

**Gender Identity Centrality as a Moderator between Critical Reflection and Critical Action
about Sexism Among Cismen and Ciswomen**

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Abstract

Critical consciousness is a framework for analyzing and critiquing systems of oppression and privilege. In the context of sexism, groups that benefit from sexism and groups that are oppressed by sexism play a role in eliminating sexism. This thesis aimed to examine if gender identity centrality moderated the relationship between critical reflections on sexism and critical actions taken to eliminate sexism, as well as how those relationships differed between cismen and ciswomen. Data were used from a larger study, IDentity and Actions Project (ages 18-25). Responses from 1289 ciswomen (n = 817, 63.4%) and cismen (n = 472, 36.6%) were used for the analyses. Regression analysis found gender identity centrality moderated the critical reflection to critical action relationship and differences between gender groups were observed. Limitations and implications for future research and direction on gender and critical consciousness are considered.

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**Gender Identity Centrality as a Moderator between Critical Reflection and Critical Action
about Sexism Among Cismen and Ciswomen**

Sexism – “the systematic inequitable treatment of girls and women by men and by society as a whole” (Bearman et al., 2009) – is ingrained in all aspects of society, including education, work, and sports. Despite the progress made in the U.S., such as having two female presidential candidates in the last ten years, sexist systems that support patriarchal expectations and beliefs remain. A sexist system refers to the interconnected elements, such as laws, policies, and social norms, that together reinforce social ideologies, which are beliefs about gender roles and expectations. For example, a social ideology for gender would be viewing men as breadwinners and women as homemakers. These social ideologies perpetuate gender-based discrimination and traditional gender roles to the detriment of women and people who identify beyond the gender binary. Recent social movements, like the #MeToo movement, have brought to light women’s experiences with sexual harassment and assault and display how social ideologies, like sexualizing women, still exist. In addition, governmental actions such as the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, a decision which restricted women’s reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, indicates that there is still a lot of work to be done towards the pursuit of gender equality.

Sexism can have negative consequences for women and men at systemic and individual levels. On a systemic level, women have unequal opportunities in some professional fields (e.g. sports and technology), are less represented in political leadership, and have restricted access to reproductive care (Blair-Loy & Herron, 2013; Dolan & Stancanelli, 2021). On a systemic level men have restricted acceptance or tolerance in professional fields like education or social work, and thus too are systemically negatively influenced by sexism. On an individual level, sexism

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perpetuates ideas that women are submissive and are expected to be maternal and always caring (Barreto & Doyle, 2022). These individual level forms of sexism reinforce women's own and society's expectations of how they can act in the world, including not pushing against the status quo. While men receive psychological and material benefits of sexism like freedom of movement, career advantages in certain fields, and perceived authority (Jost et al., 2004), men also experience negative consequences of sexism on an individual level. For example, maintaining 'masculine' expectations, such as being strong, independent, and able to deal with his own problems, may induce distress in a man and lead to suppressing his emotions (McKenzie et al., 2018).

If sexism operates on both systemic and individual levels for men and women, then it is also important for both men and women collectively liberate themselves from sexist beliefs and systems, including people who do not benefit from sexism as much as cismen, such as women, transmen, transwomen, and gender nonconforming people. Gender groups who are oppressed may have the most motivation to eliminate these unequal systems, gender stereotypes and discrimination. However, engaging in work in which a person must confront their own oppression is burdensome and tiring. Therefore it is important to also look to men, the group with privilege, to fight discrimination. This thesis aims to consider how people from a privileged group and people from an oppressed group engage in addressing sexism to examine the current state of their participation in liberating themselves and society from sexism.

One way people have addressed sexism is through learning about how gender inequality is systemic and not due to group characteristics or attributions. Researchers have defined this education about systemic aspects of inequality as critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is

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a pedagogy that aims to educate people about the systemic aspects of inequality to liberate people from those oppressive systems.

Young adults, who are the studied age group for this thesis, are an essential group for engaging in critical consciousness. Young people have a long history of activism in social movements and are an important voice for bringing awareness to and addressing the issues mentioned above about sexism, like unequal pay or limited bodily autonomy (Earl et al., 2017). Additionally, young adulthood (broadly 18-29) is an essential period of identity formation as it combines aspects of adolescent identity development and adulthood's increased autonomy (Benson & Elder, 2011). Young adults are thus able to make their own choices partly based on what they have discovered about their identity. Identity can contribute to the way young adults think about and reflect on what they experience and witness. Because of young adults' historical role in social movements, better understanding of how their identity shapes their reflections and actions may be pivotal in continuing society's movement towards equality.

This thesis utilizes the framework of critical consciousness to answer two questions: 1) how the importance of gender identity to young adults' identity is associated with their civic engagement against sexism and 2) how that relationship differs between privileged and marginalized groups. In this thesis, I investigate whether gender identity centrality moderates the relationship between critical reflection and critical action for sexism and how this moderating relationship varies between ciswomen and ciswomen in young adulthood. Understanding this dynamic may offer insights into how to better equip young people to challenge sexist systems and promote gender equality.

