Other students may, in contrast, experience racial identity exploration as a product of engaging in critical action. Future measures of these constructs must acknowledge that exploration and critical action may not always be distinguished given that both processes may be occurring simultaneously as Black students learn about their racial identity through their college involvement.

Another limitation is that of sample size and power. Though there was enough sample size to power the model for a medium effect, it is likely that the model was underpowered given the small sample size. A larger sample size could better highlight small to medium effects, particularly when considering the mediation findings. A larger sample size could help assess if the slightly stronger pathway of critical action→exploration→ critical action remains stable considering a broader range of experiences across individuals. Yet, despite being underpowered for an assessment of small effects, trends highlighted within the smaller sample size may remain with a larger sample, particularly for those paths that demonstrated a medium effect.

Future work should consider alternative longitudinal methods to highlight the dynamic intersections of racial identity and critical consciousness, and how both change over time. Latent growth curve modeling might be of particular interest to examine how college contextual factors

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are associated with advanced racial identity and critical consciousness processes. Given current work that suggests that both racial identity and critical consciousness likely increase with age (Bañales et al., 2020; Seider, Clark, & Graves, 2020; Syed & Azmitia, 2009), thinking about how these factors grow or stabilize over time is an important contribution for future research.

Additionally, future work should also consider how critical action changes during the transition from high school to college. Though some Black youth may have access to critical action opportunities prior to college, such opportunities may be limited in scope given the various school and home demands (e.g., after school activities, watching siblings, work outside of school) that youth must meet. Colleges campuses are filled with opportunities for student involvement that are often critical to the college experience, particularly with respect to one's sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018). These opportunities, coupled with the freedom and autonomy that college students enjoy outside of their home communities is a unique space for critical action to shift. Students may try out different forms of involvement throughout the college years to learn which behaviors most align with their values and ambitions for their future selves. Given that the college context is proximal to the transition to middle adulthood, such involvement may be associated with how Black students think about their future career and civic action beyond a college context. Thus, investigating how critical action changes in the college contexts and how such changes are associated with future career aspirations provides insight into how Black students navigate the transition to middle adulthood.

Conclusion

The study of racial identity and critical consciousness has largely been confined to adolescence. While adolescence does represent a time of dynamic identity change, transitions

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throughout the lifespan can catalyze identity and other developmentally related processes. Expanding the study of both racial identity and critical consciousness to emerging adulthood is a relevant and necessary next step, as the trajectories of both processes suggest that youth continue to draw upon both as they age (Bañales et al., 2020; Seider, Clark, & Graves, 2020; Syed & Azmitia, 2009). Further, given the positive outcomes associated with racial identity exploration and critical action behaviors in Black youth, it is important to highlight how these processes may reinforce one another at the college transition. Given the salience of sociopolitical events (e.g., #BLM protests amidst COVID-19) and the historical role of Black college students in bringing visibility to societal inequity, it is imperative to understand how they draw upon their racial identities and critical action behaviors to challenge the status quo. Further, investigating the reciprocal nature of racial identity exploration and critical action can help inform university stakeholders of best practices to support the unique experiences of Black students in PWI contexts.

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Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Items Per Wave

				W1			
Item	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**% Missing**	**SE**	**Skew**	**Kurtosis**
EX1	232	2.92	.899	2.1%	.02	-.53	-.44
EX2	232	2.95	.856	2.1%	.02	-.61	-.12
EX3	231	2.91	.919	2.5%	.02	-.57	-.44
CA1	234	.73	1.179	1.3%	0.04	1.7	2.39
CA2	234	.47	.927	1.3%	0.05	2.24	5.41
CA3	234	.44	.997	1.3%	0.05	2.44	5.69
CA4	234	.74	1.290	1.3%	0.06	1.89	2.89
CA5	234	2.01	1.754	1.3%	0.06	.45	-.98
CA6	234	1.47	1.621	1.3%	.06	.91	-.27

				W3			
Item	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**% Missing**	**SE**	**Skew**	**Kurtosis**
EX1	203	2.89	.87	14.3%	.03	-.54	-.28
EX2	202	2.88	.91	14.8%	.02	-.56	-.39
EX3	200	2.90	.87	15.6%	.05	-.53	-.30
CA1	213	.65	1.05	10.1%	.07	1.99	4.45
CA2	213	.27	.88	10.1%	.10	3.96	16.67
CA3	213	.29	.93	10.1%	.08	3.8	14.81
CA4	213	.45	1.01	10.1%	.08	2.43	5.44
CA5	209	.52	1.18	11.8%	.09	2.55	5.97
CA6	213	1.32	1.67	10.1%	.07	1.13	.06

				W6			
Item	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**%Missing**	**SE**	**Skew**	**Kurtosis**
EX1	188	2.99	0.99	20.7%	.03	-.66	-.62
EX2	191	3.07	0.95	19.4%	.02	-.73	-.45
EX3	190	3.08	0.93	19.8%	.03	-.81	-.17
CA1	204	.71	1.03	13.9%	.05	1.39	1.31
CA2	204	.47	1.01	13.9%	.05	2.69	7.68
CA3	204	.38	0.96	13.9%	.08	3.08	10.18
CA4	204	.40	0.97	13.9%	.10	2.98	9.58
CA5	204	.86	1.58	13.9%	.08	1.71	1.53
CA6	205	1.15	1.53	13.5%	.06	1.21	.45

Racial Identity Exploration
Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 4=Strongly Agree
W1α= .94 W1 IIC=.83; W3α=.90 W3 IIC=.75;
W6α=.93 W6 IIC=.81

