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Transformative Consciousness: Scale Development and Content Validity

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Abstract

This paper outlines the development of the Transformative Consciousness (TC) of Oppression and Privilege (COAP) Scale created to address the conceptual and measurement limitations of the critical consciousness (CC) construct. Unlike prior CC measures, this scale was developed for the general population, integrates identities that are oppressed and privileged, incorporates the social-ecological framework, assesses cognitions, and attempts to reduce the impact of social desirability bias. Following DeVellis' (2003) scale development process and Rubio and colleague's (2003) process for content validity, this paper presents: a review of CC measurement literature and the lack of standardized conceptualization and measurement tools; an overview of TC theory; the COAP scale development process; and, a content validity study of COAP including quantitative and qualitative methods. An outgrowth of the first author's conceptualization of Transformative Consciousness, the domain-specific and content validated COAP scale demonstrates a unique scaling method combining vignettes, sentence completions,

rank ordering of response options, and scoring of ordering patterns. Limitations of the COAP scale and opportunities for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Critical consciousness, scale development, oppression, white privilege, anti-racism

Introduction

Critical consciousness (CC) is defined as the ability to conceptualize and act against inequity (i.e., oppression and privilege) (Jemal, 2017a). Research identifies oppressive experiences – e.g., racial/ethnic discrimination, systemic inequity – as significant predictors of psychological distress and as a form of toxic stress and trauma that presents a pathway to poor health (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Fortunately, CC development is a protective factor (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). Although CC has a scholarly following and serves as a theoretical basis to inform research and practice addressing HIV risk (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002), domestic violence (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006), and substance misuse (Windsor, Jemal, & Benoit, 2014), there are concerns with its conceptualization and measurement (Baker & Brookins, 2014; Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017; Jemal, 2016; Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011). An extensive literature review for measures of CC returned few results. In most CC studies, absent a comprehensive CC measure, researchers assess each CC domain - critical reflection, political efficacy, and action - using proxy scales of similar constructs in lieu of developing a CC-specific measure. The lack of a coherently conceptualized construct limits cross-study comparison, inhibits application in addressing personal and social dysfunction, and prevents the advancement of the CC field (Goodman, et al., 1998). To bridge previous efforts to future scholarship, this paper is divided into two parts. Part one will review measurement of critical consciousness (via the CC domains) and discuss the limitations. Part two will detail the development of the Transformative Consciousness of Oppression and Privilege (COAP) Scale created to address the CC scale limitations. The paper will demonstrate how such a measure can be used by social workers to assess CC development of themselves (as service providers or educators), clients, and students, functioning as a means to identify and mitigate biases.

Part I: Measuring Critical Consciousness

Critical Consciousness Domains

As introduced above, contemporary CC scholarship proposes that critical consciousness is comprised of a combination of three domains—critical reflection, political efficacy, and action. Critical reflection refers to awareness of the role of structural factors or systemic forces in social problems (understanding causes of inequality as structurally based versus a result of individual choice; [Hughes & Tuch, 2000]). In social work education and practice, this is demonstrated by the student or practitioner’s capacity to assess for and understand the person-in-environment (Finn & Jacobson, 2008), not “blaming the victim” or otherwise locating the source of social inequity at the individual level (Abramovitz, 2012). Political efficacy captures the individual’s perception of their capacity to take political action towards social change (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). In social work, this may be evident in the teaching of and competency around advocacy skills, community organizing and engagement, and participatory research. Similarly, but beyond perception, the action domain encompasses the likelihood of or

actual involvement in actions towards social change (Corning & Myers, 2002). The sections below further outline existing measurement tools used to gauge CC by domain. The primary objective is not to assess the measurement of each domain of CC but to review how CC has been measured in pieces rather than as one construct.

Critical reflection. As a qualitative assessment of critical reflection, researchers coded respondents' statements for evidence of critical reflection during an intervention using social psychological theories of attribution (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998). For a quantitative assessment, Neville Coleman, Falconer, and Holmes (2005) used a modified version of the Attributions about Poverty Scale (APS) (Hughes & Tuch, 2000, as cited in Neville et al., 2005) "to examine individual (or victim blame) and structural (or system blame) attributions for current economic and social disadvantages among African Americans" (p. 35). An alternative method for assessing critical reflection, Diemer and Blustein (2006) measured sociopolitical analysis through inverse scores on the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale (Pratto et al., 1994), conceptualized as the desire to maintain the status quo of non-egalitarian, hierarchical relationships among socially constructed groups (Diemer & Blustein 2006). Diemer and colleague's (2015) study reports no correlation between the two subdomains of critical reflection- perceived inequality and egalitarianism - and items from the SDO scale, indicating that scores using the SDO measure may be an imprecise measure of critical reflection.

Political efficacy. Diemer and Blustein (2006) measured political efficacy using the Sociopolitical Control Scale (SPCS) designed to assess individuals' perceptions of their capabilities in social and political systems (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Peterson and colleagues (2006) showed, however, that method bias from negatively worded items had a significant effect on the factor structure of the SPCS.

Action. Researchers commonly measure the action domain of CC quantitatively, as the frequency of participation (or intent to participate) in various social and/or political actions (Watts et al., 2011). For example, the Activism Orientation Scale (AOS) examines action propensity to reduce injustices (Corning & Myers, 2002); the Speer, Jackson, and Peterson's (2001) civic engagement scale assesses frequency of involvement in specific actions (e.g., "signed a petition"); and the Sociopolitical Control Scale has been used as a proxy for critical action "[reflecting] the perceived capacity to take action" (Diemer et al., 2006, p. 223).