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Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is a framework that focuses on the lives and experiences of marginalized populations in the context of the socio-political experience of living within a system of power and oppression. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, developed the critical consciousness framework after observing how “illiteracy” was an agent of oppression. Both “functional illiteracy,” not being able to read, and “critical literacy” not being able to “read the world,” are used by dominant groups to maintain power and oppress marginalized groups (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Reading the world refers to the ability to critically analyze social, political, and historical contexts that shape people’s lives, especially as it pertains to inequality. Freire outlined critical consciousness, whereby members of marginalized groups talk about and reflect on their own experiences of oppression to become “literate.” This literacy ultimately empowers people to resist and transform the structures that held (and still hold) them down (Rapa & Godfrey, 2023).

Since Freire created critical consciousness, the framework has been used in relation to many different social issues with their different contexts of oppression, inequality, and marginalization, such as race-based, class-based, and gender-based oppression. All of these issues have their own dynamics of power and oppression, history in which it was formed, and current systems. In recognizing that one study cannot attempt to address all issues of inequality at once, this study focuses on sexism and gender inequality.

Diemer et al. (2016) and Watts et al. (2011) developed Freire’s critical consciousness framework into a 3-component model. The 3-component model of critical consciousness theory includes: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. Critical reflection is thinking about, examining, and learning about social issues historically and in terms of how they are

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involved in systemic political and cultural oppression. Critical motivation is an individual's belief in their ability to make change. Critical action refers to actions taken to resist and address social issues to ultimately liberate oneself and others from those systemic positions of power or inequality.

Combined, these components make up critical consciousness and each component is considered important for making change in society and for every individual participating in creating that change. However critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action do not always occur at equal levels for every individual. Considering that each component varies for every individual, researching these subcomponents of critical consciousness in ways that reflect their variability is important. For the limited scope of this thesis, I only choose to engage with critical reflection and critical action as constructs to understand critical consciousness in relation to sexism.

Developing critical consciousness has been associated with positive outcomes for adolescents and young adults, mostly from marginalized groups. The literature on critical consciousness characterizes critical consciousness across adolescence and young adulthood as relatively similar, and therefore, here I reference both research on adolescents and young adults. Critical consciousness is associated with positive outcomes for marginalized youth in school. For example, critical consciousness in school predicted school achievement and academic performance for Black and Latinx high school students (Heberle et al., 2020; Luginbuhl et al., 2016; Seider et al., 2023). Additionally higher critical reflection and critical motivation predicted psychological satisfaction for academic success and autonomy. Critical consciousness is important for marginalized young adults because developing an understanding that limitations on

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one's success are external, and not within oneself, may contribute to supporting possible positive outcomes.

Despite positive outcomes, critical consciousness may also be harmful to marginalized youth. For example, critical consciousness for marginalized youth may be associated with negative mental health consequences, such as risky behavior and depression (Desmarais & Christophe, 2024). Negative consequences of critical consciousness in marginalized youth may be related to the burden and exhaustion of working against a system that continuously oppresses them, and people like them. This claim means that critical consciousness research must also focus on taking the burden of resistance off those who are oppressed and look to privileged groups in developing critical consciousness as well, because they too have a responsibility in making change towards equality.

Although critical consciousness predicts some socio-political efficacy, civic action, and positive outcomes in marginalized young adults, research shows that these outcomes may not always be the case for individuals who experience privilege (i.e. white young adults). For example, even after learning about social inequality, white young adults show much lower levels of efficacy and action than do marginalized individuals (Seider et al., 2023). However, because privileged young adults also play a role in social structures, it is still important to consider how their actions and reflections incite stagnation or change. For this thesis and its focus on sexism, I will include men, who are in the position of power, as well as women.

People in positions of power and privilege also have a role to play in resisting oppression and confronting their own privilege (Rapa & Godfrey, 2023). When people in positions of power better understand their privilege, they may be more likely to participate in ending it. This thesis considers the differences in critical consciousness between people in power and marginalized

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people in the context of sexism, specifically cis men and cis women. I am only focusing on gender-based oppression as one social issue because a person could have varying levels of critical consciousness for different forms of oppression (Johnson et al., 2023).

In sum, this thesis examines the relationship between gender identity centrality, critical reflection, and critical action in the context of sexism. Grounded in the critical consciousness framework, I aim to reinforce the importance of critical reflection and critical action in addressing sexism. I highlight how identity and differing experiences of privilege and marginalization influence both people's capacity to act and choice to act. In the following sections, I will more thoroughly describe critical reflection and critical action in regard to sexism. I will also explain gender and gender identity centrality.

Critical Reflection and Critical Action to Resist Sexism

Critical Reflection. There are many ways people think about, reflect on, and understand issues of inequality. From the perspective of critical consciousness, critical reflection involves reflecting on and analyzing what causes inequality. Critical reflection derives from the process of critiquing the structural roots of inequality, such as white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy, in all areas of life, from health and education to social and financial (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2011). Personal experiences, social identity, and structured activities may prompt these processes (Diemer et al., 2016). Critical reflection centers social issues in their historical context and emphasizes structural attributions, not individual attributions. To understand the distinction between structural and individual attributions, take unequal pay between men and women as an example. Attributing this inequality to individual characteristics such as: "women do not work as hard as men" or "women choose jobs in fields that pay less" is

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indeed thinking about and reflecting on inequality. However, people who think about inequality with individual attributions do not consider structural and historical contexts.

