Empowerment and Critical Consciousness: A Conceptual Cross-Fertilization

Brian D. Christens¹ · Lawrence T. Winn¹ · Adrienne M. Duke²

Received: 18 September 2015 / Accepted: 3 November 2015 / Published online: 7 November 2015
© Springer International Publishing 2015

Abstract Empowerment and critical consciousness are concepts with shared roots. Both are associated with attempts at overcoming oppression and fostering human development, community participation, and wellbeing. Both concepts have been influential in theoretical accounts and empirical studies of youth civic development. This is particularly true in studies of young people's involvement and leadership in change efforts such as community organizing, activism, and social movements. The differences between the concepts, however, are often difficult to discern, even for those conducting research informed by these concepts. For instance, although critical consciousness provides a greater relative emphasis on cognitive aspects of civic development in contrast to empowerment's accentuation of emotional aspects, both have been theorized as overarching conceptual frames spanning emotional and cognitive aspects of civic development. In this article, we examine these two kindred concepts and their associated bodies of research literature. Our analysis identifies opportunities for cross-fertilization between critical

consciousness and psychological empowerment that can lead to more holistic understanding of youth civic development.

Keywords Civic development · Critical consciousness · Empowerment · Sociopolitical control · Sociopolitical development

Introduction

Unequal systems and community conditions create compounding advantages for some young people while creating compounding disadvantages for others (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002; Watts and Flanagan 2007). In educational systems, for example, scholars have traced legacies of inequality to the contemporary era (Ladson-Billings 2006) in which Black and Brown students are disproportionately suspended, treated as threats, and forced out of schools and into the criminal justice system (Fine and Ruglis 2009). As young people become aware of such systemic inequities, their identities, goals, moral and political beliefs, feelings of agency or alienation, and civic behaviors tend to unfold differently. How youth engage in educational and community contexts shapes these developmental processes, as well. Scholars of youth civic engagement, civic education, activism, and community organizing have sought to understand and explain the processes that enable some youth—particularly those living in marginalized communities—to work toward social justice and systems change while also enhancing their own well-being (e.g., Kirshner and Ginwright 2012). A detailed understanding of these processes holds promise since it

✉ Brian D. Christens
bchristens@wisc.edu

Lawrence T. Winn
ltwinn@wisc.edu

Adrienne M. Duke
amd0046@auburn.edu

¹ Department of Civil Society and Community Studies, School of Human Ecology, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1300 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706, USA

² Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Human Sciences, Auburn University, 286 Spidle Hall, Auburn, AL 36849, USA

would enable scholars and practitioners to more effectively promote positive youth development while at the same time working toward systems-level changes.

In discussions of these processes, empowerment and critical consciousness are perhaps the two most frequently utilized conceptual frameworks. The two are kindred concepts and have roots in social movements, resistance to oppression, and attempts at liberation. Across disciplines, studies of youth civic engagement and civic development continue to use both empowerment and critical consciousness to frame and assess the attitudes, behaviors, and cognitive processes that take place as young people engage in attempts to achieve social change. Some studies rely exclusively on one conceptual framework, while others use the two interchangeably. Researchers will often note that the two concepts are interrelated due to areas of overlap; however, there are differences in emphasis and some substantive differences across the two frameworks. Up to this point, there has not been a concerted attempt at delineating the two concepts. The lack of such an effort leaves many who study youth civic developmental processes struggling to understand the similarities and differences between critical consciousness and empowerment.

Clear delineation of these two concepts, as they have been used in theory and empirical research, is the first of our two goals in this article. To accomplish this, we first present a brief review of critical consciousness—its conceptual origins, applications to the study of youth and adolescents, and the current state of empirical work that is leading to a more detailed understanding of its dimensions and relationships with other developmental processes. Following this, we present a similar review of the research literature on empowerment in youth civic development. Reviewing both concepts allows us to compare and clarify what their associated bodies of research literature have in common, and where they have tended to diverge.

Our second goal is to leverage this side-by-side comparison to identify opportunities for cross-fertilization between these two branches of research literature. We contend that each branch, through its distinct emphases and influences, has developed insights and tools that could be productively contemplated by scholars and practitioners in the other. Accordingly, the final section of this article presents possibilities for conceptual cross-fertilization—first from critical consciousness to empowerment and then vice versa.

Critical Consciousness

The concept of critical consciousness (or *conscientização*) originates in the writings and popular education of Paulo Freire. While collaborating with illiterate and poor Brazilians, Freire encouraged them to think critically about

political and social injustices maintained and sustained by oppressive systems. Freire believed that a critical understanding of poverty, oppression, exploitation, history, economics, and etc. was a precondition for poor people to initiate positive change. By becoming more aware of social and economic inequities and their causes, marginalized Brazilians could more effectively resist oppressive systems and insist on transforming their social and political conditions (Freire 1974/2005). Freire describes critical consciousness as consisting of both reflection and action geared toward transformation of social systems and conditions (Freire 1970/2002). It is a kind of critical literacy that involves reading written words and reading the world (Freire and Macedo 2013). Over the years, critical consciousness has informed a number theoretical frameworks and studies throughout the world in both the fields of education (e.g., Cammarota and Fine 2010; Fisher 2007; Souto-Manning 2010) and community psychology (e.g., Campbell and MacPhail 2002; Prilleltensky 2012; Varas-Díaz and Serrano-García 2003).

A growing body of research is aimed at understanding critical consciousness and the roles it plays in youth development and civic engagement (Watts et al. 2011). Building on Freire's work, scholars have grounded the study of critical consciousness in an acknowledgment of social injustices and an analysis of oppression. Influential studies by Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) and Watts et al. (1999) viewed oppression as both a state and process that perpetuates the unequal distribution of needed resources (asymmetry) that negatively affects the quality of life of poor and disenfranchised communities. In their studies of marginalized African American youth, Watts and colleagues examined a programmatic strategy for building political, historical, and social awareness among young people to enhance what they term “sociopolitical development”—a holistic developmental process incorporating critical consciousness and behaviors oriented toward liberation.