Item	Item Wording	Wave 1 Factor Loading	SE	Wave 3 Factor Loading	SE	Wave 6 Factor Loading	SE
EX1	I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	.90***	.02	.88***	.03	.89***	.03
EX2	I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.	.94***	.02	.93***	.02	.92***	.02
EX3	I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.	.89***	.02	.78***	.05	.78***	.03

Critical Action
Question Stem: During your [previous year] how often did you participate in the following activities?
Scale 0=Never 5=More than 10 times
W1α=.82 W1 IIC=.49; W3α=.78 W3 IIC= .42; W6α= .76 W6 IIC=.39

Item	Item Wording	Wave 1 Factor Loading	SE	Wave 3 Factor Loading	SE	Wave 6 Factor Loading	SE
CA1	Joined a protest, march, meeting or demonstration?	.83***	0.04	.71***	.07	.87***	.05
CA2	Participated in a boycott (not buying something because you dislike or disagree with the social or political values of the company)?	.75***	0.05	.69***	.10	.78***	.05

CA3	Participated in a buycott (buying a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company)?	.79***	0.05	.75***	.08	.64***	.08
CA4	Worked or volunteered for a political campaign?	.72***	0.06	.66***	.08	.43***	.10
CA5	Served as a member of an organizing committee or board for a club or organization?	.46***	0.06	.57***	.09	.35***	.08
CA6	Participated in an ethnic or cultural club or organization	.53***	.06	.42***	.07	.50***	.06

Table 4.3 Model Fit Indices for CFA and SEM Models

Test	CFAs for Racial Identity Exploration and Critical Action	Model 1: Baseline with Only Autoregressive Effects	Model 2: Autoregressive Effects and EX at W1 and W3 Predicting CA at W3 and W6	Model 3: Autoregressive effects CA at W1 and W3 Predicting EX at W3 and W6	Model 4: Fully Cross-Lagged Model
CFI	.95	.94	.94	.94	.95
TLI	.94	.93	.93	.93	.94
RMSEA	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05
SRMR	.06	.10	.08	.08	.07
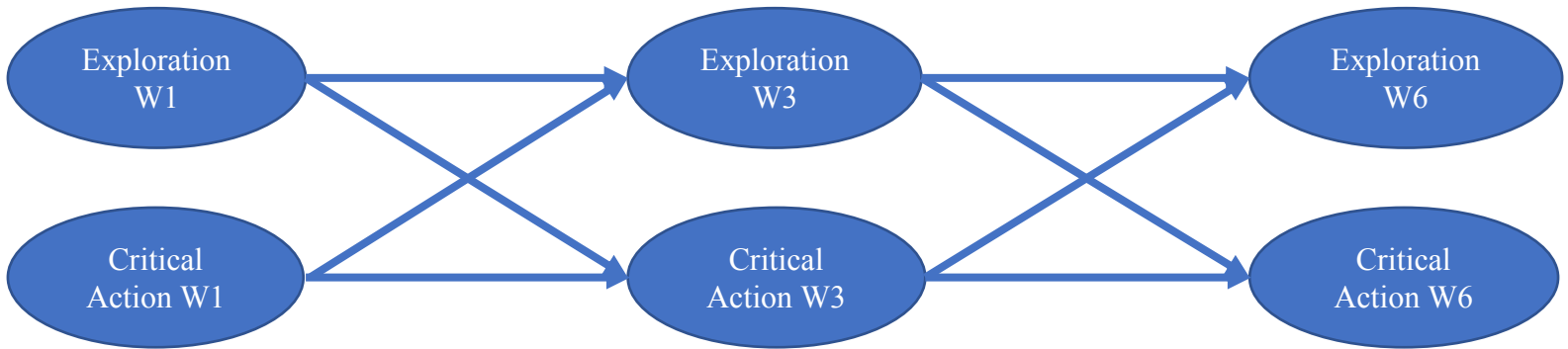
Figure 4-1 Conceptual Model
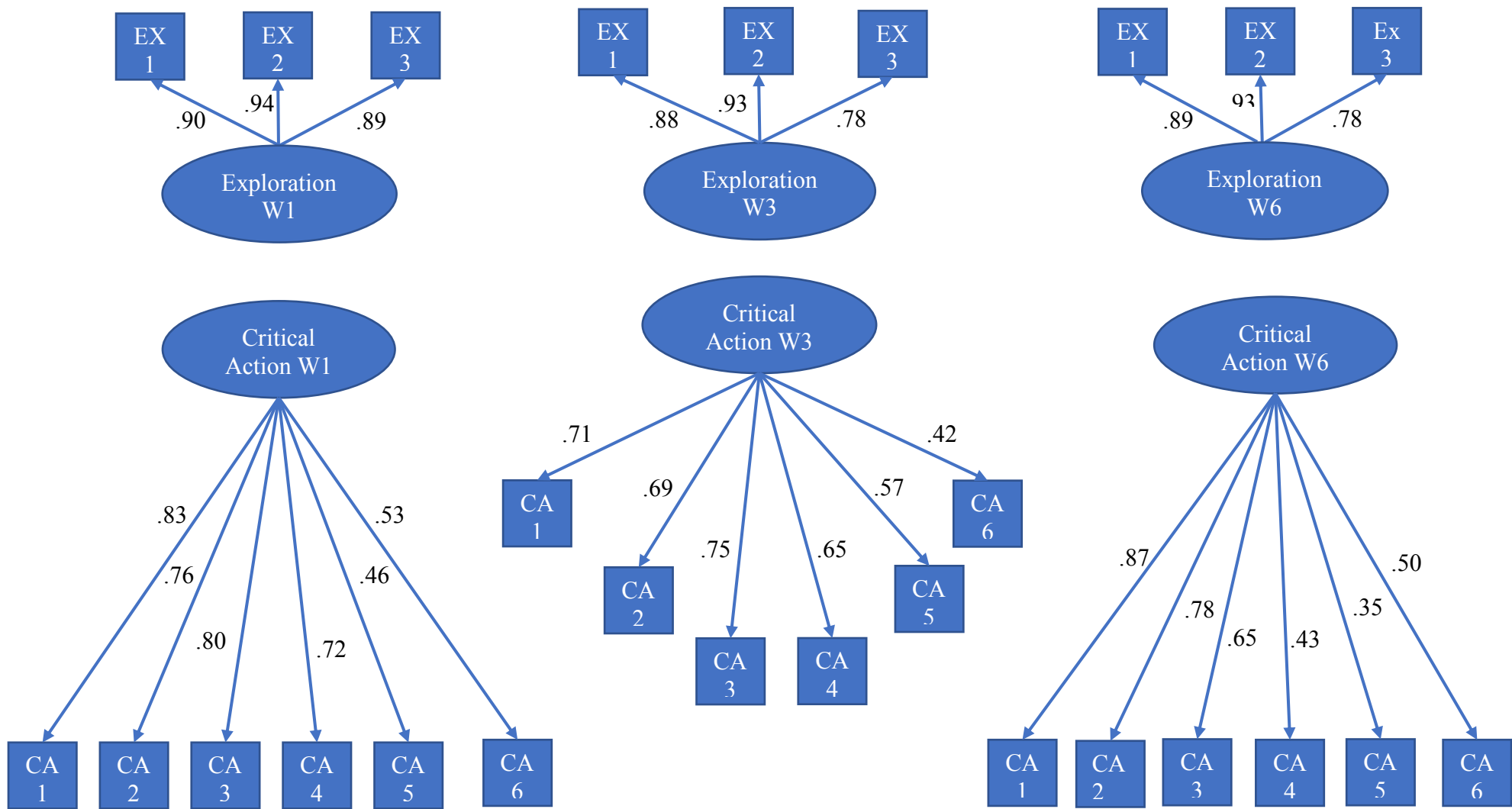
Figure 4-2 CFAs of Latent Constructs of Racial Identity Exploration and Critical Action Across Waves