Measurement challenges

Researchers attempting to measure CC lack standardized and validated measurement tools, and thus, frequently devise ad hoc scales, modify scales developed by other researchers, or borrow scales of proxy constructs from related disciplines. Because the psychometric properties of quantitative measures used for proxy constructs were not designed to measure CC, measurement of CC lacks content, construct, and factorial validity (Jemal, 2016; Corning & Myers, 2002). Moreover, researchers operationalize CC differently (e.g., Reflection v. Reflection *and* Action). When researchers conceptualize the construct using the same domains, their definitions and methods to measure those domains may vary. Thus, not only are study results incomparable, it is disputable that they measure CC. The disjointed measurement of the CC construct challenges effective scholarship, causing concern for the future and utility of CC theory, research, and practice, as well as applicability to social work education and practice.

Fortunately, scholars note “inconsistent conceptualization and measurement of CC... [and that] *no scale exists that was explicitly designed to measure CC*” (Diemer et al., 2017, p. 463, emphasis in original). Attempting to address these issues, five CC scales were developed between 2014-2017. Three of the five aimed to measure CC in youth and young adults in the U.S. (Diemer et al., 2015; Diemer et al., 2017; McWhirter 2016; Thomas et al., 2014), one sociopolitical consciousness for Salvadoran youth (Baker & Brookins, 2014), and the last CC of institutionalized discrimination in the general population (Shin, Ezeofor, Smith, Welch & Goldrich, 2016).

Critical Consciousness Scales

Thomas et al. (2014) created the nine-item Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) adopting the developmental perspective of CC in Watts et al.’s (1999) model of sociopolitical development. With four stages of development—pre-critical, beginning critical, critical, and post critical—the scale assesses “issues of equity and justice in society, equitable treatment across social groups...access to resources or educational opportunities for various groups,” and experiences of empathy and emotional reactions to oppression and inequity (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 489). The CCI’s Guttman (sequential pattern) format allows for a developmental perspective and facilitates the ability to distinguish between levels of CC in the interpretation (unlike Likert-type responses).

McWhirter and McWhirter (2016) conducted two studies—exploratory and then confirmatory factor analyses—towards the development of an effective measure of marginalized, Latinx-identified high-school aged youth’s CC to demonstrate how their CC relates to subsequent educational or vocational attainment. The measure of adolescent critical consciousness (MACC) highlighted ‘critical agency’ and ‘critical behavior,’ diverting from prior research as critical agency combined previously separate concepts of awareness and efficacy. Also examining CC in Latinx youth, Baker and Brookins (2014) developed a measure of sociopolitical consciousness from photovoice data with Salvadoran youth and conceptualizations by Watts and colleagues (1999; 2003). Themes related to sociopolitical awareness included: efficacy, equality, and methods for social change.

Diemer et al. (2015) developed and tested the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS) using Likert-scaling. They theorized CC as composed of critical reflection (CR) and critical action (CA). The CR domain contained two dimensions, perceived inequality and egalitarianism, measuring critical reflection on perceived societal inequalities and the endorsement of societal equality, respectively. CA embodied individual or collective action taken to change those social inequalities (Freire, 2000). Diemer et al. (2017) reported results from high-school based studies with marginalized youth aiming to validate a revised CCS. Their findings indicate that CR and CA are best considered independent of one another. This calls into question the theoretical assumption of a “transitive relationship” between reflection and action, and whether reflection and action are two domains that comprise CC.

Building on the literature of intersectionality that highlights how axes of identity intersect to compound or constrict experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Hills-Collins & Bilge, 2016), Shin et al.’s (2016) measure aimed to evaluate CC as it relates to racism, heterosexism, and classism within the general population. The scale departed from prior CC

research by not including a measure of action. The items, however, appear to measure respondent attitudes or opinions rather than consciousness, failing to illustrate whether respondents have a structural understanding of systemic issues (Shin et al., 2016). Further, with no social desirability results, it is unclear how well this scale mitigates social desirability bias.

Critical Consciousness Scale Limitations. Items on CC scales tend to be ambiguous and lack clarity. For example, Thomas' (2014) scale states "I don't notice when people make prejudiced comments" (p. 48). What one does not notice is difficult to measure, gauge, or quantify. Likewise, is this referencing prejudiced comments against anyone? Some respondents may have gender but not race consciousness. Several items lack clarity regarding subject matter, population, and content area. Similarly, is Baker and Brookins' (2014) scale a measure of CC or a self-assessment measure of CC? For example, by agreeing with: "I can think analytically when trying to solve problems" (Baker & Brookins, 2014, p. 1028), the respondent may believe in their ability to think analytically but, for a CC assessment, what respondents believe about their ability is not meaningful.

In Thomas' (2014) scale, the terms "groups" and "people" are general and ambiguous. With this language, a respondent's belief that members of the privileged group are treated unfairly will produce a false positive for CC. This resonates with the myth of reverse discrimination and is counter to the spirit of CC. Similarly, terms have various interpretations. Respondents may interpret the phrase "human rights" as "pro-life" or "pro-choice," or the right to live in a segregated neighborhood. Similarly, with the sociopolitical action item "participated in a political party, club or organization" (Diemer et al., 2017, p. 466), members of hate groups (e.g., KKK members) may receive high scores, which is counterintuitive for a measure of CC that is about anti-oppression. Another serious flaw with item wording is exemplified in the CCS scale (Diemer, 2017). Respondents may choose the same response to items but for different reasons, prohibiting analytical conclusions from the data. For example, "poor people have fewer chances to get good jobs" (Diemer, 2017, p. 465). Respondents may endorse that idea but with opposing causal explanations, such as victim-blaming and ignoring oppressive systemic factors impacting individuals living in poverty. It is questionable whether self-assessed attitudes or responses to vague statements accurately gauge critical consciousness.

It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the measures of CC have issues with content validity. Content validity refers to how accurately a measurement tool includes the various aspects of the construct (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Researchers note that CC is topic-specific (Diemer et al., 2015) and have tailored measures of CC to specific content, such as domestic violence (e.g., Chronister & McWhirter, 2006). However, content validity issues arise when scales intend to measure "oppression" but exclude forms of oppression—e.g., heterosexism, ageism—as Diemer et al. (2015) note is a limitation of their scale. There may also be content issues regarding equity (i.e., just outcomes) and equality (i.e., fair provision in circumstance) in the existing scales. Content naming equal treatment as the highest level of CC (Thomas et al., 2014; Diemer et al., 2017) begs the question: is giving a historically disadvantaged group equal opportunity indicative of critical consciousness or should treatment focus on equitable outcomes?