Critical consciousness has frequently been examined in schools and other educational contexts (e.g., Murray and Milner 2015; O'Connor 1997; Ramos-Zayas 2003). Notable findings include Diemer and Blustein's (2006) study of urban high school students, which found that youth who had greater levels of critical consciousness also had a better understanding of their career aspirations and interests, were more committed to their future careers, and to their current work that could lead toward their aspirations for the future. Other studies have sought to understand how critical consciousness can be fostered in educational contexts. For example, Godfrey and Grayman (2014) examined whether an open classroom climate encouraged students to discuss inequities and injustices, finding that open dialogue fostered skills that influenced students' critical consciousness development. Still other

studies have examined the process of building critical consciousness among teachers, hypothesizing that this is an important pathway for development of critical consciousness among students (e.g., Zion et al. 2015). Discussions of political issues with parents and peers have also been found to promote critical consciousness (Diemer 2012; Flanagan 2013).

Development of critical consciousness is a complex process that involves changes in knowledge and perspectives as well as behaviors. Accordingly, by examining critical consciousness in disparate contexts, scholars have identified three core components of the concept (Godfrey and Grayman 2014; Watts et al. 2011): critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. These components, it is thought, are developed in stages of transitive consciousness—from semi-intransitive consciousness to naïve transitive consciousness to critical transitive consciousness (Freire 1974/2005; Leonard and McLaren 2002). As people proceed through these stages, they are increasingly able to connect their subjective experiences to community issues and to make better judgments about how to advocate for change. Next, we discuss each of the three core components of critical consciousness.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection refers to the ability to analyze inequities and injustices connected to one's social conditions. It involves critical analysis of social, political, economic, and race or gender-based inequities as well as an endorsement of egalitarian social and political arrangements. Through critical analysis, youth begin to process why their community has limited access to desirable resources and opportunities. This process provides the pivotal connection between their oppressed living conditions and how society's systems perpetuate these injustices. Therefore, critical reflection is focused on the causal attributions for the disparate conditions of people in contemporary society. An individual with higher levels of critical reflection would, for example, be less likely to "blame the victim" for circumstances perpetuated by oppressive systems, and would be able to make the links between disparities between groups and historical and contemporary forms of oppression. Studies of critical reflection have also emphasized egalitarianism, or the endorsement of equitable position among different groups in society. Critical reflection therefore involves the recognition that inequality and oppression are morally wrong and should be addressed.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is the sense that the individual or a collective has the ability and capacity to change their political

and social conditions (Watts et al. 2011). Collective political efficacy implies that there is a common purpose and shared aspirations among people who feel confident about the capacity of their group/community to change social and political conditions (Watts and Flanagan 2007). A sense of efficacy leads to a greater likelihood of effective action in the social world (Watts et al. 1999).

Critical Action

Critical action occurs when individuals actively seek to change their unjust conditions through policy reform, practices, or programs. This may occur through actions taken as part of the formal political system or engagement in social justice activism (Watts et al. 2011). According to Diemer et al. (2015), critical action encompasses a broad array of participatory behavior from individual sociopolitical actions (e.g., writing a letter to an elected official or signing a petition) to participation in a variety of organizational and social movement settings including clubs, political parties, or protests.

Debates and Open Questions

Studies have identified positive relationships between these three core components of critical consciousness (e.g., Godfrey and Grayman 2014; Hope and Jagers 2014). Although most studies have considered critical reflection and action as fundamental components of critical consciousness, there is not universal agreement among scholars about the bounds or dimensionality of the construct. New measures are being developed and tested, and these efforts are renegotiating conceptual contours. For instance, Diemer et al. (2014) designed and tested a Critical Consciousness Scale with critical reflection assessed according to two dimensions—perceived inequality and egalitarianism—and critical action assessed as sociopolitical participation. Meanwhile, other scholars (Thomas et al. 2014) developed a Critical Consciousness Index, which measures critical reflection using a more interpersonal (as opposed to structural) emphasis, and assesses critical action as social perspective taking. Notably, neither of these scales contain a measure of political efficacy (Diemer et al. 2015), although some recently developed scales do (McWhirter and McWhirter 2015). Baker and Brookins (2014) developed a measure through mixed-methods research with Salvadoran youth. Their sociopolitical awareness scale has seven factors. Despite the momentum in measurement and conceptualization, the field has not yet coalesced around a common conceptual and measurement framework that would allow specific comparisons of developmental processes across diverse groups over time. Given the surge of interest in the concept among developmental and

community psychologists, educators, and political scientists, this may be achieved in the near future.

Another debate in critical consciousness scholarship is the exclusive focus on the developmental advances for youth populations most negatively affected by oppression and inequality. The extent to which critical consciousness is also a relevant construct for less oppressed or more privileged populations remains an open question (Diemer et al. 2015). It may be that more privileged groups would effectively be building critical consciousness concerning the existence of oppression in society and its negative effects, and less about their own oppression. For instance, adults have collaborated with privileged youth and historically marginalized groups to interrogate schooling practices in the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, with a study reporting that white student participants benefited from the opportunity to think through their relationships to power, deconstruct privilege, and challenge silence (Torre et al. 2008). While the development of critical consciousness can be effective for all youth, some studies have found that the beneficial effects of critical consciousness on other developmental outcomes are strongest among those directly experiencing oppression (e.g., Diemer et al. 2010). Critical consciousness may nevertheless be a process worth studying in broader cross-sections of the public, particularly in light of the growing recognition that oppression is not binary but multi-dimensional and intersectional.

Empowerment

Empowerment has conceptual roots in social movements for equality, peace, and justice (Rappaport 1981) as well as in democratic theory, particularly in work by John Dewey on democracy and education (Gonzalez 1991). In community psychological theory and research, empowerment has been defined as “a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environments, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization” (Maton 2008, p. 5). Accordingly, empowerment has been considered from an ecological perspective with interrelated processes and outcomes studied at a community level, at the level of organizations and settings, and at the level of psychology (Zimmerman 2000). For example, at the level of organizations, Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) synthesized research on the features of settings within and between organizations that have been observed to build social power and facilitate empowering processes for participants. Some theoretical contributions and empirical studies have helped to

illuminate empowerment at the community level (e.g., Fedi et al. 2009; Laverack 2006), yet far more research has focused on psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment should be distinguished from individual empowerment. The distinction is that individual notions of empowerment are missing clear links to empowerment at other levels of analysis (i.e., group, community). Psychological empowerment has been theorized with these links clearly in mind (Zimmerman 1990) and has been studied using data collection and analysis at multiple levels (e.g., Peterson and Hughey 2002). Conceptual frameworks for psychological empowerment and empirical studies have identified behavioral, relational, cognitive, and emotional components (Christens 2012; Zimmerman 1995). Next, we examine each of these components of psychological empowerment.