Critical reflection may vary depending on social issue (e.g. sexism, racism, classism) and the way individuals understand each. Understanding inequality in terms of societal structures is essential for critical reflection. In the context of sexism, critical reflection would include thinking about and acknowledging social ideologies of gender that men have more social, political, and financial power than women. For example, a person who is critically reflecting would recognize that gender expectations have limited women in the workplace and led to discrimination in how they are paid. Gender expectations are one aspect of societal structures that shape how society functions. Societal structures refer to the organized social relationships and institutions that guide how people interact and behave. These social structures also influence opportunities and resources people have access to depending on identity and how much they abide by these structures.

Critical reflection and levels of critical reflection are issue specific, meaning that individuals may engage in critical reflection about all, some, or one issue(s), such as racial inequality, gender inequality, and socioeconomic inequality. Some individuals may engage in more critical reflection in one area and less in another area. People also may engage in critical reflection about domains that personally relate to their own experiences and identities. For example, Diemer et al. (2016) suggest that white women may have a greater understanding of sexism than they do of racism. Sexism is an issue that may more personally connect to their lived experience and identity, whereas a different issue, such as racism, may require a deeper investigation as it goes beyond what they can connect to personally.

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A combination of personal experiences, identity exploration and structured activities, such as workshops or classes about identity, privilege, and oppression, can prompt critical reflection (Diemer et al., 2016). Connecting to people's own experience and identity may prompt critical reflection on sexism. Overall, an individual's critical reflection may depend on their own identity and the relationship that identity has to social issues in the context of oppression and power.

Critical Action. A person thinking critically about a social issue may act to address what they have come to understand about those systemic inequalities. Freire (1970) considered critical reflection to be a necessary step before critical action, as there are certain awarenesses of structural inequality that may be needed to lead people to take action. Diemer et al. (2016) clarify and add that the act of doing something to resist inequality can also lead to questioning and thinking about what someone is acting on. Not only does critical reflection influence critical action, but critical action influences critical reflection. For this thesis, I will only examine how critical reflection predicts critical action, not both directions of the relationship between critical reflection and critical action.

Critical action is a form of civic engagement that emphasizes dismantling systems of inequality (Diemer et al., 2021). In other words, what makes civic engagement critical action is that it involves engaging with unequal systems and aims to disrupt or restructure those systems. For example, take volunteering as a form of civic engagement. Volunteering at a soup kitchen is a form of civic engagement, but it is not critical action because it is not necessarily working towards breaking down systems, such as unequal housing policies in this case. However, volunteering with an organization whose work advocates for changing housing policies or

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advocates for the rights of unhoused people is critical action. While both actions are volunteering, what makes the latter critical action is actively resisting oppressive systems.

Critical action, such as voting for nominees who support issues to eliminate discriminatory policies, for example, can eventually lead to systemic change. Take the Civil Rights Movement as an example of critical action that turned into concrete policy change, at the systemic level. People voted to elect President Johnson, who supported civil rights. People also worked for organizations who supported and strategized campaigns for civil rights, another form of critical action. These groups organized boycotts and protests, and the people who participated in those actions were exhibiting critical action. These critical actions, namely, voting, boycotting, and protesting, ultimately led to systemic change, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although it can be difficult to track how an individual's critical actions connect to these systemic changes, the Civil Rights Movement is one major example of individuals actions, when done by many, can create systemic change. Therefore, when examining critical actions today in the context of sexism, it is important to recognize that the outcomes of people's critical actions may not be written into law or visible in people's behavior on a systemic level immediately.

Critical action is not only beneficial to breaking down unequal systems, but it also can benefit the people doing the work as individuals (Berg et al., 2009). For example, critical action has been associated with positive outcomes in youth, particularly for marginalized youth. For example, greater involvement in critical action significantly predicted high grades and high career aspirations in Black and Latinx high school students (Rapa & Godfrey, 2023; Seider et al., 2023). For LGBT+ youth, participating in activism, as a type of critical action, was positively associated with mental health outcomes (Frost et al., 2019). Not only can this kind of engagement lead to positive outcomes in individual lives, but it also can lead to changes on a

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community and policy level, which (as explained above) critical action intends to do. Youth community coalitions and activism have led to school level policy changes, educational programs, and institutional reorganization (Berg et al., 2009; Christens & Dolan, 2011). In sum, critical action can have a positive impact on the individuals engaging in the action and can have concrete outcomes in a broader community. However, similar to critical reflection, engaging in this kind of action may also be exhausting and diminishing for these individuals.

People's critical action, like critical reflection, varies for different social issues and can vary depending on how one's identity relates to those social issues. There has been relatively more research on critical consciousness on oppression and resistance for low income or ethnic minority groups (i.e. Mathews et al., 2023). There has been less research on 1) how critical consciousness specifically relates to gender and sexism and 2) privileged groups' critical consciousness. This thesis aims to address these two less researched points through 1) examining sexism alone and 2) including both ciswomen and cismen, the privileged group in this case, in the analysis.

Critical Consciousness and Sexism

As defined at the outset of this proposal, sexism is "the systematic inequitable treatment of girls and women by men and by society as a whole" (Bearman et al., 2009). On a structural level, sexism has limited women's access to professional fields, reproductive care, and representation in sports for example. Facing such systemic discrimination has negative consequences for women's physical and mental well-being (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997). In addition to women, sexism also oppresses other minority gender identities, such as trans-gender or non-binary identities. For this thesis, I will only examine sexism and gender between cismen and ciswomen as a starting point for the literature on critical consciousness and sexism.