Despite scholarly linkages of CC to positive outcomes at the individual and collective levels, as well as the development of interventions that foster CC and civic engagement, issues

with the inconsistent conceptualization and measurement of CC still exist. Critical measurement limitations stem from conceptual ambiguity, inconsistency, and the use of proxy measures unsubstantiated for CC evaluation (Corning & Myers, 2002). With divergent conceptualization of CC, varying domains and measurement techniques ensue. The variance suggests the absence of an agreed upon framework of CC from which a measurement model might originate. The result is whether the construct of CC is being measured as intended, problematizing comparison of results across studies or linking CC to outcomes. Related to issues of validity, populations with known low CC ought not score high on a CC measure. Not addressing the limitations of CC's measurement with greater precision runs the risk of minimizing the importance of CC as a key phenomenon of interest for scholars, and social work educators and practitioners (Watts et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2014).

The remainder of this paper will detail the development of the Transformative Consciousness of Oppression and Privilege (COAP) Scale created to address the CC scale limitations. A goal beyond describing this scale development process is to highlight the benefit of having a validated measure for use in social work education (classroom and field instruction) and practice. Such a tool could be used to evaluate the cultivation of critical reflexivity in the student and practitioner, aiding in mitigating practitioner biases in the field instruction setting and/or supervision dyad. Shedding light on the varying—and intersectional—experiences of oppression and privilege by both social work students, providers, and clients, engenders critical consciousness, identifies gaps for training, education and advocacy, and deepens the capacity for authentic engagement and application of appropriate interventions. The measure could be adapted to assess the efficacy of critical consciousness-based interventions in work with clients as an intervention measurement tool (pre- and post-testing). Similarly, in social work education, the scale could be used to evaluate how well social work curriculum is advancing students' critical consciousness (pre- and post-course evaluation).

Part II: Transformative Consciousness Conceptualization and Scale Development

Considering and to address the theoretical and measurement pitfalls of CC, this paper presents the development of a scale to assess a new construct, Transformative Consciousness (TC) (Jemal, 2017a). In short, TC refers to “a person’s level of socio-ecosystemic reflection on: 1) inequitable elements, factors and causes that perpetuate their identified problem [Awareness]; 2) potential behavioral responses to inequity for the identified problem [Behavioral-Response]; and, 3) consequences of inequity for the development and implementation of potential solutions [Consequence]” (Jemal, 2018). For an in-depth discussion of TC, see Jemal, 2018. As social workers, the authors are proponents of infusing critical consciousness with social work theory, education and practice to better equip the field to fulfill its ethical and professional mission for social justice. Operating within a critical consciousness paradigm aligns with the field’s systems orientation that fosters awareness of causes and action toward solutions at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Finn & Jacobson, 2008). With this perspective, social workers can resist blaming individuals for systemic failures and create holistic responses.

Levels of Transformative Consciousness

In TC, each of its three domains (awareness, behavioral-response, and consequence) has three levels of consciousness (critical (C), blame (B) and denial(D)) (Jemal, 2018) rooted in

Freire's work (1973). Freire articulated three stages of consciousness—magical, naïve, and critical. Magical consciousness corresponds to the denial level of TC, encapsulating lack of insight into the structural forces impacting the lives of individuals (Jemal, 2018). Freire's (1973) naïve consciousness aligns with the TC blame level, characterized by blaming individuals, usually those the problem is most negatively affecting, without consideration of other systemic factors that shape problems and the state of people's lives (Jemal, 2018). The highest level of TC—critical—corresponds with Freire's (1973) critical consciousness level and is the critical analysis of socio-structural factors underlying individual and community problems (Jemal, 2018).

Social Ecological Model

TC is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Social Ecological Systems Theory, a person-in-environment perspective purporting an interplay between individual and environmental factors wherein people exert influence on their environment, and their environment exerts influence on their development and actions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Transformative Consciousness is "informed by the socio-ecological model because forms of inequity operate at each socio-ecological level: from individual prejudice and discrimination, to institutional processes that create disparities, to cultural norms and values that devalue non-dominant perspectives and practices" (Jemal, 2018). Offering a conceptual model in which analysis is possible at multiple levels invites the potential to measure change outside of the individual—the feasibility of social transformation (Corning & Myers, 2002; Shin et al., 2016). Building on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) original six level social-ecological model, the TC model incorporates seven levels in its "socio-ecosystem": Intrapersonal (Intra)—or internal cognitions, attitudes, and beliefs— Interpersonal (Inter)—interactions with influential others, Microsystem (Micro), Mesosystem (Meso), Exosystem (Exo), Macrosystem (Macro) and Chronosystem (Chrono) (Jemal, 2018). Additionally, intersecting identities inform TC. A central gap in CC theory is the exclusion of privilege. Most CC definitions focus solely on individuals who are oppressed or marginalized, and how these individuals perceive their experiences of oppression (Jemal, 2017a). In contrast, from a TC perspective, individual and social dysfunction is a direct consequence of oppression *and* privilege at each level of the socio-ecosystem (Jemal, 2018).

The respective TC scale: 1) incorporates a developmental perspective; 2) excludes action; 3) considers intersectionality by including privilege (not solely focusing on experiences of oppression and recognizing the nuance of interrelation in identity, e.g. race and gender); 4) is for the general population; 5) assesses cognitions (not attitudes, beliefs, or self-assessments); and, 6) addresses the issue of social desirability bias. The TC theoretical framework may be applied to measuring critical consciousness of a range of social issues, such as violence, incarceration, homelessness, HIV/STI infection, and substance misuse. Here, for demonstration purposes, Transformative Consciousness is applied to African American racial oppression and white racial privilege to create the Transformative Consciousness of Oppression and Privilege (COAP) Scale.