Behavioral Empowerment

The behavioral component of psychological empowerment—community participation—refers to actions taken to exert influence and gain control in civic and community contexts. As such, it is an expansion of the concept of citizen participation. Citizen participation has been studied as a narrower set of activities including voting and seeking to influence policy debate through actions such as writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988). Often referred to as community participation—and sometimes treated as a distinct variable (see Peterson 2014)—the behavioral component of psychological empowerment involves these types of activities as well as a variety of forms of community and organizational involvement. These typically include membership in organizations, the number or times a person has participated in organizational activities, and attendance at community meetings (Speer and Peterson 2000). Among youth and adolescents, the conceptual boundaries of community participation have often expanded to encompass discussions of social and political issues with peers, teachers, family members, and others (Mahatmya and Lohman 2012; Wray-Lake and Flanagan 2012) and engagement through social media (Oser et al. 2013).

Emotional Empowerment

The emotional component of psychological empowerment refers to the perception and feeling that one’s active participation and involvement can influence societal and civic decision-making. The emotional component has been conceptualized and measured as sociopolitical control—a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1982) and motivation to control one’s environment (De Charms 1968) that is specific to the sociopolitical domain. Sociopolitical control

has been conceptualized and operationalized with two dimensions or factors: (1) leadership competence and (2) policy control (Zimmerman and Zahniser 1991). Leadership competence refers to the skills and confidence necessary for acting as a leader in organizational and community contexts. Policy control involves perceptions that one is capable of influencing decisions in these contexts. Recent studies have found support for this two-factor structure in populations of adolescents in the U.S. (Peterson et al. 2011), Italy (Vieno et al. 2014), and Malaysia (Christens et al. 2016).

Cognitive Empowerment

The cognitive component of psychological empowerment involves an awareness of the forces that shape policies and systems and the critical and strategic understanding of how to make changes in these systems. Zimmerman (1995) specifies the elements of the cognitive component of psychological empowerment as encompassing the commitment to collective interests, leadership and decision-making skills, and knowledge of different options for social and civic action. Drawing on interdisciplinary research on power and social change processes, community psychological research has assessed the cognitive component according to three dimensions: knowledge of (1) the source of social power, (2) the nature of social power, and (3) the instruments of social power (Speer 2000; Speer and Peterson 2000).

First, the understanding that an individual person is unlikely to make social, policy, or systems change operating alone is the core of what is referred to as knowledge of the source of social power. It is a core tenet of grassroots community organizing and social movement organizations, for instance, that in order to make change, a group rather than an individual must take and sustain action (Poletta 2002). Second, the understanding that sustained change efforts are likely to provoke conflict is what is referred to as knowledge of the nature of social power. This aspect of the cognitive component of psychological empowerment emphasizes readiness to deal with conflict in the likely event that it arises, particularly as elite or other vested interests are often threatened by proposed changes (Alinsky 1971). Third, understanding the ways that entities and actors use social power to shape processes and achieve desired outcomes constitutes knowledge of the instruments of social power (Gaventa 1980; Lukes 1974).

Relational Empowerment

Recent work has explored the concept of a relational component of psychological empowerment. Qualitative studies of youth empowerment have emphasized the roles

that relationships and relational capacities play in psychological empowerment processes (e.g., Russell et al. 2009). Considering findings like these alongside relational theories on leadership (e.g., Ospina and Foldy 2010) and efforts to infuse psychology, often an individualistic discipline, with a greater emphasis on relationships (e.g., Gergen 2009), Christens (2012) suggested that a relational component of psychological empowerment might include dimensions such as facilitating others' empowerment, bridging social divisions, collaborative competence, network mobilization, and passing along a legacy of empowerment to others. Some scholars have applied this framework for relational empowerment in empirical research. For instance, Langhout et al. (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study of empowerment processes among a group of elementary school students involved in youth participatory action research through an afterschool program, finding each of the dimensions of relational empowerment reflected in students' experiences.

Debates and Open Questions

Research on psychological empowerment is continually being shaped by new findings and conceptual debates. For example, a recent article by Peterson (2014) calls into question the way that empowerment has been specified using a super-ordinate conceptual model, or one in which the components (i.e., cognitive, emotional, etc.) are thought to be manifestations of a higher-order construct. Instead, Peterson suggests an aggregate concept of empowerment that is formed by multiple dimensions, some of which may themselves have either formative or reflective measurement frameworks. Peterson (2014) also notes that many researchers treat the behavioral component of psychological empowerment as a separate variable that is distinct from psychological empowerment.

This debate about the overarching conceptual model for psychological empowerment of course has implications for measurement. Some components of psychological empowerment have associated measures that have been widely used and adapted for specific populations. For example, the sociopolitical control scale for youth (Peterson et al. 2011) is being rapidly adapted for use in multiple countries. Although sociopolitical control can likely be considered as a reflective latent construct, it may be simply one of many indicators of an overarching concept of psychological empowerment (Peterson 2014). Measurement of the cognitive component has thus far taken place primarily among adults. When it has been measured among young people, it has tended to be measured in specific domains (e.g., tobacco control efforts: Holden et al. 2005), although efforts are underway develop more generalized measures of the cognitive component of psychological empowerment

among young people (Ozer and Schotland 2011; Speer and Christens 2013). Studies of the relational component of psychological empowerment among young people have thus far been exploratory rather than confirmatory (e.g., Langhout et al. 2014; Russell et al. 2009). Finally, the behavioral component has been measured in a variety of ways from extracurricular participation to civic action to conversations with parents and peers. Future research on the behavioral component could benefit from more specificity about which types behaviors are most important to assess in a psychological empowerment framework.

Another example of an ongoing debate involves attempts to achieve greater conceptual clarity on the connections between empowerment, power, and social justice (e.g., Cattaneo et al. 2014). Many have noted that the term is used in individualistic ways that ignore the interrelatedness of social context. Furthermore, scholars have questioned notions of empowerment that dilute and ignore the centrality of oppression, liberation, and power (Christens 2013; Woodall et al. 2012). We return to this important issue later in this article.