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Additionally I only consider cisgender identities and sexism to match the limited scope of this thesis' timeline, and to address sexism alone. Overall, the focus for this thesis is on sexism, which is detrimental for women.

As a researcher, I understand that sexism may have implications for all groups of people, including men and women. However, to varying effects, every member of society experiences consequences from sexism, including men. Despite cismen being the dominant group, sexism is also harmful to men, whom society expects to fulfill their gender role as strong and confident, and can ultimately lead to psychological stress, health issues, and hostility (J. P. Schwartz & Lindley, 2009). In addition to individual negative consequences of sexism for men, men also face systemic negative consequences of sexism. In the same way that women are systemically kept out of certain jobs, men too are expected only to work in certain settings or in certain positions. For example, men are underrepresented as nurses, teachers, and caregivers (AIBM, n.d.; American Nurses Association, 2024; Schmader & Block, 2025). Systemic liberation from sexism for men and women would mean equal access and acceptance into jobs and fields of their choosing.

Critical reflection by cismen and ciswomen.

Although many women and men do recognize that sexism exists, they may not observe or comprehend that sexism is built into societal structures, including healthcare, education, and the economy, that permeate and reinforce systems of oppression. In other words, men and women may notice sexism, but they may or may not engage in critical reflection about it specifically. In addition, men and women may both experience sexism and its consequences personally or in everyday interactions, but they may not understand sexism in the same way.

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Overall women are more likely to recognize sexism in interactions as well as see how it is also systemic. For example, women recognize sexist actions and comments more than men, who observe the same situation (Rodin et al., 1990; Swim et al., 2001). More women self-identify as feminists, which means they are supporters of feminism, the social and political movement seeking to achieve gender equality (Russell et al., 2024). This finding means that critical reflection is happening for women because they recognize the systemic inequality of sexism.

Men may also recognize gender inequality, but they may not understand it on a systemic level. For example, men may also notice gender differences, however they do not detect sexism as regularly as women. Their identity as male may contribute to this lack of critical reflection. This may be due to the fact that men can enjoy the psychological and material benefits that come with their male identity, especially when they accept the status quo that men have more power than women (Jost et al., 2004). These men are likely to have no interest in challenging sexism as that would mean they would relinquish those benefits. However, there are also men who do reject status legitimizing beliefs and endorse feminism. These men are more likely to notice sexism (Swim et al., 2001).

There is not a lot of research on how men understand sexism and how that connects to their male identity, which this thesis aims to understand. Russell et al., (2024). suggest that there may be a set of attitudes and ideologies that underlie men's endorsement of feminism. This thesis aims to see if identity centrality is one of those attitudes or ideologies. All together, research suggests that there are differences between how cismen and ciswomen notice sexism and critical reflection on sexism. This thesis considers how these differences may be related to their respective identities.

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Gender differences in critical action on sexism.

Both men and women participate in addressing sexism. Women combat sexism in many ways. Even a women taking a leadership position pushes the status quo. Overall, women do engage in actions on individual and systemic levels to eliminate sexism.

Although sexism more significantly affects women, they are not the only ones who can participate in resisting it. Men too can participate in standing up against sexism and to temporarily stopping it. For example, men's acknowledgement and confrontation of a sexist act not only potentially stops the sexist act, but it can also empower women and increase the self-confidence of women who witness the resistance (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). However not all forms of confrontation by men may be perceived in the same way. Research shows that women feel more empowered and respected when men confront sexism with a perspective of systemic gender inequality and justice, but they do not feel empowered when men confront from a standpoint of needing to protect women (Estevan-Reina et al., 2021). This finding connects to critical action, as the men who confront with knowledge of systemic inequality are addressing structural issues more than when fulfilling their cultural gender norm as protector. This finding also highlights how taking a critical reflection perspective that takes into account structural attributes rather than personal qualities affects how men act and how women feel towards a particular confrontational act. Drury & Kaiser (2014) demonstrated that observers, especially male observers, took men who confronted sexism more seriously and attributed credibility to them than women. This finding illustrates the importance of increasing critical action for men as they have a strong influence on limiting sexism and play a role in addressing gender inequality.

Overall, these findings highlight that men and women experience and resist sexism differently. Knowing that identity and membership in a social group may play a role in these

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differences is important requires further research. In this study, I address these gender differences in a deeper examination with gender identity.

Gender Identity and Critical Consciousness in Young Adulthood

One of the main aims of this thesis is to connect how social identity, gender in this case, connects to critical consciousness. Broadly speaking, Crocetti et al. (2012)'s research highlights the positive relationship between identity formation and civic engagement in adolescence. More specifically social identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality, are group memberships that can shape individual relationships with systems of power and oppression (Johnson et al., 2023; Spears, 2011). Young adults may increasingly recognize how their group memberships influence the experiences and opportunities they have. Non-marginalized people may not feel as much belonging with their non-marginalized group as marginalized people feel with their marginalized group that may have implications on their sense of identity. However if a person is also part of a privileged group, the part of their identity associated with power has less group membership salience or importance (Vial & Napier, 2017). This finding means that men may have less affinity with a sense of gender identity than women, who are a part of the marginalized group in terms of gender and sexism. This thesis focuses on how gender identity plays a role in the relationship between identity and critical consciousness.