Methods

The methods for this study were adapted from an eight-step scale development procedure detailed in DeVellis (2003): (1) clearly define construct, (2) generate vignettes and items, (3) determine format of the measure, (4) have experts review vignettes and items, (5) consider

inclusion of validation items, (6) administer items to a development sample, (7) evaluate items, and (8) optimize scale length. Of note, scale development is an iterative process and may not follow the steps linearly; instead, it cycles between or skips steps as needed (DeVellis, 2003).

Vignettes

Vignettes - an alternative to Likert-scales or attributions, which may not suit the construct of CC - are scenarios or examples about hypothetical persons, situations, or behaviors in specified circumstances, to whose situation the participant is invited to respond (Hazel, 1995; Hughes, 1998). Vignettes are advantageous for contextualizing information that is content-specific (Veloski, Tai, Evans, & Nash, 2005). In social research, vignettes: 1) allow situations in specific contexts to be explored; 2) assess or clarify people's thoughts, beliefs, judgments or attitudes; and, 3) provide a less personal or threatening method of exploring sensitive topics that might otherwise be difficult to discuss (Barter & Renold, 1999) such as racism (Watt, 2007). Vignettes are recommended to explore perceptions and interpretations of uniform situations (Barter & Renold, 1999); control variation and details (Veloski et al., 2005); test cognitions rather than attitudes; and, incorporate scenarios of privilege or oppression (Menaker & Franklin, 2013). Vignettes may be used alone or in conjunction with other research methods (Barter & Renold, 1999).

Freire (2000) noted the importance of investigating people's thinking via thematics: "the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their... [world view, in which] generative themes are found" (Freire, 2000, p. 97). In social work, it is crucial to explore this foundational thinking of educators, students, and practitioners as a means to better align the profession with anti-racism tenets and the social justice ethical mandate (Abramovitz, 1998; Tolliver, Hadden, Snowden & Brown-Manning, 2016). For this study, the first author created vignettes to correspond with each socio-ecosystem level for both African American racial oppression and white racial privilege. The vignettes include generative themes of oppression and privilege, and thus, were specific and grounded in issues of racial importance and interest (Watts et al., 2003). The vignette structure provided specificity eliminating the ambiguity of content necessitating respondents to consider the same scenario, underlying causes, appropriate behavioral responses, and potential consequences.

Person-perception method. This scale uses the 'person perception' method with vignettes because of the importance of assessing cognitions, not attitudes (Rayburn, Medoza, & Davison, 2003). The 'person-perception' method captures people's automatic and unconscious thoughts around behaviors and events presented in vignettes (Hastorf et al., 1970). This is typically done by directing respondents to read a vignette and then rate people in the scenarios on bipolar adjective scales (good v. bad) to assess perceptions (Rayburn, et al., 2003). The COAP scale does not have respondents rate targets but instead rank order items in response to the vignettes. The COAP scale 'person-perception' vignette method reveals respondent's consciousness about oppression and privilege while providing some protection from social desirability bias (Rayburn et al., 2003). A straightforward inquiry about racism may raise a red flag for respondents prompting them to censor responses in a socially desirable way. Consequently, it is necessary to look beyond the respondent's willingness to disclose sensitive information and instead examine their automatic or intuitive inference processes (Hastorf et al.,

1970). A method common among social psychologists, this has not been used in analysis of critical consciousness or oppression and privilege.

Vignette development. Based on scholarly recommendations (Clifford, Iyengar, Cabeza & Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015), the first author developed vignettes through successive iterations in collaboration with peers and colleagues. For realism and plausibility, researchers often develop vignettes around actual experiences (Barner & Renold, 2009). For inspiration, the first author used personal experience, the experiences of others, and prior knowledge on the subjects. Because the first author identifies as an African American woman, the African American oppression vignettes were easier to develop than the white privilege vignettes. The white privilege vignettes were also more difficult because individuals in the U.S. are conditioned to be blind to whiteness and its normativity (Speight, 2007). The first author asked five lay people to provide feedback on wording and authenticity of the vignettes (Barter & Renold, 1999). With the revised vignettes, the first author conducted an Institutional Review Board approved, content validity study to assess agreement with oppression or privilege, clarity, and representativeness of socio-ecosystem levels.

Content validity study of vignettes. A content validity study is executed when no measure exists that operationalizes the construct conceptualized by the researcher (Rubio et al., 2003), as was the case for this present study. Also, a content validity study may protect the scale from prejudice and bias in that the scale's developer is not the only person interpreting the representation of items for the content domains. Content validity—comparing the operationalization against the content domain for the construct—is part of assessing construct validity (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008) and is characterized as face validity or logical validity. Face validity indicates that a measure seems valid from a simple inspection of its content (i.e. “on its face”) (Rubio et al., 2003). Logical validity requires a more systematic, rigorous process using experts to objectively evaluate the content of the measure (Rubio et al., 2003). For this study, a panel of experts (DeVellis, 2003) determined the extent to which the scale reflected the full breadth of the content domains of the construct and assessed the quality of the measure (Gump, Baker, & Roll, 2000; Rubio et al., 2003). This content validity study assessed the degree to which the operationalization effectively reflected the constructs of privilege and oppression at each socio-ecosystem level (Gump et al., 2000; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Panel of experts. Following the steps outlined in Rubio et al. (2003), using non-probability, purposeful sampling, the first author identified a panel of four content and three lay experts willing to review the vignettes and provide feedback. “Content experts” are professionals who have published or worked in the field related to the scale content (Rubio et al., 2003). Selected raters had expertise in diversity and inequity as indicated by education and occupation. The “lay experts” were peers and colleagues without academic, but with experiential expertise in issues of privilege and oppression. Recruiting lay experts ensured that the measure is accessible to potential research subjects (Rubio et al., 2003). The first author divided 69 vignettes between reviewers, assigning each two socio-ecosystem levels (e.g., one reviewer would assess the privilege and oppression vignettes at the microsystem and mesosystem levels). Each vignette was reviewed by at least two experts, one content and one lay expert. Respondents did not receive an incentive but did receive a copy of the revised scale as recommended by Rubio et al. (2003).