Making the Connection: Empowerment and Critical Consciousness

Psychological empowerment and critical consciousness have some notable similarities. First their conceptual superstructures both have components that address cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dynamics. Furthermore, the content of the components themselves is, in many cases, similar. For example, the critical action component of critical consciousness and the behavioral component of psychological empowerment (community participation) are conceptually very similar. Both include actions taken within the formal political system, and also account for actions taken outside of formal political structures, such as activism, participation in community organizations, and participation in protests.

There is, however, a difference in emphasis between behavioral empowerment and critical action. Critical action has been described by theorists in ways that make very clear that the actions it encompasses are those specifically oriented toward changing unjust systems and policies. The behavioral component of psychological empowerment, in contrast, has been theorized in broader terms. It has been applied in a variety of contexts, some of which have been conspicuously oriented toward social and political change and some of which have not (Maton 2008). This conceptual and practical breadth has led to widespread confusion concerning which actions can be considered as part of empowerment processes and which should be considered as more general forms of pro-social action and community

or organizational engagement (Cattaneo et al. 2014). Thus, although the substantive differences are slight, there is an important difference in the relative emphases of the behavioral or action orientations of the two constructs.

The political efficacy component of critical consciousness and the emotional component of psychological empowerment likewise share conceptual terrain. In fact, the same measure for sociopolitical control (Zimmerman and Zahniser 1991) that has been adapted for use in studies of the emotional component of youth psychological empowerment (e.g., Peterson et al. 2011) has been adapted for measuring political efficacy in studies of critical consciousness (e.g., Diemer and Li 2011). The differences between political efficacy in a critical consciousness framework and sociopolitical control in a psychological empowerment framework have less to do with the content of the components themselves with the priority placed on them within their respective frameworks. Simply put, sociopolitical control has assumed a very central role in studies of psychological empowerment, but is a more marginal consideration in studies of critical consciousness. Nearly every study of psychological empowerment has included sociopolitical control, often to the exclusion of other components such as the cognitive component. This clearly signals the centrality of this emotional component to the notion of psychological empowerment. In contrast, two of the most recently developed measurement frameworks for critical consciousness have not included a component for political efficacy (Diemer et al. 2014; Thomas et al. 2014), signaling that this is a less important piece of the overarching construct.

The reverse is true when we consider the cognitive dimensions of critical consciousness and psychological empowerment. As might be assumed based simply on the connotation of the name “critical consciousness”, cognitive aspects—typically linked to the concept of critical reflection—have been assessed in nearly all studies on the topic. In contrast, studies of psychological empowerment have given far less attention to the cognitive component relative to the emotional component. The cognitive component has not featured prominently in much of the research literature despite it being included in the major definitional works on psychological empowerment (e.g., Zimmerman 1995, 2000) and the existence of validated measures for assessing the cognitive component (Speer 2000; Speer and Peterson 2000). This difference in emphasis has been so pronounced that newcomers to the literature could be forgiven for assuming that, as their names connote, empowerment is more about emotion, while critical consciousness is more about cognition.

The differences between critical reflection and the cognitive component of psychological empowerment go beyond the relative priority placed on them in their

respective conceptual frameworks. Critical reflection targets causal attributions about social issues and people's normative value judgments about sociopolitical systems, whereas the cognitive component of psychological empowerment targets understanding of the ways that power can be used to contest these systems, and how it can be used to suppress contestation in order to preserve the status quo. Critical reflection addresses the cognitive shifts that occur as one recognizes the roles that power and dominance play in creating and maintaining systematic disparities between groups, and the moral/value judgments about the unfairness of such an arrangement, including the importance of changing it. The cognitive component of psychological empowerment addresses the gains in understanding that must occur for people who would like to make sociopolitical changes to operate as powerful actors in that arena. The two types of cognitive development are thus closely theoretically interlinked, yet, at the same time, almost entirely substantively distinct.

To summarize the component-level comparison of the two constructs, the behavioral component of psychological empowerment and the critical action component of critical consciousness are similar, although critical action has been more narrowly applied to contexts associated with social and political change. The emotional component of psychological empowerment and the political efficacy component of critical consciousness are nearly identical in substance, but this component has been emphasized to a far greater degree in the psychological empowerment literature. The cognitive component has been emphasized to a greater degree in the critical consciousness literature, and the two bodies of literature seek to understand and promote different types of knowledge. Finally, although qualitative studies of critical consciousness have emphasized the importance of relationships for the development of critical consciousness, there has not been as much discussion about how relationships operate in the critical consciousness framework as there have with discussions of relational empowerment. More broadly, psychological empowerment has been explicitly linked to organizational empowerment and community empowerment in a multi-level ecological framework, and this is not the case for critical consciousness.

Discussion (Cross-Fertilization)

Having examined the similarities and differences between critical consciousness and psychological empowerment, we turn now to a discussion of the possibilities for conceptual cross-pollination—first from critical consciousness to empowerment and then vice versa. Although we do see possibilities for future use of the two concepts in tandem,

our intent with this discussion is not to merge the two concepts or to have one subsume the other. Due to the differences in substance and emphasis outlined above, we see benefits to the two remaining theoretically related but distinct concepts. Our goal, rather, is to provide those interested in both empowerment and critical consciousness with a sense of some of the ways they might productively leverage the scholarship of the other concept.

From Critical Consciousness to Empowerment

As discussed, empowerment and critical consciousness share roots in efforts to contest oppression. In the critical consciousness literature, unlike much of the empowerment literature, the connection to these roots is strong. It is clear that critical consciousness is oriented toward liberation from various forms of oppression. In the U.S., much of the scholarship on critical consciousness has focused on efforts to address race-based oppression and actions to contest other forms of identity-based oppression (Moane 2010). With its strong grounding in the legacy of Freire and other critical and liberation-oriented scholars in the Majority World (e.g., Martín-Baró, see Varas-Díaz and Serrano-García 2003), critical consciousness and the associated concept of sociopolitical development are clearly concerned with social change and social justice (Watts and Serrano-García 2003). Critical consciousness is therefore not easily confused with ameliorative approaches to social issues that ignore their systemic nature or the roles that power plays in maintaining them (Prilleltensky 2008).