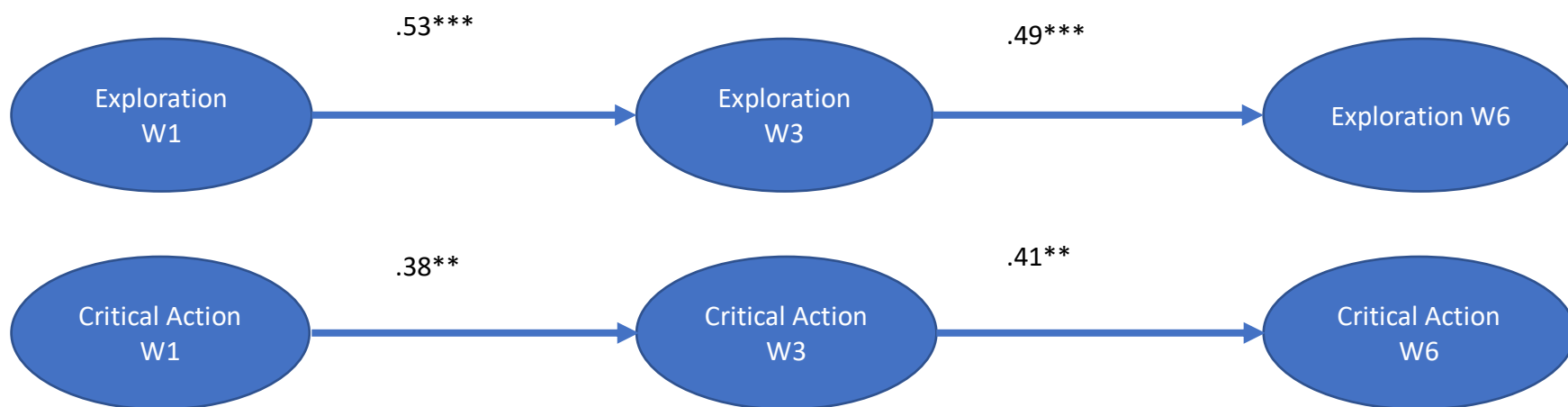Note. All bolded lines were significant, p < .001***