Response form. The response form for the expert panel review of the vignettes contained vignettes organized by socio-ecosystem level and partitioned by privilege or oppression. Most sections had five vignettes including a test vignette for rater reliability. Test vignettes were intentionally placed in sections where they did not belong, such as with the incorrect socio-ecosystem level or with racial oppression when they corresponded with white racial privilege. The test vignettes would stand out as lacking representativeness of socio-ecosystem level and/or type of inequity (i.e., oppression or privilege) to ensure the raters understood the construct definitions and were paying attention to the content. The response form used three criteria to evaluate the measure: (1) representativeness for socio-ecosystem level and type of inequity; (2) clarity; and, (3) ranking of vignettes for quality. Representativeness and clarity were rated on a scale of 0–4, with lower values indicating poorer representativeness or clarity. The raters repeated the same process for how well the vignettes reflected privilege or oppression. The experts were asked to evaluate factor structure, or how well the vignette assessed that factor (i.e., socio-ecosystemic level or inequity type) (Rubio et al., 2003). Reviewers noted if a vignette was better suited for a different socio-ecosystem level or type of inequity. This was especially important to enable the scale to be divided into separate subscales to measure multiple constructs (DeVellis, 2003).

After assessing representativeness, clarity, and factor structure, reviewers ranked the vignettes according to their preference. Reviewers commented, indicated awkward or confusing wording, suggested alternative phrasing, and offered suggestions for improvements or for new vignettes, particularly regarding ways to better tap into the constructs of privilege and oppression (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). In total, the experts evaluated vignettes for clarity, redundancy, representativeness, factor structure, conciseness, grammar, reading level, and, content validity. From the expert panel review results, the first author selected the two highest scoring vignettes for each inequity level in each socio-ecosystem level, which totaled 28 vignettes to comprise the COAP scale.

Response format. The scale response format - how participants respond to the scale - is comprised of three parts: 1) stem development for sentence completion; 2) branch development in response to the stems; and, 3) rank ordering. Grounded in Freire's (1973) developmental perspective of critical consciousness, for each vignette, the first author developed incomplete statements (stems) corresponding to the domains of TC (awareness, behavioral-response, and consequence), and multiple completion responses (branches) corresponding to the levels of TC (denial, blame, and critical). Scale respondents ranked possible responses (branches representing the levels of TC) to complete each sentence (stems representing the three domains of TC). This structure was chosen because the branches to be ranked reflect the differing levels of TC—denial, blame, and critical—allowing assessment of CC development similar to Guttman scaling (Thomas et al., 2014). A Likert response format precludes this developmental perspective (Thomas et al., 2014) by allowing respondents to score high on more than one level (i.e., critical, blame, denial) of TC which is counter-theoretical. In addition, mean scores developed from a Likert-type scale would not offer precise interpretation for clinical use. Further, the ability to rank items—prohibited by Likert structuring—allows items to be compared and for the assessor to distinguish between levels of TC (Thomas et al., 2014).

Stem and branch development. Generally, the stems followed a pattern, with awareness stems ending with “because,” behavioral-response stems ending with “would” or “should,” and

consequence stems using an “if-then” structure. Stems and branches were developed through formal and informal means. The first author organized seven teleconferences of lay people ranging from two to five participants for a total of 25 respondents. Each respondent was given the vignettes, definitions of the stem (awareness, behavioral-response, consequence) and item content areas (denial, blame, critical). During the teleconferences, the first author prompted discussion around: the experience of oppression or privilege in the vignette; questions one might ask about this vignette to determine someone’s level of awareness of oppression or privilege; thoughts on why the action in the vignette occurred; and, how someone might respond if they were aware or unaware of the systemic issues. Additional concepts for stems and branches came from daily experiences, informal discussions, reading comments to electronic media postings, and, eavesdropping on conversations about racism.

Branch evaluation. After evaluating clarity and representatives of the vignettes, the first author selected eleven lay experts to examine the branches representing the levels of TC (denial, blame, and critical). This process used Survey Monkey, resembling the examination of vignette factor structure. The respondents were provided vignettes with three stems per vignette for sentence completion. The respondents were directed to assign each item to a level of TC. Respondents also provided feedback on the scale overall, and data from this survey informed additional revisions.

Ranking. As indicated, each vignette contains three stems (awareness, behavioral-response and consequence) and each stem has three branches representing critical, blame or denial. The ranking system to respond to the stem, forces the respondents to choose a proposed branch, “I don’t know,” or “Refuse to answer” as first, second, and third choices. (For score accuracy, the “refuse to answer” option was necessary to distinguish between a participant not knowing the answer—which is scorable—and opting out of a question, which is not). Each option may only be used once. By rank ordering, the respondents select which items most or least align with their thinking. The ranking also determines if respondent’s comprehension aligns most with critical, blame, or denial responses. Mean scores developed from a Likert-type scale would not be as precise in interpretation for clinical use.

Sentence completion with a ranking scale format was selected for two reasons. First, the individual choices for the ranking scale have pre-determined sequential order reflecting the differing levels of Transformative Consciousness, thereby, allowing a developmental perspective of the construct. This may be the first time that ranking is used to assess a developmental approach, but this approach is similar to Guttman scaling used to assess development (Andrews, Hops, Ary, Lichtenstein, & Tildesley, 1991; Thomas et al., 2014). Since the branches were written to represent denial, blame, and critical consciousness, they had a sequential pattern, allowing for a developmental perspective of the construct (Thomas et al., 2014). Second, similar to Thomas and colleagues (2014), this study did not use a Likert-type response format because it prohibits a developmental perspective and results would be difficult to interpret. For example, a Likert response format would allow participants to score high on more than one level (i.e., critical, blame, denial) of TC which counters theory. Also, ranking, as opposed to Likert, allows the items to be compared to each other rather than independent items, allowing the assessor to distinguish between levels of Transformative Consciousness (Thomas et al., 2014). Mean scores developed from a Likert-type scale would not be as precise in interpretation for clinical use.