Empowerment's relationship to social issues, oppression, and liberation has tended to be more ambiguous. Several recent critiques of empowerment-oriented scholarship and practice make this very point. For example, Woodall et al. (2012) argue that the connections between empowerment and social justice in the field of health promotion "have been at best diluted and at worst lost" (p. 743). They cite overly individualistic uses of the term, differences in definitions of the term, and the perception that empowerment is a Eurocentric term, perhaps in part because of its prominent use in initiatives like the World Health Organization's European Healthy Cities program (Tsouros 2009). The widespread dilutions of the term lead these authors and others (e.g., Cattaneo et al. 2014) to ask whether empowerment has lost its power.

For scholars and practitioners of empowerment, critical consciousness therefore offers several possible points of leverage. First, those concerned with the terminological dilution and definitional issues in the empowerment literature could use critical consciousness either as an alternative framework or as a complement to empowerment in order to clarify the links to liberation from oppression and social justice. Alternatively, critical consciousness could

offer empowerment theorists a model for strengthening ties between contemporary uses of empowerment and the term's emancipatory roots. One way that critical consciousness has kept these links strong has been to emphasize the cognitive aspects of sociopolitical development and their relationship to societal injustices. We argue that a greater emphasis on the cognitive component is also a promising direction for contending with the dilution and misuse of empowerment.

The cognitive component of psychological empowerment, however, differs substantively from the critical reflection component of critical consciousness. The content of the critical reflection component—specifically its emphasis on causal attributions for social issues, the importance of understanding historical context, and value judgments—represent another area of possible cross-fertilization from critical consciousness to empowerment. In most cases, the measures for psychological empowerment, including measures of the cognitive component, have been relatively value-neutral. As long as people are taking action in community and organizational contexts, growing in their self-perceptions of leadership and policy control, and in their understanding of power in social and political systems, they could be found to be increasing in psychological empowerment regardless of the nature of their engagement in the sociopolitical arena. The most commonly used measures of psychological empowerment are ideologically neutral. To make this point in a more extreme way, there would be little to prevent the application of a psychological empowerment framework to the study of organizations working to preserve or enhance oppressive structures (e.g., a white supremacist organization) other than the insistence of scholars that the framework was intended for different uses.

The content of the critical reflection component therefore offers empowerment researchers and practitioners a possible complement or alternative. For instance, as studied by Diemer et al. (2014), the first dimension of critical reflection involves an understanding of the structural “root” causes of systemic inequities, as well as their historical context. This builds the ideological foundation for links between the critical reflection component of critical consciousness and a social justice orientation. The second dimension, egalitarianism, involves moral/value judgments about the unfairness of contemporary oppressive relations between groups. Thus, unlike most measures of components of psychological empowerment, it is clear that the assessment of critical reflection is detecting cognitive gains specifically associated with the worldviews of those who take action for liberation from oppression. For these reasons, we urge empowerment theorists and practitioners, particularly those seeking to address the weakened links between empowerment and critical/transformational praxis

to carefully consider how the critical reflection component of critical consciousness might relate to theories of psychological empowerment.

From Empowerment to Critical Consciousness

When comparing psychological empowerment and critical consciousness, one difference that is immediately apparent is that psychological empowerment has been conceptualized as one level of a multi-level, ecological framework. In empowerment theory, these levels (psychological, organizational, community) are held to be inextricable (Rappaport 1981; Zimmerman 2000), and research has examined the relationships between, for instance, empowerment and sense of community at an organizational level and empowerment at the psychological level (e.g., Peterson and Hughey 2002). This ecological orientation is not universally understood by those invoking “empowerment” in research or practice, and many of the uses of the term that have been critiqued as having “lost their power” are those that have ignored the ecology of empowerment in favor of an individualistic approach. Yet, for those who have grounded empowerment approaches in an ecological framework, it has emphasized contextual and extra-individual considerations, which could benefit the study of critical consciousness. Work on sociopolitical development (e.g., Watts et al. 2003) has been more ecologically oriented, and a more thoroughly ecological orientation has been noted as a promising future direction for critical consciousness more broadly (Watts et al. 2011).

A second difference between the two concepts that offers an opportunity for cross-fertilization concerns the hypothesized causal relationships between the components of each concept. Early works typically did not specify directional relations between components of psychological empowerment, and subsequent studies have begun to examine these relationships between components empirically. For example, a longitudinal study by Christens et al. (2011) tested predictive paths between the behavioral and emotional components, finding that behavior was a better predictor of future emotion than the reverse. This finding contrasts the hypothesized theoretical model of sociopolitical development in which cognition and emotion are held to precede behavior. Although some scholars have acknowledged that it is possible for participatory behaviors to influence cognition, a central tenet of theory on critical consciousness is that critical reflection and perceptions of political efficacy lead to greater likelihood of taking critical action. Perhaps because of its ecological orientation, scholarship on empowerment has often emphasized the primacy of context rather than changes that occur first within the individual that then translate into alterations in their behaviors. Investigating these different hypothesized

Fig. 1 Recommendations for conceptual cross-fertilization between critical consciousness and psychological empowerment

pathways between components is an important future direction in scholarship for both critical consciousness and psychological empowerment; however, critical consciousness theorists in particular should not ignore the possibilities for socialization to occur through participation in critical action that might lead to subsequent gains in critical reflection and political efficacy. In fact, more reciprocal models or those that emphasize socialization are more compatible with Freire's descriptions of praxis.

Studies of psychological empowerment have also detected differences in the relationships between components across demographic groups, for instance according to race or socioeconomic status (e.g., Christens et al. 2011; Peterson et al. 2002). This raises an important issue for consideration in studies of critical consciousness, which have tended to focus specifically and often exclusively on marginalized populations. Although studies have identified critical consciousness as a stronger element of positive youth development among more marginalized youth than among more privileged youth (e.g., Diemer et al. 2010), this should not necessarily preclude the study of critical consciousness among more privileged youth. In fact, more detailed understanding of differences in the sociopolitical development processes among different groups of youth (i.e., according to social class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation) could yield some of the most important insights for practice and community action.