Having said that, examining only gender as an isolated part of a person's identity does not reflect the whole picture of who someone is, the experiences they have, or the sense of belonging they may have towards their gender group. Many individuals have multiple social identities, and some identities may be a part of a dominant group while other identities may not be. For example, a black man is both black and a man. This means that this man is considered a part of the dominant group in terms of gender, but he is a part of the nondominant group in terms

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of race. These multiple identities are important to consider because the combination of marginalized identities and/or privileged identities creates a unique interaction of societal expectations, stereotypes, and discrimination. Considering these intersectional perspectives and identities rightfully adds layers of understanding of multiple domains of power and oppression, as well as how they interact. In this thesis I chose to examine gender alone to intentionally hone in on the social issue and gender identity. I intend to answer questions about gender and sexism that may broadly inform the literature on gender and sexism. To do this, I must first define gender and explain how gender connects to people's identity.

West & Zimmerman (1987) explain gender as the routines of behavior, attitudes and mannerisms that reflect socially constructed ideas of masculine and feminine. This definition means that gender is continuously performed and evaluated in relation to dominant norms and expectations. Gender may reflect gender norms and expectations, but gender identity, on the other hand, is not only defined by norms and expectations. Unlike gender, gender identity is not only externally defined, it is also self-defined. According to the Human Rights Campaign (2023), gender identity is one's inner and personally subjective concept of oneself as male, female, both, or neither. This combination of external and internal definitions creates a complex construct of gender identity. In an attempt to better understand these complexities, researchers have proposed with constructs that break gender identity into multiple components.

For example, Lurye et al. (2008) used a multidimensional construct to pinpoint three components of gender identity: centrality, evaluation, and felt pressure. Centrality refers to how important gender is to one's identity, evaluation refers to how one views gender-related values and beliefs within a person's cultural context, and felt pressure refers to one's feelings about the need to conform to cultural ideas and beliefs about gender (Lurye et al., 2008). Gender salience

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is another similar concept that is similar to gender centrality, and it refers to the prominence of one's gender identity in certain contexts. For ciswomen, higher gender salience was associated with higher perceptions of sexism and higher confrontations to sexism (Wang & Dovidio, 2017). While the research on gender salience is important to my research questions, I chose to use gender identity centrality for my study because identity centrality may be less context dependent than identity salience, which may change based on context (Haslam et al., 1999). Because the constructs I use in this thesis are not context specific, I am choosing to use gender centrality for consistency across constructs.

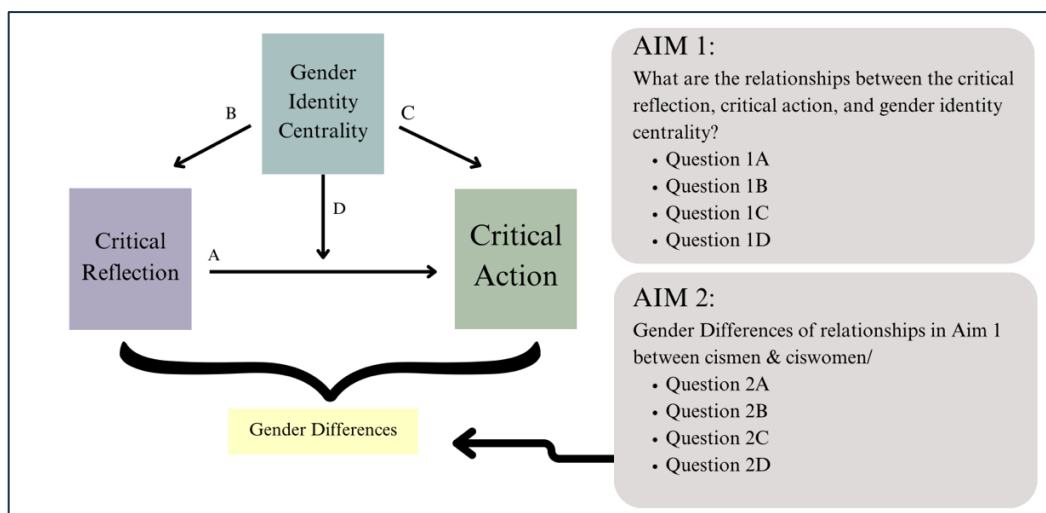
Gender identity centrality and critical consciousness have not yet been examined together. This thesis aims to better understand how gender identity centrality plays a role in critical consciousness. The connection between gender identity centrality and critical consciousness may vary between individuals. For example, there may be cismen and ciswomen with high gender identity centrality who have high critical consciousness. For ciswomen this combination could involve a proud feeling of being a ciswomen and ownership over that identity that leads them to hold values and beliefs towards ciswomen liberation. For men with high gender identity centrality and high critical consciousness, the importance of being a man may relate to reflecting on and acting to address sexism. Additionally low gender identity centrality may be associated with high critical consciousness. For ciswomen and cismen, this combination could appear as a rejection of their gender that is associated with greater critical action. On the other hand, gender identity centrality levels could be associated with low critical consciousness. The combinations of these variables can give insight into how gender identity centrality plays a role, or does not play a role, in critical consciousness.