Scale Review

The first author conducted a cognitive interviewing session to review the entire scale—composed of 28 vignettes, 84 stems, and 252 items—with a group of approximately ten pre-doctoral fellows. The session elicited feedback on vignette content, wording, and clarity leading to scale revision. For further scale review with different respondents, the first author created a 14-vignette oppression scale and a 14-vignette racial privilege scale. The first author entered both scales into Survey Monkey with three unique respondents (first author asked people willing to review) viewing each scale evaluating for clarity, conciseness, grammar, wording, reading level, content validity, and redundancy. The first author asked respondents to critique the vignettes on missing content and overall length of administration (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data, the first author completed final revisions (see Table 1 for example of one vignette at the intrapersonal level).

Table 1

African American Racial Oppression at the Intrapersonal Level

Vignette:	Amanda is a 7-year-old African American girl with dark skin who was adopted by White parents. While in the toy store, Amanda browses the small ethnic and Black doll section. She remembers her parents told her to get a doll that looked like her. Amanda grabs a White doll and thinks, “ <i>I don’t want an ugly Black doll.</i> ”				
Awareness Stem:	You think Amanda selects a White doll because				
	Awareness Branches	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
A1	(C) She has received messages from society that dark skin like hers is considered ugly.	X			
A2	(D) She wants a pretty doll that looks like her adoptive White family.				X
A3	(B) Amanda has low self-esteem and needs to learn to love herself.		X		
A4	I don’t understand				
A5	Refuse to answer				
Behavioral Response Stem:	If you were Amanda’s parent, you would				
	Behavioral-Response Branches				
B1	(B) Strongly encourage Amanda to take the Black doll because Amanda should play with dolls that look like her.				X
B2	(D) Let Amanda take the White doll because she obviously really wants it.		X		
B3	(C) Ask Amanda why she thinks the Black doll is ugly and the White doll is pretty.	X			
B4	I don’t understand				
B5	Refuse to answer				
Consequence Stem:	Amanda’s preference for White dolls suggests that				
	Consequence Branches				

C1	(D) Amanda appreciates the beauty of people who do not look like her.	X	
C2	(C) Amanda may think and act in ways that supports her belief that she - like the Black dolls - is ugly.		X
C3	(B) White people should not adopt/raise African American children since White people can't instill African American cultural values.		X
C4	I don't understand		
C5	Refuse to answer		

Scoring. The scale's scoring system was developed in partnership with the first author's dissertation committee chair. The rank ordering of the branches created twenty-four possible combinations. Separately, the first author and dissertation committee chair organized the twenty-four possible response combinations from the highest level of TC (1st—Critical branch, 2nd—Blame branch, and 3rd—Denial branch) to the lowest level of TC (1st—“I don't know,” 2nd—Denial branch, and 3rd—Blame branch). The findings were compared, and inconsistencies discussed. After attaining 100% consensus, the order of the 24 possible combinations was finalized. Next, each combination was scored as an ordinal level measurement (a common technique with vignettes) from 0 to 23, with 0 representing the lowest level of TC and 23 representing the highest (Clifford et al., 2015). For scoring purposes, each stem and three branches make up one item for either oppression or privilege at one level of the seven socio-ecosystems (e.g., Awareness-Oppression-Intrapersonal item). Thus, each vignette has one awareness item, one behavioral-response item, and one consequence item.

Optimizing Scale Length. After scale item evaluation, length needs to be considered, balancing length with reliability (DeVellis, 2003). The ideal scale is long enough to assess the construct in question but not too long as to preclude completion. The literature offers different guidelines, recommending completion be between 15 to no more than 50 minutes (Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Mindful of these guidelines, the scale's structure allows for administration flexibility, from 20-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

As introduced above, two content experts rated the vignettes on a scale of 0-4 in the following areas: 1) Representativeness of Socio-ecosystem Level; 2) Representativeness of Oppression or Privilege; and, 3) Clarity. Vignettes could have a max score of 24 if both experts rated the vignette a 4 in each of the 3 categories. The raters then ranked the vignettes on likeability in each section (i.e., the socio-ecosystem level and privilege or oppression). To score the findings, the first author summed the ratings for representativeness and clarity and subtracted the rank to get the final score, with the highest possible score being 23. The first author summed the experts' scores (each vignette had a minimum of two expert raters) to determine the total vignette score (see Table 2). Any vignettes significantly changed after the content validation study were sent to raters for new ratings.

Table 2

Example of Expert Ratings of Vignette

African American Racial Oppression Vignettes - Chronosystem	Representativeness Level 0-4	Oppression 0-4	Clarity 0 – 4	Rank	Score
The rate of unemployment for African Americans has been double the rate of unemployment for White Americans for nearly four decades...	4, 4	4, 4	4, 4	3, 2	$24 - 5 = 19$

Branch Evaluation

Evaluators completed a survey indicating whether the branches represented the respective level of TC. Survey Monkey calculated a percentage of agreement of all responses providing a measure of inter-rater reliability. Only those branches with 60% or more agreement on their categorization—denial, blame, or critical—were included on the final scale. Branches with less than 60% agreement were revised using the qualitative feedback provided.

Scale Review

The purpose of the scale review was to: 1) determine the average length of completion time; 2) finalize wording; and 3) identify the best vignettes. Respondents reported scale completion duration, and comments about the vignettes and wording. The first author incorporated qualitative feedback to strengthen and clarify the vignettes, stems, and items.