Figure 4-3 Baseline Model Depicting Autoregressive Relationships for Exploration and Critical Action Across 3 Waves
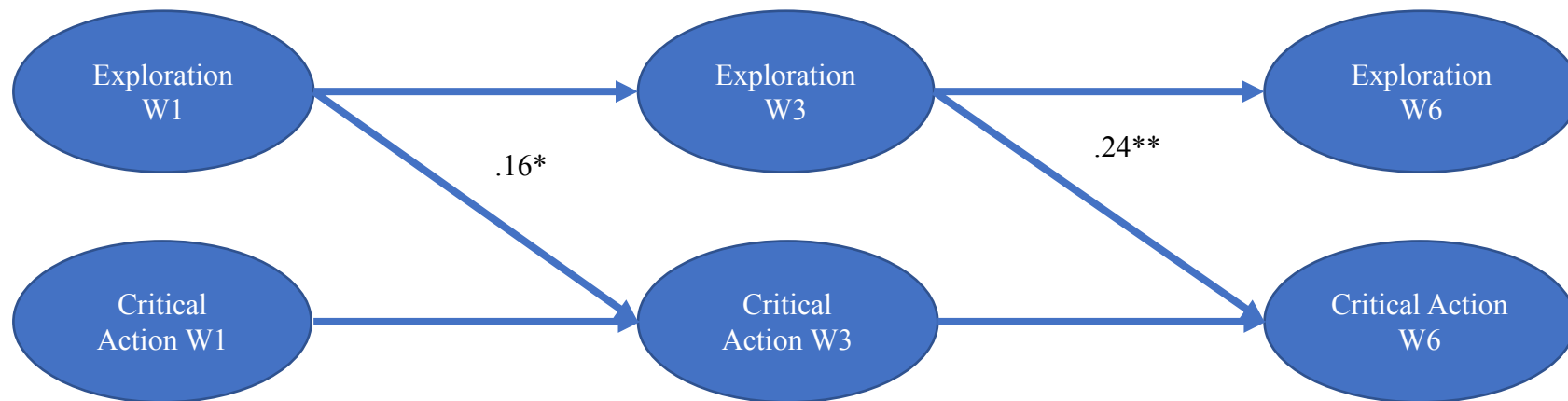
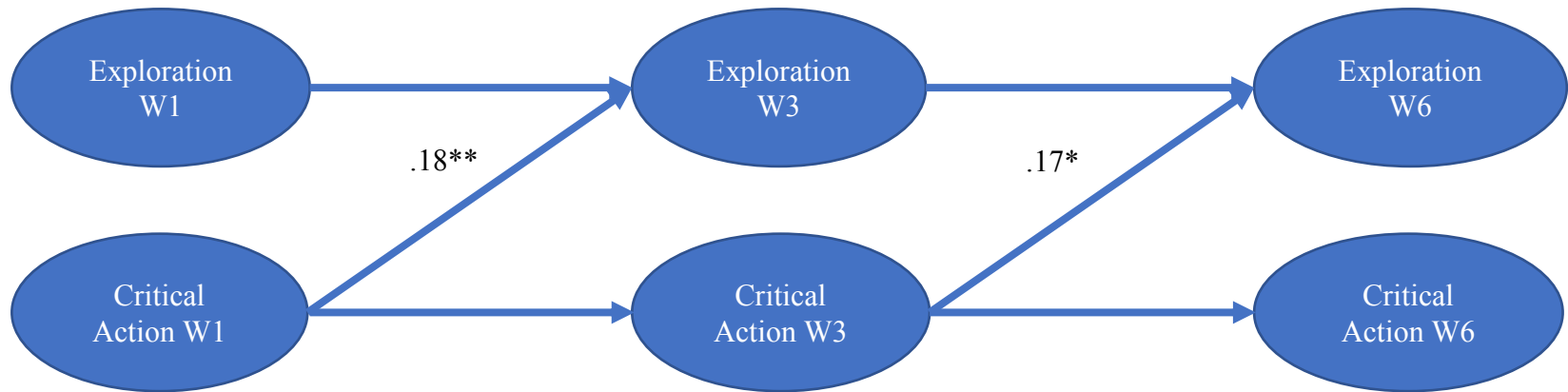*Figure 4-4 Model 2 Exploration Predicting Critical Action Across 3 Waves*

Figure 4-5 Model 3 Critical Action Predicts Exploration Across 3 Waves

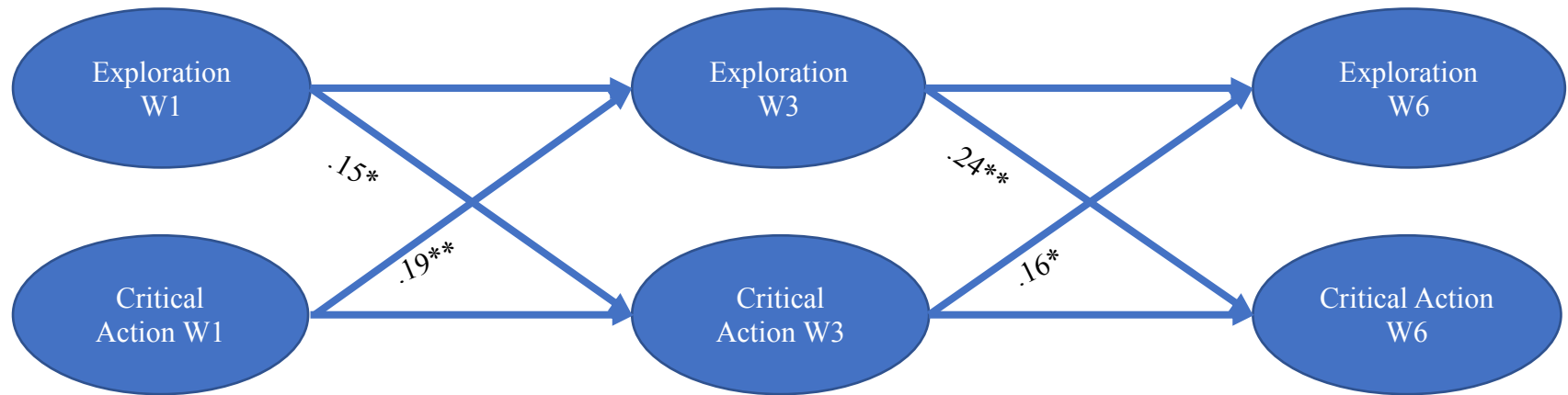Note. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{**}$