Finally, just as there are opportunities for studies of empowerment to leverage the content of the critical reflection component of critical consciousness, the

cognitive component of psychological empowerment represents an area of potential opportunity for a more holistic understanding of sociopolitical development and critical consciousness. The cognitive component of psychological empowerment places an emphasis on understanding of strategic uses of power to bring about change. Without such understanding among participants and leaders, actions oriented toward social justice are unlikely to succeed. As it stands, critical consciousness is concerned primarily with the cognitive shifts that would motivate someone to take action for social justice causes in the first place. It does not address the critical skills and perspectives that they will need to learn in order for their actions to be effective. This is an important consideration for critical consciousness because ineffective action is common in social change efforts and often leads, over time, to alienation and burnout among participants (Christens et al. 2013). The cognitive component of psychological empowerment therefore offers a possible complement or alternative to critical reflection, depending on the context in which they are being applied. The relationships between the two cognitive processes over time and among different populations and contexts should also be a priority for scholars seeking to understand and promote both empowerment and critical consciousness.

Conclusion

The concepts of critical consciousness and empowerment overlap in several areas, but they also have important differences. Some of the differences are matters of emphasis,

or they concern the relative importance of certain components to the overarching concepts. Other differences are substantive; in particular, the cognitive component of psychological empowerment and the critical reflection component of critical consciousness address theoretically related but different types of knowledge. In this article, we examined the similarities and differences between these two concepts in detail. The differences we have highlighted between critical consciousness and empowerment create opportunities for scholars to more deliberately link the two concepts in empirical research. It is also possible to borrow ideas from one framework and apply them in studies of the other. This article has elaborated on some of these opportunities (summarized in Fig. 1), but there are others to explore.

Understanding social and political systems and the ways that one can be involved in them is an important progression in youth and adolescent development (Flanagan and Christens 2011; Larson 2011). Critical consciousness and empowerment are two of the most prominent conceptual frameworks for understanding civic development and engagement among youth involved in change efforts. Research has found that civic engagement and sociopolitical control are positively related to developmental outcomes such as social capital and social trust (Flanagan et al. 2015; Wray-Lake and Flanagan 2012), and negatively related to risk behaviors and psychological symptoms (Christens and Peterson 2012; Denault and Poulin 2009; Zimmerman et al. 1999). These findings demonstrate that civic behaviors and the perception that one is capable of making a difference are important indicators of positive youth development.

On the whole, there has been less empirical research focused on the cognitive aspects of youth civic development. Empirical research on understanding inequities and the nature of social power has been focused relatively narrowly on particular issues or domains and has not yet been sufficiently linked with other developmental processes. There have been promising findings linking critical consciousness to educational and career aspirations (Diemer 2009; Diemer and Blustein 2006), yet more research is needed to fully understand the developmental implications of critical awareness of social issues, social justice, and social power (Torney-Purta and Barber 2011). Although there are documented benefits, studies of educational programs and youth organizing initiatives suggest that these relationships can be complex (Cammarota 2011; Kirshner and Ginwright 2012; Rogers et al. 2007)—for instance, it can be alienating to achieve greater understanding of systems that perpetuate societal injustices. Yet, greater awareness of these issues is part of meaningful engagement in the civic arena, and it can have developmental benefits

as well, particularly for young people who are part of marginalized groups.

This article's goal has been to contribute to clarity in what is sometimes a muddled conceptual terrain. Empowerment and critical consciousness are two of the most promising frameworks for understanding the dynamics and contexts of youth civic development. Studies of both of these concepts have the potential to reveal insights into the ways that civic action and reflection shape young people's developmental trajectories. They also both seek to account for the fact that the contemporary world is replete with social, political, and economic injustices. They both draw attention to the fact that positive youth development is not only successful adaptation to institutional and community life in the world as we find it at present, but also the capacity to critically analyze social issues, identify unjust arrangements, and take actions to strengthen social justice. Understanding the developmental dynamics of empowerment and critical consciousness should therefore be a priority for the multiple disciplines and fields of practice interested in promoting positive youth development. We hope that greater clarity about the contours of these two kindred concepts will help to advance the scholarship and practice of youth civic and sociopolitical development.

Acknowledgments The authors received no financial support for the research or authorship of this article.

Authors' contribution B.C. conceived of the study and led the drafting of the manuscript. T.W. and A.D. drafted portions of the manuscript and provided important intellectual content in revisions. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Alinsky, S. D. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals*. New York: Vintage.
- Baker, A. M., & Brookins, C. C. (2014). Toward the development of a measure of sociopolitical consciousness: Listening to the voices of Salvadoran youth. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(8), 1015–1032. doi:10.1002/jcop.21668.
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*, 37(2), 122–147. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.37.2.122.
- Cammarota, J. (2011). From hopelessness to hope: Social justice pedagogy in urban education and youth development. *Urban Education*, 46(4), 828–844. doi:10.1177/0042085911399931.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.