Results

Content Validity Study of Vignettes

Scores from the content validity study of the vignettes ranged from -7 to 23 with an average of 14. Without the test vignettes, the scores ranged from 4 to 23, and the average was 16. A vignette needed a score of at least 15¹ to be included in the scale, as a lower score indicated poor representativeness of the theoretical construct. The test vignettes were the lowest scored in all but one section. Since vignettes were ordered in privilege and oppression sections for each level of the socio-ecosystem (i.e., 7 socio-ecosystem levels for privilege and 7 for oppression), the first author easily organized the vignettes from highest to lowest score. The two highest scored vignettes from each of the 14 sections were selected for the final scale. The final scale's 28 vignettes had scores that ranged from 16 to 23, with an average of 20. Content and lay expert feedback focused on the wording of vignettes, and representativeness for each level of socio-ecosystem privilege or oppression. For example, a comment about wording was: "I think the

¹ The cutoff score of 15 was selected by the first author because 15 is the score a vignette received when rated a 3 in each category and was ranked as first and second favorite ($3+3+3+3+3-(1+2) = 15$).

additions make it clearer that it is internalized oppression. Because African Americans DO have to work twice as hard to get as much, that is reality.” The representativeness of the inequity level called some content into question. For example, one expert observed, “I’m confused about this one. It doesn’t seem clear enough that this is about privilege.” Some feedback questioned representativeness of socio-ecosystem levels. “This doesn’t seem like internalized oppression so much as denial/blindness to other forms of oppression. Maybe belongs in macro or similar?” In addition, experts provided feedback regarding potential factor issues: “isn’t this more individual level between individuals rather than microsystem? I know it can be both, but I think it would be better in that section rather than this one.” Experts also commented on content. “There is gender at play here as well (that’s why I put 3s).” Most experts identified test vignettes by low scores and/or comments. For example, “this one does not fit for what you are measuring, get rid of it.” Last, the comments provided a glimpse into the thought processes of the experts and their respective level of TC. For example, one expert observed, “I don’t know but I like it—My first read of this vignette was that it was a stupid comment but not privilege. After reading it several times, it seems to me that Peggy is setting up a power dynamic for their relationship, perhaps unconsciously.” This comment demonstrates awareness of the power relationship central to privilege and oppression. In contrast, indicating a lack of awareness, an expert stated, “Confusing. The Whites say they are more qualified, then one says all the AAs went to Ivy League Schools (which would seem to indicate that they were very qualified), but Affirmative Action favors unqualified minorities.” Such comments shed light on the respondent’s TC-awareness level.

Branch Evaluation. Fifteen percent of the branches had less than 60% agreement on placement in the denial, blame, or critical levels of TC, while 69% had 100% agreement and 9.5% had a 50/50 split. The split occurred with the blame and denial branches indicating how respondents struggled to decipher between the two, suggesting the branches were not optimal representations. Eight blame and denial branches received 0% agreement, reflecting that all evaluators agreed to swap the denial and blame branches. Similarly, four blame and denial branches received 25% agreement such that 75% of evaluators agreed on a denial and blame branch switch. Like the content validity results for vignettes, branch evaluators provided qualitative feedback ranging from grammatical errors to suggested wording to inquiries for clarification. For example, “Option#2: extra word “do”. Great vignette.”

Scale Review. On average respondents required 45 minutes to complete the scale. During this process, respondents identified typos, which vignettes they liked most, and which were confusing. One reviewer commented, “this is a really interesting vignette, but it feels like it is tapping multiple issues: racially-discriminatory policing and criminal solutions to substance abuse. I’m not sure if you want the vignettes to only represent a single dimension of these generally complex social problems.” Most comments included reflections on the vignettes and ended in a question. One reviewer wrote, “I understand what you are getting at here – but I also think there is a valid argument that media images in general do not make teenage girls feel good about themselves because they are designed to breed insecurity and sell products...given that white privilege is so frequently invisible, would Lacey, as a teenager be aware of the similarities between herself and the people represented in the media?”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a scale addressing the gaps and limitations of CC measurement identified in the literature. The Transformative Consciousness of Oppression and Privilege (COAP) scale demonstrates a unique scaling method—the Jemal Method of Scaling (JEMS)—which integrates and builds upon existing approaches to scale responses utilizing a combination of vignettes, sentence completions, rank ordering of response options, and scoring of ordered patterns. The COAP is content-specific, and through vignettes, speaks to the experiences of African American racial oppression and White racial privilege at each socio-ecosystem level. The use of stems and branches focuses respondents' attention on either privilege or oppression. The vignettes provide respondents with a clear reference group making them more likely to answer based on a similar interpretation of content. Last, using JEMS allows the scale to assess types of cognitions (denial, blame, or critical) rather than attitudes while facilitating a developmental perspective. The COAP is for the general population, most of whom have intersecting identities of privilege and oppression (Black & Stone, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989; Hills-Collins & Bilge, 2016).

When creating the stems and branches, the first author remained cognizant of social desirability bias and how the inclusion of controversial language may bolster respondent confidence in their response (Hazel, 1995). When possible, people will select responses they think are morally or politically correct especially around issues of race (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972); and, when given the opportunity, people are drawn to statements most like their own thinking (Quillian, 2006). The first author assumed there would be less social desirability bias if no obvious “politically correct” choice was offered. In addition, if this scale had used a Likert-response format, then selecting ‘strongly agree’ for all socially desirable responses would have falsely indicated a high score for TC. The first author relied on the premise that respondents would recognize items corresponding with their level of TC when given the option. The branch ranking allowed respondents to consider multiple statements, and statements similar to their perspective created validation for and legitimacy to their way of thinking. In other words, the first author believed that respondents would not identify the critical branch if they lacked that level of TC *and* if there was an item that more closely aligned with their thinking. The first author received confirmation of this method as many evaluators remarked they were unable to recognize the “right” choice. This affirmed the approach, as there is no correct choice, only levels of TC that assess a person's thinking, not how they think they should be thinking.