Figure 4-6 Model 4 Full Cross Lagged Panel Model of Exploration and Critical Action Across 3 Waves
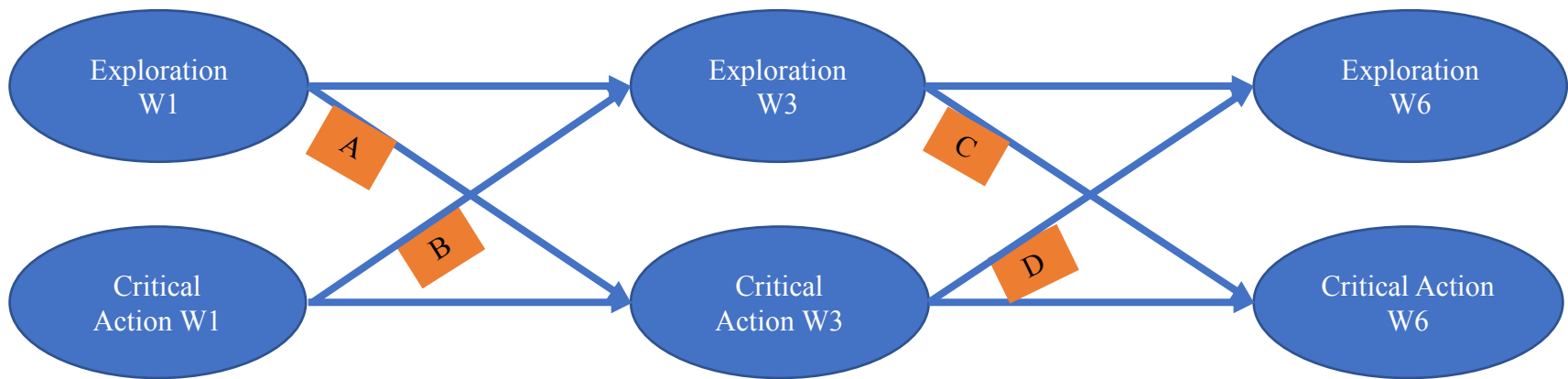
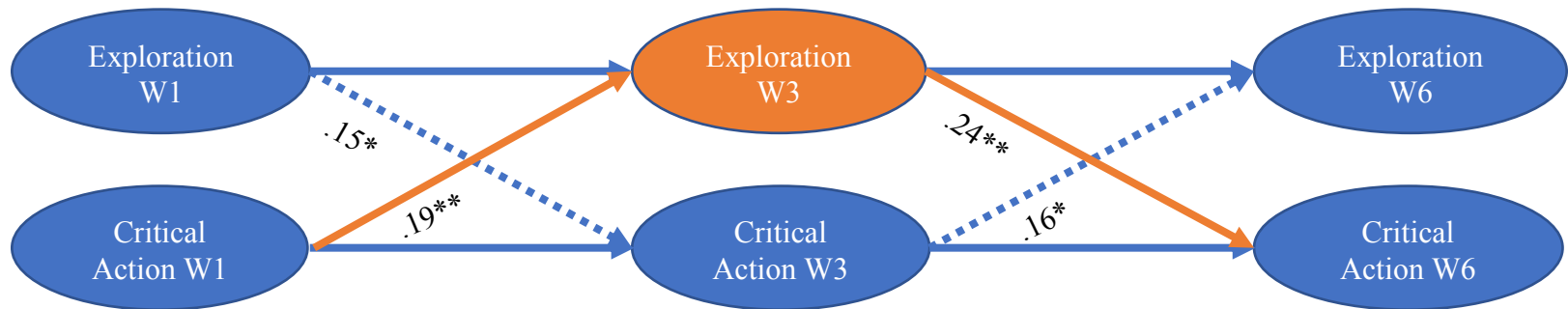*Figure 4-7 Comparison Paths for Wald Tests Analysis*

Figure 4-8: Mediation Relationships Between Exploration and Critical Action

Note. Dashed lines are non-significant and bold lines are significant. $p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{**}$

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to assess the ways that racial identity and critical consciousness processes overlap in Black youth and emerging adults' development. This work centers the experiences of Black individuals given the specific ways that institutionalized racism and anti-Blackness has shaped their collective identities, awareness of racial inequities, and subsequent action to challenge such inequities in American society (Cross, 1991; Gurin & Epp, 1975; Watts et al. 2011). Further, this work uses a strengths-based approach to assess how racial identity and critical consciousness processes reinforce one another to create resilience in the face of negative race-related experiences. Examining the interaction between racial identity and critical consciousness processes advances current scholarship focused on Black youth by highlighting the dynamism between, rather than unique contributions of, racial identity and critical consciousness to positive Black youth development. This work responds to calls for an integrated approach to the positive development of youth of color that is specific to the racial barriers they will inevitably encounter in society (Aldana, Checkoway, Richards-Schuster, 2012; Aniywo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). The work presented in this theoretical paper and two empirical studies highlights (a) the need for further integration of racial identity and critical consciousness processes to align with the experiences of Black youth as they mature into adulthood (b) how Black youth may use racial identity beliefs as a lens to analyze racial discrimination experiences and (c) how racial identity and critical consciousness processes

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reinforce one another during the college transition. Study findings suggest that Black youth use their centrality and private regard beliefs as interpretive lenses for racial discrimination experiences. These beliefs likely strengthen systems thinking (i.e., high critical reflection) about racial inequality. In addition, racial identity exploration and critical action are reciprocal processes that inform the Black students' experiences during the college transition. Taken together, this work provides insight on how race-related events and social contexts may prompt youth to analyze the meaning of race in society. Such meaning making may also prompt racial identity exploration, which may involve participation in critical action activities during the process.