- Campbell, C., & MacPhail, C. (2002). Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness: Participatory HIV prevention by South African youth. *Social Science and Medicine*, 55(2), 331–345. doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(01)00289-1.
- Cattaneo, L. B., Calton, J. M., & Brodsky, A. E. (2014). Status quo versus status quake: Putting the power back in empowerment. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(4), 433–446. doi:10.1002/jcop.21619.
- Christens, B. D. (2012). Toward relational empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1–2), 114–128. doi:10.1007/s10464-011-9483-5.
- Christens, B. D. (2013). In search of powerful empowerment. *Health Education Research*, 28(3), 371–374. doi:10.1093/her/cyt045.
- Christens, B. D., Collura, J. C., & Tahir, F. (2013). Critical hopefulness: A person-centered analysis of the intersection of cognitive and emotional empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 52(1–2), 170–184. doi:10.1007/s10464-013-9586-2.
- Christens, B. D., Krauss, S. E., & Zeldin, S. (2016). Malaysian validation of a sociopolitical control scale for youth. *Journal of Community Psychology*. doi:10.1002/jcop.21777.
- Christens, B. D., & Peterson, N. A. (2012). The role of empowerment in youth development: A study of sociopolitical control as mediator of ecological systems' influence on developmental outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(5), 623–635. doi:10.1007/s10964-011-9724-9.
- Christens, B. D., Peterson, N. A., & Speer, P. W. (2011a). Community participation and psychological empowerment: Testing reciprocal causality using a cross-lagged panel design and latent constructs. *Health Education & Behavior*, 38(4), 339–347. doi:10.1177/1090198110372880.
- Christens, B. D., Speer, P. W., & Peterson, N. A. (2011b). Social class as moderator of the relationship between (dis)empowering processes and psychological empowerment. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 39(2), 170–182. doi:10.1002/jcop.20425.
- De Charms, R. (1968). *Personal causation*. New York: Academic Press.
- Denault, A. S., & Poulin, F. (2009). Intensity and breadth of participation in organized activities during the adolescent years: Multiple associations with youth outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(9), 1199–1213. doi:10.1007/s10964-009-9437-5.
- Diemer, M. A. (2009). Pathways to occupational attainment among poor youth of color: The role of sociopolitical development. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37(1), 6–35. doi:10.1177/0011000007309858.
- Diemer, M. A. (2012). Fostering marginalized youths' political participation: Longitudinal roles of parental political socialization and youth sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1–2), 246–256. doi:10.1007/s10464-012-9495-9.
- Diemer, M. A., & Blustein, D. L. (2006). Critical consciousness and career development among urban youth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68(2), 220–232. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2005.07.001.
- Diemer, M. A., & Li, C.-H. (2011). Critical consciousness development and political participation among marginalized youth. *Child Development*, 82(6), 1815–1833. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01650.x.
- Diemer, M. A., McWhirter, E. H., Ozer, E. J., & Rapa, L. J. (2015). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of critical consciousness. *The Urban Review*. doi:10.1007/s11256-015-0336-7.
- Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Park, C. J., & Perry, J. C. (2014). Development and validation of the critical consciousness scale. *Youth & Society*. doi:10.1177/0044118X14538289.
- Diemer, M. A., Wang, Q., Moore, T., Gregory, S. R., Hatcher, K. M., & Voight, A. M. (2010). Sociopolitical development, work salience, and vocational expectations among low socioeconomic status African American, Latin American, and Asian American youth. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(3), 619–635. doi:10.1037/a0017049.
- Fedi, A., Mannarini, T., & Maton, K. I. (2009). Empowering community settings and community mobilization. *Community Development*, 40(3), 275–291. doi:10.1080/15575330903109985.
- Fine, M., & Ruglis, J. (2009). Circuits and consequences of dispossession: The racialized realignment of the public sphere for US youth. *Transforming Anthropology*, 17(1), 20–33. doi:10.1111/j.1548-7466.2009.01037.x.
- Fisher, M. T. (2007). *Writing in rhythm: Spoken word poetry in urban classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Flanagan, C. A. (2013). *Teenage citizens: The political theories of the young*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Flanagan, C. A., & Christens, B. D. (2011). Youth civic development: Historical context and emerging issues. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 134, 1–9. doi:10.1002/cd.307.
- Flanagan, C. A., Kim, T., Collura, J., & Kopish, M. A. (2015). Community service and adolescents' social capital. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 25(2), 295–309. doi:10.1111/jora.12137.
- Freire, P. (2002). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970).
- Freire, P. (2005). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1974).
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (2013). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. New York: Routledge.
- Gaventa, J. (1980). *Power and powerlessness: Quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian valley*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2002). New terrain in youth development: The promise of a social justice approach. *Social Justice*, 29(4), 82–95.
- Godfrey, E. B., & Grayman, J. K. (2014). Teaching citizens: The role of open classroom climate in fostering critical consciousness among youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(11), 1801–1817. doi:10.1007/s10964-013-0084-5.
- Gonzalez, I. (1991). Empowerment and democratic education. *Southern Changes*, 13(4), 3–6.
- Holden, D. J., Evans, W. D., Hinnant, L. W., & Messeri, P. (2005). Modeling psychological empowerment among youth involved in local tobacco control efforts. *Health Education & Behavior*, 32(2), 264–278. doi:10.1177/1090198104272336.
- Hope, E. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2014). The role of sociopolitical attitudes and civic education in the civic engagement of black youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(3), 460–470. doi:10.1111/jora.12117.
- Kirshner, B., & Ginwright, S. (2012). Youth organizing as a developmental context for African American and Latino adolescents. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(3), 288–294. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00243.x.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3–12. doi:10.3102/0013189X035007003.
- Langhout, R. D., Collins, C., & Ellison, E. R. (2014). Examining relational empowerment for elementary school students in a yPAR program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 53(3–4), 369–381. doi:10.1007/s10464-013-9617-z.
- Larson, R. W. (2011). Positive development in a disorderly world. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(2), 317–334. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00707.x.
- Laverack, G. (2006). Using a 'domains' approach to build community empowerment. *Community Development Journal*, 41(1), 4–12. doi:10.1093/cdj/bsi038.