The Current Study

This study aims to add to the literature on the relationship between critical reflection and critical action regarding sexism. Previous research suggests that engaging in more critical reflection for a domain correlates with more critical action for that domain (Diemer et al., 2016; Freire, 1970). Therefore, this relationship should hold for sexism. Depending on gender and gender centrality, however, this relationship may be different. Ciswomen may use critical reflection and recognize sexism more than men and may be more likely to think about gender inequality in terms of structure. Men engaging in critical action play an important role in addressing sexism. Men may support anti-sexist ideas and their actions attempting to stop sexism can in fact stop the sexism at hand or in the moment as it occurs. The relationship between critical reflection and critical action may also differ by gender identity. This thesis examines how the importance of gender to one's identity may moderate the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. To address these complex and interrelated components of individual critical consciousness and identity, this thesis has two overarching aims.

Figure 1

Visualization of overarching aims and each research question within each aim.



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Overarching Aim 1

The first aim of the current study is to better understand the interrelationships between three constructs: critical reflection, critical action, and gender centrality. In Figure 1, the top 3 squares represent overarching aim 1. Within this first aim, I have three research questions that build on each other:

Research question 1A: How does critical reflection about sexism predict critical action to address sexism?

Previous research indicates that thinking critically about issues is likely a step before taking action on those issues (Diemer et al., 2021). Therefore, I hypothesize that individuals who engage in higher levels of critical reflection about sexism will also engage in more critical actions against sexism.

Research question 1B: How does gender centrality predict critical reflection?

I hypothesize that higher levels of gender identity centrality will be positively associated with higher levels of critical reflection. Gender centrality may be related to more awareness about gender issues and being more aware about gender issues could be related to being more likely to reflect critically about gender. Therefore, I hypothesize that a stronger sense of gender centrality will be associated with a higher amount of critical reflection.

Research Question 1C: How does gender centrality predict critical action?

I hypothesize that higher level of gender identity centrality will be associated with higher levels of critical action. However, I hypothesize that this relationship will be weaker than the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection. Because self-awareness about one's identity is more connected to reflecting in general, I hypothesize that the relationship

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between gender identity centrality and critical reflection may have a greater association than the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical action.

Research Question 1D: How does gender identity centrality moderate the relationship between critical reflection and critical action?

This research question addresses whether the relationship between critical reflection and action is different at different levels of gender centrality. I hypothesize that gender identity centrality strengthens the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. If a person has reflected on sexism, they may have also spent time understanding how that relates to their sense of identity, which could influence their sense of gender centrality. Then they may feel a greater purpose for critical action, and thus may participate in more critical actions.

Overarching Aim 2

The second aim for this thesis is to investigate whether the relationships tested within the first aim (the relationships of critical reflection, critical action, and gender centrality) differ based on gender identification in the context of the gender binary, that is between ciswomen and ciswomen. In Figure 1, the curved parenthesis and gender differences square represent that overarching aim applies the new factor of gender onto the first overarching aim's variable connections.

Research question 2A: Is the relationship between critical reflection and critical action different between ciswomen and ciswomen?

I hypothesize that while cis may overall have higher levels of critical reflection about sexism and critical action against sexism, the correlation between critical reflection and critical action will be similar for each cisgender because translating reflection to action may be more dependent on the kind or amount of reflection rather than gender.

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Research Question 2B: Is the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection different between cismen and ciswomen?

I hypothesize that higher gender centrality will be associated with higher critical reflection about sexism for ciswomen, but not for men. Being members of the non-dominant group, ciswomen may be more likely to reflect on what it is like to be a woman in a sexist world. Additionally women who strongly identify with being a ciswoman are more likely to confront sexist discrimination (Good et al., 2012; Wang & Dovidio, 2017). In contrast, cismen benefit from sexist structures and may embrace their male identity either intentionally or unknowingly. Then if they learn about the structural nature of sexism, they may have to reject their identification with being a man or, alternatively, redefine what it means to them to be a man. Perhaps men may also accept their male identity as they may feel their identity will play a necessary role in being an ally to women and resisting sexism. I hypothesize that the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection is different for men and for women overall, and I will explore how they are different.

Research Question 2C: Is the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical action different between cismen and ciswomen?

I hypothesize that gender identity centrality will predict critical action for both cismen and ciswomen. This will be an exploratory question.

Research Question 2D: Is the way gender centrality moderates the relationship between critical reflection about sexism and critical reflection different for cismen and ciswomen?

I hypothesize that for women, higher gender identity centrality will strengthen the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. For men, I hypothesize that lower

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gender identity centrality will strengthen the relationship between critical reflection and critical action.

Methods

Procedure

Data used in this study were part of a larger research project: The IDentity and Actions (IDEAs) Project. The IDEAs Project was a survey-based, cross-sectional study of Black and White young adults living in the U.S. that had the broad aim of studying the relationships between identity and critical consciousness.

The participants first opened the survey to information about the purpose of the study, (gaining knowledge about how young adults engage civically), as well as that the study poses minimal risks and possible benefits. The participants also read that their answers would be kept confidential, and that their answers would be associated with a random ID, not any personal information through Tufts University or Prolific. Before they answered any questions, the participants were asked to consent to taking the survey and made aware that they could withdraw at any time without being disadvantaged or penalized. After all questionnaires were completed, the participants were asked for their demographic information, including age and race. The participants were compensated with \$10.00 for answering the survey. Responses were only considered from participants who completed the survey with attentive responses. Attentiveness was tested using attention check questions during the data cleaning process. These procedures were approved by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board.