The first paper presented a theoretical review and integration of racial identity and critical consciousness theory. It presents three testable hypotheses of intersections between racial identity and critical consciousness development in Black youth and emerging adults. Racial identity theory and critical consciousness theory speak to the unique experiences of Black communities. Society tasks Black people to forge a positive sense of self in the midst of anti-Black racism that permeates society. Racial identity theory speaks to both the process and content of what it means to be Black, demonstrating how Black people can find strength and pride in their identity despite their negative race-related experiences. Critical consciousness theory frames how Black individuals process negative race-related experiences to protect a positive sense of self. Awareness of anti-Black racism, coupled with motivation and action to challenge oppressive structures has been a common theme in Black social movements across historical contexts. Though racial identity and critical consciousness theory provide individual lenses to study the heterogeneous experiences of the Black community, bridging these two frameworks allows for a holistic and strengths-based approach to the study of Black experiences.

Further integrating the two theories emphasizes the ways that racial identity and awareness of racial inequality are often intertwined across the lifespan. In a society that elected an openly White supremacist President on the heels of celebrating the country's first Black president, and is actively grappling with racial disparities made apparent through the COVID-19 pandemic, conversations about race, identity, and critical action permeate the cultural zeitgeist in ways that are reminiscent of the civil rights and Black power movements of the 1960s and 1970s respectively. The cyclical nature of racial identity formation in the context of structural racism forges an inextricable link between racial identity and critical consciousness processes in Black youth. Thus, it is critical to explicitly bridge racial identity and critical consciousness frameworks to inform how scholars study the lived experiences of Black Americans. Without this integration, scholars miss the full picture of how Black youth and young adults navigate and understand themselves in a racialized society.

The second paper empirically tested a potential integration of racial identity and critical consciousness processes. I used quantitative methods to assess how racial identity beliefs played a role in the relationship between racial discrimination and critical reflection. Additionally, I examined the critical consciousness pathway in a sample of Black youth to determine if their experiences aligned with theoretical stipulations of critical consciousness. Previous theoretical work has suggested that racial discrimination may be a catalyst to awareness of racial inequities, but little empirical work has tested this pathway (Cross, 1991; Hope et al., 2019). The findings of this study align with theoretical hypotheses that racial discrimination is associated with critical reflection (Aniywo, 2018; Cross et al., 1991; Watts & Guessous, 2006; Mathews et al., 2019). This study adds nuance to the link between racial discrimination and critical consciousness by proposing racial identity beliefs as a lens to process discrimination experiences. Though study

findings only allow for cautious suggestion of a moderating relationship between racial identity beliefs, racial discrimination, and critical reflection, the general trend suggests that racial identity is associated with how Black youth make sense of discriminatory experiences. Such findings are important to consider when thinking about best practices to support Black youth as they process negative racial encounters.

The second empirical study highlights the dynamic relationship between racial identity exploration and critical action in Black college students. While scholarly work on racial identity and critical consciousness development has proliferated in recent years, much of this work focuses on adolescent experiences. The college transition is a unique time to study the experiences of Black youth as they transition into adulthood. Further, Black college students at PWIs may have unique race-related experiences given their minority status and challenges around racial climate in PWI contexts. Such experiences may lead to critical action, particularly as these students hold their institutions accountable to the missions of diversity, equity, and inclusion that it promises all of its students. Findings from this study highlight that racial identity exploration likely reinforce one another during the college transition. Critical action may have a slightly stronger impact on racial identity exploration which suggest that behavior may drive both participation and search processes associated with racial identity exploration. These findings add to current scholarship by highlighting how racial identity and critical action interact during the college transition, and how these relationships remain salient in the first two years of college. Given limited longitudinal research on Black students' racial identity and critical consciousness processes at the college transition, this work extends research focused on adolescence by examining how these two processes function in emerging adulthood.

Although I did not test the full models outlined by the postulates I presented in Chapter 2, the subsequent empirical studies support components of each hypothesis. Chapter 3 examined direct links between racial discrimination and critical reflection, which was presented as a component of postulate 1. Findings from Chapter 3 supported the theory that racial discrimination is associated with higher critical reflection. Chapter 3 also highlighted the direct associations between public regard and critical reflection, a component of postulate 3B. This finding suggests that low public regard may be an entry point for critical reflection, as outlined by postulate 3B. Although, I was not able to test the full model presented in postulate 2 (i.e., high levels of racial identity resolution may lead to more critical action), I was able to test relations between racial identity exploration (an aspect of racial identity process) and critical action in chapter 4. These findings suggest racial identity exploration and critical action reinforce one another during the college transition.

Given the findings of the two empirical studies, one potential revision to the theoretical framework is to conceptualize the relationship between racial identity process and critical action as reciprocal rather than unidirectional. Adding reciprocal relations emphasizes that not only do these processes reinforce one another, but also that they may recycle as youth age and transition to new social contexts. Another potential revision may be to remove political efficacy as a central construct and instead focus on racial identity's associations with critical reflection and critical action, given their salience to the lived experiences of Black youth (Hope, 2019; Syzmanski & Lewis, 2015; Watts, 1999; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado 2015). Though political efficacy likely does play a role in Black youth's critical action, the findings of this study aligns with previous work that suggests critical reflection and critical action may be the dimensions that are more salient for Black youth. Centering the intersections of racial identity and critical

consciousness in Black youth to focus on critical reflection and critical action may be more meaningful in telling the story of Black youth. Thus, focusing on critical reflection and critical action as intersecting components with racial identity may provide a clearer picture of positive development within Black youth.