- Leonard, P., & McLaren, P. (Eds.). (2002). *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter*. New York: Routledge.
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A radical view*. London: Macmillan.
- Mahatmya, D., & Lohman, B. J. (2012). Predictors and pathways to civic involvement in emerging adulthood: Neighborhood, family, and school influences. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(9), 1168–1183. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9777-4.
- Maton, K. I. (2008). Empowering community settings: Agents of individual development, community betterment, and positive social change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 4–21. doi:10.1007/s10464-007-9148-6.
- McWhirter, E. H., & McWhirter, B. T. (2015). Critical consciousness and vocational development among Latina/o high school youth: Initial development and testing of a measure. *Journal of Career Assessment*. doi:10.1177/1069072715599535.
- Moane, G. (2010). Sociopolitical development and political activism. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34(4), 521. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01601.x.
- Murray, I. E., & Milner, H. R. (2015). Toward a pedagogy of sociopolitical consciousness in outside of school programs. *The Urban Review*. doi:10.1007/s11256-015-0339-4.
- O'Connor, C. (1997). Dispositions toward (collective) struggle and educational resilience in the inner city: A case analysis of six African-American high school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(4), 593–629. doi:10.3102/00028312034004593.
- Oser, J., Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). Is online participation distinct from offline participation? A latent class analysis of participation types and their stratification. *Political Research Quarterly*, 66(1), 91–101. doi:10.1177/1065912912436695.
- Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2010). Building bridges from the margins: The work of leadership in social change organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(2), 292–307. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.01.008.
- Ozer, E. J., & Schotland, M. (2011). Psychological empowerment among urban youth: Measure development and relationship to psychosocial functioning. *Health Education & Behavior*, 38(4), 348–356. doi:10.1177/1090198110373734.
- Peterson, N. A. (2014). Empowerment theory: Clarifying the nature of higher-order multidimensional constructs. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 53(1–2), 96–108. doi:10.1007/s10464-013-9624-0.
- Peterson, N. A., Hamme, C. L., & Speer, P. W. (2002). Cognitive empowerment of African Americans and Caucasians: Differences in understandings of power, political functioning, and shaping ideology. *Journal of Black Studies*, 32(3), 336–351. doi:10.1177/002193470203200304.
- Peterson, N. A., & Hughey, J. (2002). Tailoring organizational characteristics for empowerment: Accommodating individual economic resources. *Journal of Community Practice*, 10(3), 41–59. doi:10.1300/J125v10n03_03.
- Peterson, N. A., Peterson, C. H., Agre, L., Christens, B. D., & Morton, C. M. (2011). Measuring youth empowerment: Validation of a sociopolitical control scale for youth in an urban community context. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 39(5), 592–605. doi:10.1002/jcop.20456.
- Peterson, N. A., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2004). Beyond the individual: Toward a nomological network of organizational empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(1/2), 129–145. doi:10.1023/B:AJCP.0000040151.77047.58.
- Poletta, F. (2002). *Freedom is an endless meeting: Democracy in American social movements*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2008). The role of power in wellness, oppression, and liberation: The promise of psychopolitical validity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 36(2), 116–136. doi:10.1002/jcop.20225.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(1–2), 1–21. doi:10.1007/s10464-011-9448-8.
- Ramos-Zayas, A. Y. (2003). *National performances: The politics of race, class, and space in Puerto Rican Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 9(1), 1–25. doi:10.1007/BF00919275.
- Rogers, J., Morrell, E., & Enyedy, N. (2007). Studying the struggle: Contexts for learning and identity development for urban youth. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(3), 419–443. doi:10.1177/0002764207306069.
- Russell, S. T., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A., & Laub, C. (2009). Youth empowerment and high school gay-straight alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(7), 891–903. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9382-8.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2010). *Freire, teaching, and learning: Culture circles across contexts*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Speer, P. W. (2000). Intrapersonal and interactional empowerment: Implications for theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(1), 51–61. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(200001)28:1<51:AID-JCOP6>3.0.CO;2-6.
- Speer, P. W., & Christens, B. D. (2013). *Measuring youth cognitive empowerment*. Presentation at the 14th Biennial of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA), Miami, FL.
- Speer, P. W., & Peterson, N. A. (2000). Psychometric properties of an empowerment scale: Testing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. *Social Work Research*, 24(2), 109–118.
- Thomas, A. J., Barrie, R., Brunner, J., Clawson, A., Hewitt, A., Jeremie-Brink, G., & Rowe-Johnson, M. (2014). Assessing critical consciousness in youth and young adults. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(3), 485–496. doi:10.1111/jora.12132.
- Torney-Purta, J., & Barber, C. (2011). Fostering young people's support for participatory human rights through their developmental niches. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(4), 473–481. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.2011.01113.x.
- Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Alexander, N., Billups, A. B., Blanding, Y., Genao, E., et al. (2008). Participatory action research in the contact zone. In J. Cammarota & M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. 23–44). New York: Routledge.
- Tsouros, A. (2009). City leadership for health and sustainable development: The World Health Organization European Healthy Cities Network. *Health Promotion International*, 24(Supplement 1), i4–i10. doi:10.1093/heapro/dap050.
- Varas-Díaz, N., & Serrano-García, I. (2003). The challenge of a positive self-image in a colonial context: A psychology of liberation for the Puerto Rican experience. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1–2), 103–115. doi:10.1023/A:1023078721414.
- Vieno, A., Lenzi, M., Canale, N., & Santinello, M. (2014). Italian validation of the sociopolitical control scale for youth (SPCS-Y). *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(4), 463–468. doi:10.1002/jcop.21621.
- Watts, R. J., & Abdul-Adil, J. K. (1998). Promoting critical consciousness in young, African-American men. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 16(1), 63–86. doi:10.1300/J005v16n01_04.
- Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 134, 43–57. doi:10.1002/cd.310.
- Watts, R. J., & Flanagan, C. (2007). Pushing the envelope on youth civic engagement: A developmental and liberation psychology perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(6), 779–792. doi:10.1002/jcop.20178.

- Watts, R. J., Griffith, D. M., & Abdul-Adil, J. (1999). Sociopolitical development as an antidote for oppression—theory and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(2), 255–271. doi:[10.1023/A:1022839818873](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022839818873).
- Watts, R. J., & Serrano-García, I. (2003). The quest for a liberating community psychology: An overview. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1), 73–78. doi:[10.1023/A:1023022603667](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023022603667).
- Watts, R. J., Williams, N. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1/2), 185–194. doi:[10.1023/A:1023091024140](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023091024140).
- Woodall, J. R., Warwick-Booth, L., & Cross, R. (2012). Has empowerment lost its power? *Health Education Research*, 27(4), 742–745. doi:[10.1093/her/cys064](https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cys064).
- Wray-Lake, L., & Flanagan, C. A. (2012). Parenting practices and the development of adolescents' social trust. *Journal of Adolescence*, 35(3), 549–560. doi:[10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.09.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.09.006).
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1990). Taking aim on empowerment research: On the distinction between individual and psychological conceptions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 169–177. doi:[10.1007/BF00922695](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00922695).
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 581–599. doi:[10.1007/BF02506983](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506983).
- Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 43–63). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Zimmerman, M. A., Ramírez-Valles, J., & Maton, K. I. (1999). Resilience among urban African American male adolescents: A study of the protective effects of sociopolitical control on their mental health. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 733–751. doi:[10.1023/A:1022205008237](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022205008237).
- Zimmerman, M. A., & Rappaport, J. (1988). Citizen participation, perceived control, and psychological empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 16(5), 725–750. doi:[10.1007/BF00930023](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00930023).
- Zimmerman, M. A., & Zahniser, J. H. (1991). Refinements of sphere-specific measures of perceived control: Development of a sociopolitical control scale. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(2), 189–204. doi:[10.1002/1520-6629\(199104\)19:2<189::AID-JCOP2290190210>3.0.CO;2-6](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199104)19:2<189::AID-JCOP2290190210>3.0.CO;2-6).
- Zion, S., Allen, C. D., & Jean, C. (2015). Enacting a critical pedagogy, influencing teachers' sociopolitical development. *The Urban Review*. doi:[10.1007/s11256-015-0340-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-015-0340-y).