A Qualtrics online self-report survey was distributed via Prolific using a snowball sampling method to recruit participants. The survey included asking participants to tell other people about the survey. Prolific is an online survey platform on which participants can earn

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financial compensation for taking surveys. They partner with academic research institutions to spread research and connect them to individuals that fall into their target demographic. The research sample consisted of individuals who identify as young adults (18 - 29 years old) in the U.S. They were only eligible for inclusion if they were currently enrolled in college or university and had lived in the U.S. for at least ten years or were located in the U.S. when they took the survey. This distinction of how long they have lived in the U.S. or if they are located in the U.S. takes into consideration international college students in the U.S. For instance, participants may have immigrated to the U.S. as a child and ten years later are attending college elsewhere. On the other hand, a participant may only be in the U.S. since starting college, and they too can participate.

Participants

The average participant age was 21 years old, and more than half of the sample identified as cisgender female, transgender male, transgender women, or another gender identification not provided. A total of 1289 participants participated in the survey study.

Measures

The study consisted of a survey that had four questionnaires: gender, gender identity centrality, critical reflection, and critical action.

Gender

All participants were asked, "How would you describe your gender?" Response options were Male/Man, Female/Woman, Trans Male/Trans Man, Trans Female/Trans Woman, Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming, and Another identification not listed here.

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Gender Identity Centrality

To measure the extent to which participants included their gender as an important aspect of their identity, the research team adapted an item from Grossman & Charmaraman (2009), which originally measured racial identity: “When you think about who you are as a person, how important is your gender?” Participants responded to this question using a slider-bar scale from 0 = Not at all important to 10 = Extremely important, with higher scores indicating high levels of centrality around one's gender identity.

Critical Reflection

To measure the extent to which participants make structural attributions to explain the nature and causes of gender inequality in the United States, the research team used/adapted three items from Diemer et al.'s (2017) *Critical Consciousness Scale* and adapted one item from (Gurin, Miller, and Gurin's (1980) *System Blame Scale*. Items include “Women have fewer chances to get ahead”, “Women have less opportunity than men to get the education for top jobs, “women have fewer chances to get good jobs”, “Women have less power than men in today’s society.” Participants responded to questions using a slider-bar scale from 0 = Strongly disagree to 10 = Strongly agree, with higher scores indicating higher levels of critical reflection regarding gender inequalities. A composite was created to take the average of each participant’s scores for the analysis.

For critical reflection, the measure originally was 4 items. All items were used to create a composite variable to reflect critical reflection. To do this, I examined the inter-item correlation and alpha (.841). Based on this, I concluded that creating a composite was applicable for critical reflection.

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Critical Action

The research team measured how and how often the participants tried to eliminate gender inequality in the U.S. by asking participants to indicate how often they engaged in ten types of action: giving money, expressing their views, being involved with organizations, attending a rally or protest, educating themselves, educating others, boycotting, symbolic displays, participating in high-risk activities (e.g., civil disobedience leading to arrest), and formal political activities. The categories were chosen based on a review of the literature and measures developed to evaluate civic engagement and actions targeted at social justice (e.g., Activism Orientation Scale (Corning & Myers, 2002); Rights-Based Activism (Duncan & Stewart, 2007); Anti-Racism Behavioral Inventory (Pieterse et al., 2016); (Torres-Harding et al., 2014).

The survey asked all participants the following: “Below is a list of things you might do to try to influence or have an effect on social issues. In the past year, have you done any of these activities with the purpose of trying to eliminate sexism?” Then, participants were shown the list of ten actions each with their own slider-bar. Participants responded to questions using a slider-bar scale from 0 = Never to 10 = More than once a week, with higher scores indicating higher frequency of action. The average of the items for each participant was taken to create a composite variable for the analysis.

Analysis Plan

First, I selected only the participants who identified as ciswomen or cismen. Then I conducted preliminary data analyses using SPSS 28 (IBM, 2021), which also included examining the distributional properties and outliers of each measure.

For overarching aim 1, I conducted analyses for the 4 research questions and their hypotheses. For research question 1A, I first conducted a correlation test between critical

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reflection and critical action. For research question 1B, I did a correlation analysis between gender identity centrality and critical reflection. For research question 1C, I did another correlation analysis on gender identity centrality and critical action. For research question 1D, the main analysis consisted of multiple regression analysis with two steps within each of the two subgroups. First, I estimated a bivariate regression to understand the relationship between critical reflection and critical action and between gender identity centrality and critical action. Then I conducted a moderation analysis using multiple regression. This moderation analysis included critical reflection as the predictor, gender identity centrality as the moderator, and critical action as the outcome variable. Finally, I conducted post-analysis diagnostics for each set of regressions to assess if the models met the assumptions.

For overarching aim 2, I conducted a series of multiple regressions. For research question 2A, I used a multiple regression, adding gender as a moderator. For this analysis, critical reflection and gender were the predictors and critical action was the outcome variable. This analysis was also conducted for research question 2B and 2C. For research question 2B, gender identity centrality and gender were the predictors, and critical reflection was the outcome variable. For research question 2C, gender identity centrality were the predictors, and critical action was the outcome variable. Finally, to understand the possible moderating role of gender identity centrality between cisgenders, I conducted a final multiple regression. This regression included three predictors (gender identity centrality, critical reflection, and gender) and one outcome variable (critical action). Finally, I conducted post-analysis diagnostics for each set of regressions to assess if the models met the assumptions.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before conducting the main analyses, I conducted preliminary analyses, including evaluation of each continuous variable's distribution and linearity between variables, as well as an examination of outliers to see whether the variables met the assumptions for each question's respective analysis.