Contributions

The central contribution of this dissertation is the theoretical integration and empirical testing of racial identity and critical consciousness theory. This integration is important because it highlights that Black people do not undergo racial identity and critical consciousness change sequentially; rather the two are intertwined as Black youth come to understand themselves as American citizens. This work explicitly asserts that the two processes are interconnected and empirically tests how racial identity and critical consciousness interact in Black youth and emerging adult samples. This work uses quantitative methods to address the gap in theoretical and empirical testing of these two phenomena to inform future approaches to the study of Black youth in context.

By leveraging racial identity and critical consciousness theory together, this dissertation centers the tools Black youth use to navigate racialized systemic oppression. Racial identity theory has long suggested the catalyzing role of racial discrimination in racial identity formation, but has not explicitly linked how these experiences contribute to Black people's understanding of systemic oppression. In contrast, critical consciousness theory emphasizes one's awareness of and motivations to challenge systemic oppression but focuses on broad conceptualizations of social inequality (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic disparities). This work explicitly links racial identity formation with understandings of racial disparities to speak to the unique experiences of Black youth growing up in an American context. This study better helps us to understand the

experiences of Black youth in the context of a racialized society, where their enactment of citizenship is largely tied to both their racial identity and critical action behaviors. In the midst of heightened visibility around Black Death at the hands of police, Black youth are coming of age in a society where Blackness is still viewed as a threat and where Black people are perceived as undeserving of full and equal citizenship. Black youth engage in critical action to both cope with and challenge the inequities that maintain Black marginalization, and to support their positive connections to Black communities. It is through this awareness and action that racial identity is forged, particularly as youth draw upon their cultural legacy of resistance. Racial identity and critical consciousness together form a formidable toolkit for Black youth to face the barriers they will inevitably encounter in a society built on systemic racism. Thus, it is critical to interrogate how these two processes help youth to understand their roles and future contributions as American citizens.

Another important contribution of this work is its explicit focus on Black samples in both adolescence and emerging adulthood. Examining both samples across studies provides some insight as to how racial identity processes may differ across developmental stages. A vast majority of both racial identity and critical consciousness work focuses on adolescence samples, due to adolescence being a time of major identity change. However, the transition to adulthood also comes with salient changes, particularly as youth become more autonomous. Examining emerging adults during the college transition offers a unique look into how racial identity and critical consciousness processes change as youth move into adulthood. Further, these processes may be particularly salient at PWIs, due to the likely incongruence between students' home community and the college space. As the findings of this study demonstrate, these conditions may serve as particularly catalytic to both racial identity and critical consciousness processes,

specifically critical action. As such, this work highlights how racial identity and critical consciousness processes are cyclical across the lifespan, rather than being contained to a specific developmental stage.

Finally, this work uses quantitative and longitudinal methods to explore the relationships between racial identity and critical consciousness in Black samples. While racial identity work uses qualitative and quantitative methods to explore racial identity, critical consciousness has heavily relied on qualitative methods to examine its three components (e.g., critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action) in Black samples. Recent work in critical consciousness scale development supports the proliferation of quantitative assessments of critical consciousness across diverse ethnic samples, but these works are largely cross sectional. This study employs longitudinal methods to explore the dynamism between racial identity and critical consciousness over time during adulthood. Although college is not representative of the full span of adulthood that may reinitiate both racial identity and critical consciousness processes, it presents a unique opportunity to highlight the reciprocal nature of this processes across the lifespan. Incorporating a wider variety of methods allows us to capture both patterns and nuanced experiences of race and consciousness in Black youth. Using multiple methods makes visual the heterogeneous experiences of Black people, as there is no one path to racial identity or awareness of systemic racism.

This dissertation not only contributes a theoretical integration of racial identity and critical consciousness theory, but also uses quantitative methods with a Black sample to test the validity of the theory's claims. Further this work focuses on both adolescence and adulthood to provide greater insight into how these processes may change across the lifespan. A majority of work focuses on adolescence as a time of rapid identity development, often ignoring contexts

that may spur identity formation beyond the adolescent years. Thus, this work fills this gap by expanding our perception of when identity development can occur, particularly beyond the teenage years.

Directions for Future Research

A question to consider is how racial identity and critical consciousness processes manifest in adulthood beyond the college years. As college students' transition into thinking about their careers and life trajectories, how might racial identity and critical consciousness play a role in career choice? Previous work has focused on how the associations between critical consciousness and vocational expectations in adolescence, but not in adults (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Ollie & Fouad, 2014). Further as adults theoretically have more experiences and cognitive development to process racism, it may be that both racial identity and critical consciousness influence their career choices in a way that their careers reflect social justice-oriented values.

Another important consideration is how other social identities may play a role in critical consciousness development along with race. Introducing other social identities such as gender or sexuality, may shift the ways that critical consciousness and racial identity interact with one another, particularly in the study of Black populations. Further, bringing in multiple social identities may allow for intersectional perspectives to inform how racial identity and critical consciousness overlap (Godfrey & Brunson, 2018). Although Blackness is often assumed to be a primary identity for Black populations, recent studies are illuminating the ways that security in one's Black identity allows for other identities to take priority for exploration (Cross Jr., 2012; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Pender, Hope, & Riddick, 2019). Further, the exploration of one's racial identity may position Black youth to see other forms of social inequity more quickly than those who do not undergo such developmental processes. Thus, it is important to investigate how racial

identity formation may translate into recognition of other forms of social inequity. Godfrey and Brunson (2018) highlighted that focusing on "multiple marginalizing systems of inequity" (p.6) (versus marginalized individuals) is one way expand critical consciousness scholarship. By incorporating multiple social identities, we can investigate how multiple axis of marginalization (e.g., Black women as marginalized by both race and gender) and privilege (e.g., Black men marginalized by race and privileged by gender) function as youth become aware of and take action against social inequity.