The comments from the content validity study illuminated that even though experts were provided definitions of privilege and oppression, their interpretation of those definitions and the vignettes was highly dependent on and limited by the experts' level of TC. The comments from the scale review provided a glimpse into the cognitive processing of respondents. Many comments seemed to invite further discussion indicating that the scale worked in a positive and unintended way. Indeed, one of the tools to develop TC is dialogue. The emergence of critical consciousness ought to send a person back into the process of TC development (Freire, 2000). This scale facilitated that process for the evaluators and, as such, could be tested as a TC development tool.

Two areas of the scale could be strengthened. First, future revisions might employ and benefit from greater diversity within the expert panel. Those selected to help build the COAP

were colleagues, peers, and associates within the first author's peer network. One could argue that this group had a higher baseline level of TC than the general population, the intended respondents, and thus, not reflective of a multidisciplinary sample. Developing a scale with vignettes, stems, and branches, "is a multistep process that benefits from a multidisciplinary team's input to refine content and format...to ensure that key themes, content, and format are vetted and appropriate" for respondents (Lapatin et al., 2012, p. 1349-1350). Second, incorporating an understanding of how socio-ecosystem levels influence each other might enhance scale development. The current vignettes each represent a single socio-ecosystem level. TC appreciates the socio-ecosystemic contextual factors and relationships between the socio-ecosystems that lead to the underlying causes of the identified problem and potential solutions.

Future scale development includes constructing a shorter, less time-consuming format for assessment. To shorten the scale, racism scholarship that identifies three levels of analysis—individual, structural, and cultural—suggests the use of three of the seven socio-ecosystems: Inter, Meso, and Macro (Speight, 2007). It is possible that assessment of TC may only require the intrapersonal level for each domain (awareness, behavioral-response, and consequence), or only the awareness domain for each socio-ecosystem level. The literature, however, supports retaining the chronosystem because TC requires an explicit appreciation of historical context. Historical context offers insight into the power dynamics used to promote and maintain oppression and privilege and facilitates the identification of methods for accomplishing social justice (Reich, Pinkard, & Davidson, 2008).

Last, the scale's content could be expanded to include consciousness of types of additional oppression and privilege or be applied to other problems/content areas. One option could be the use of vignettes that integrate multiple types of privilege and oppression (e.g., sexism, heterosexism) at all socio-ecosystem levels in line with intersectionality. This is important to consider as systems of injustice interact and are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. Effective social work activists must work to undermine all forms of inequity simultaneously (Ferber, 2012). As prevention and intervention scientists continue to develop programs leveraging critical consciousness as a means both for liberation from inequitable processes and for outcomes to improve psychological and physical health of marginalized populations, it is important to have a tool to both assess critical consciousness levels and development, and to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs/practices (Jemal, 2017b).

Contribution to and Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice, and Knowledge

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1958), recognizing the interplay of social injustice processes and outcomes, stated, "There must be a rhythmic alteration between attacking the causes and healing the effects" (p. 224). CC-informed solutions that foster insight and active engagement strike that balance by encompassing a social justice orientation and an empowerment perspective that "emphasizes societal concerns, including issues of equity and justice, self-determination, interdependence, and social responsibility" (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 485). Incorporating the socio-ecological model, the COAP scale acknowledges the bi-directional relationship between the individual and individual's context, contributing to a healthy relationship with self, others, and community (Jemal, Gardiner & Bloeser, 2018).

As for attacking the causes, CC development has been identified as a weapon to fight inequity and a shield for protection (Jemal, 2018) from the “physical and psychological harm that result from exploitive and unjust social, political, and economic systems” (Gilman, 1983, p. 8). Because inequity exists within systems and within the psyches of the masses at the intrapersonal level, it is a formidable foe, requiring “battle on two fronts: The oppressor within and the oppressor without” (Bulhan, 1985, p. 123). The lack of critical consciousness prevents one from seeing the destructive social context (external oppressor) (Jemal, Gardiner & Bloeser, 2018) and accept the dominant group’s exploitation as simply “the way things are” (internal oppressor) (Speight, 2007, p. 131). Ginwright and James (2002) have noted that critical reflection on forms of internalized and external oppression supports the healing process from social oppression, dehumanization, and marginalization. Devoting time to the process of CC development, wherein individuals become aware of inequity and its consequences, may foster individual, institutional and/or community-level change, attenuating negative outcomes (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Goodman et al., 1998; Windsor, Jemal, & Benoit, 2014), thereby addressing the multiple socio-ecological pathways to oppression (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001).

Social workers facilitate the development of critical consciousness in clients, so the clients can increase awareness of their self-oppression and their participation in furthering oppression of others (Jemal, Gunn & Inyang, 2019; Windsor, Jemal & Alessi, 2015). Social workers (in all practice areas, but especially social work educators) must develop their own critical consciousness and facilitate the development of CC in their colleagues and/or students by having challenging conversations and mobilizing to address inequity across systems and levels (Jemal & Bussey, 2018; Jemal, Gunn & Inyang, 2019). Importantly, supervision for students and those in the field should include an examination of privilege and oppression between supervisee and supervisor and should also provide the space for discussion of inequity (e.g., racism, heterosexism) that effects the lives of clients. The COAP scale could serve as a starting evaluative point for such dialogues, or to measure the efficacy of pedagogical approaches and curriculum content. Even with such a tool, if talking about inequity is taboo, then we cannot practice social justice and become adept at dismantling systems and operations of inequity, which is a defining feature and ethical mandate of the social work profession (NASW, 2018). Social workers need to take every opportunity to focus attention on making visible the invisible nature of oppressive systems and operations. Thus, critical Transformative Consciousness development (critically reflecting on the multi-level and multi-systemic causes, along with building efficacy to effect change, and engaging in action to implement holistic responses) should be the cornerstone of social work education and practice. In this case, assessment tools, such as COAP, are necessary to initiate and gauge our progress (Jemal & Graham, 2017).

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