Finally, future studies should examine how both racial identity process and content beliefs simultaneously overlap with critical consciousness components. Though both racial identity process and content models were assessed across the two empirical dissertation studies, examining the two simultaneously may provide a more developmental picture of how racial identity and critical consciousness interact. One consistent finding associated with the interaction of racial identity process and content suggests that those who have strong identity resolution are also more likely to incorporate race as a meaningful part of their self-concept (Scottham et al. 2010; Seaton, Yip, Sellers, 2006). Additionally, age likely plays a role in where youth are in their racial identity development, with older youth and adults more likely to have clarity around what it means to be Black (Seaton, Yip, & Sellers, 2006). Although the empirical studies did not focus on resolution, it may be that discriminatory experiences may prompt racial identity exploration in addition to systems thinking about racial inequity. In this process, youth may revise their racial identity beliefs to better align with their personal experiences and new understandings of race in broader society. For example, Black youth who perceive that other racial groups have positive perceptions of Black communities, but have high instances racial discrimination may be more likely to explore the meaning of their racial identity. This exploration may be used to resolve the

discrepancy between youths' beliefs and experiences, highlighting the interplay between racial identity process and content. Identifying how racial identity process and content function simultaneously in association with critical consciousness may help scholars to more deeply understand how racial identity and critical consciousness processes influence one another over time.

Practice Based Implications

This research has several implications across research and practice. In terms of research, the use of an integrated theory expands how we can better capture the experiences of Black youth through research. Further, applying an integrated racial identity and critical consciousness lens to quantitative work may be one way to incorporate critical approaches to the use of quantitative methods (quantCRIT). This work responds to recent calls for researchers to "conduct culturally relevant research by conducting research on institutions and people in context" (Stage & Wells p. 3) using critical quantitative methods (Garcia, Lopez, & Velez, 2018). The first step to doing critical quantitative methods—quantitative work in service to the goals of transformative social justice—is to use critical theories to inform the methods design of a given project. For example, using an integrative framework of racial identity and critical consciousness can help inform person oriented methodological approaches, such as latent profile analysis, that help to see how racial identity and critical consciousness patterns may function across types (profiles) of individuals. Such approaches allow scholars to study individuals as complex systems, specifically mapping how racial identity process and content, and critical consciousness function in tandem within one individual, rather than as parallel phenomena.

This work also has merit in both secondary and postsecondary contexts. As the findings of this work demonstrate, Black youth may be better positioned to see systemic oppression

versus other racial groups given their experiences of racial discrimination and connection to their racial group. This systemic thinking stands in stark contrast to the teachers, college professors, and administrators who run educational institutions, a majority of whom are White. When racial events occur, administrators and student affairs officers often turn to individualized tactics (i.e., relationship building, intergroup dialogue) to implement social justice change, without thinking of the broader context that secondary and post-secondary spaces perpetuate. While relationship building certainly has its merit as a start in ending institutional oppression, it does not always translate to the larger systems that create barriers for Black students. Given that Black students may be better positioned to think systemically about racial inequities, teachers and administrators have much to learn from Black students about how to approach systemic inequities in ways that are meaningful to the people that they are supposed to impact. However, there is a slippery slope that exists in learning from Black students while simultaneously positioning them as teachers responsible for White administrators' understandings of institutional racism. Thus, this tension between Black students being able to see systemic oppression due to their negative experiences, versus administrators' inability to see such systems due to their neutral or positive experiences with institutions creates a knowledge gap that must be addressed to create institutional change. However, Black students should not be positioned as responsible for addressing this gap, given that they are pushing for success amidst a system that was designed for them to fail.

Finally, this work has implications for higher education professionals responsible for programming focused on the positive development of college students. The ways that racial identity exploration and critical action reinforce one another in college is likely indicative of the positive outcomes associated with each. One of the most important outcomes of both processes is the confidence to self-advocate and to garner the resources needed to finish college. Such self-

advocacy helps students to finish college and successfully enter the workforce. Creating programming and curriculum that supports both identity exploration and action, will help support black students' sense of belonging in a PWI context.

Conclusion

We need an integration of racial identity and critical consciousness theories to better inform how scholars understand the experiences of Black youth. This study advances current scholarship by integrating two theoretical frameworks and testing hypotheses related to this framework. Study 1 presented the theoretical integration of racial identity and critical consciousness theory, forwarding three testable hypotheses for future research. Study 2 suggests a different, but related integration of racial identity and critical consciousness by highlighting how racial identity beliefs may strengthen the relationship between racial discrimination and critical consciousness. Study 3 examines how racial identity exploration is dynamically intertwined with critical action among Black students. As a whole, this dissertation underscores that racial identity and critical consciousness processes work in tandem with one another. Thus, scholars should examine the integration of these processes, as studying them in isolation is not reflective of the lived experiences of Black youth. This work will help us to better support Black youth in their development by developing research methods and programming that reflect their lived experiences and ultimately support their positive development into adulthood.

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