Overall, the continuous variables were relatively normally distributed with few extreme outliers. Gender Identity Centrality appeared to have a close to normal distribution. The mean and median were similar (see Table 1), and the skewness and kurtosis showed that data were left-skewed and platykurtic. There were no extreme outliers for gender identity centrality. Critical Reflection's distribution was also very close to normal. The mean and median were similar, and the skewness and kurtosis showed that the distribution was normal. According to the boxplot and inspection of z-scores, there were no extreme outliers found. Critical Action's distribution was close to normal, although it was slightly skewed to the right and platykurtic. The boxplot showed 4 extreme outliers on the higher end of the distribution, and there were 3 cases with z-scores above 3. When examining the variables relationships with each other between each predictor variable and the outcome variables, the scatter plots displayed a blobular relationship. Mahalanobi's distances between the three continuous variables showed 7 multivariate outliers. Altogether, these preliminary analyses indicated that the data were appropriate to use for the planned analysis.

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Table 1*Descriptive Statistics (Total N = 1289)*

	CR	CA	GIC
Valid N	1289	1289	1289
Mean	6.18	2.99	6.04
Median	6.45	2.78	6.50
Mode	10.0	0.00	10.0
SD	2.48	1.83	2.96
Variance	6.17	3.34	8.74
Skewness	-0.57	.517	-0.51
SE Skewness	0.07	0.07	0.07
Kurtosis	-0.22	-0.21	-0.75
SE Kurtosis	0.14	0.14	0.14

Note. CR = Critical Reflection, CA = Critical Action, GIC = Gender Identity Centrality

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I also conducted independent sample t-tests to see whether the mean scores of the continuous variables were different between cismen and ciswomen. For all continuous variables, ciswomen had a statistically significantly higher mean compared to cismen (Table 2).

Table 2

Cismen and Ciswomen Differences in Critical Reflection, Critical Action, and Gender Identity Centrality

Variables	Ciswomen ^a		Cismen ^b		<i>t</i> (1287)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Critical Reflection	6.62	2.21	5.44	2.75	8.43***	<.001	2.42
Critical Action	3.42	1.82	2.25	1.59	11.69***	<.001	1.74
Gender Identity Centrality	6.80	2.67	4.72	2.98	12.94***	<.001	2.78

Note: N =1289

^an = 817. ^bn = 472.

*** *p* < .001.

Overarching Aim 1***Correlation Analysis Results: RQ 1A, 1B, 1C***

I conducted correlational analyses for research questions 1a, 1b, and 1c by computing A Pearson's correlations (shown in Table 3). Critical reflection on sexism and critical action on sexism were moderately and positively correlated, $r(1287) = .38, p < .001$. Critical reflection and gender identity centrality were also positively correlated, with a weak effect size, $r(1287) = .20, p < .001$. Finally there was a positive correlation between critical action and gender identity centrality, $r(1287) = .24, p < .001$, with a small effect size.

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Table 3

Correlations of critical reflection, critical action, and gender identity centrality amongst all participants

	CA	GIC
CR	.384*	.199*
CA		.243*

Note. CR = Critical Reflection, CA = Critical Action, GIC = Gender Identity Centrality

I also examined the correlations separately in the two gender groups addressed in this thesis (shown in Table 4). The correlations between critical reflection and critical action were similar for both cismen and ciswomen. However, for gender identity centrality and critical reflection, there was a stronger association among ciswomen than among cismen, however, the correlation between these variables for cismen was not significant. For the correlation between gender identity centrality and critical action, ciswomen also had a higher correlation than cismen did, also considering that the correlation was not significant for men. This means that for the associations between gender identity centrality critical action/reflection was not significant for cismen.

Table 4

Correlation between critical reflection, critical action, and gender identity centrality for cismen and ciswomen separately.

	CR	CA	GIC
CR		.347**	-.026
CA	.341**		.025
GIC	.259**	.229**	

Note. CR = Critical Reflection, CA = Critical Action, GIC = Gender Identity Centrality. Bottom left side is ciswomen, top right side is for cismen.

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Research Question 1D:

Critical reflection, gender identity centrality, and their interaction explained 17.9% of the variance in critical action, $F(3, 1288) = 93.65, p < .001$. The intercept, which represents the critical action score for participants who said that their gender was “not at all” important to their identity and that they did not “not at all” reflect on sexism, was 1.18 ($p < .001$). When gender identity centrality was held at zero, the association between critical reflection to critical action was positive ($b = 0.18, B = .25, p < .001$). When critical reflection was held at zero, the association between gender identity centrality and critical reflection was not statistically significant. The interaction indicates that gender identity centrality moderates the relationship between critical reflection and critical action ($b = 0.01, B = .18, p < .03$).

Table 5

Coefficients from Linear Regression predicting Critical Action from Critical Reflection and Gender Identity Centrality ($n = 1289$)

	Unstandardized Coefficient (SE)	Standardized Coefficient
Intercept	1.18 (0.24)***	
Gender Identity Centrality	.03 (0.04)	.05
Critical Reflection	0.18 (0.04)***	0.25
Gender Identity Centrality * Critical Reflection	.01 (.006)*	.18

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; SE = standard error

I conducted a region of significance analysis, using Hayes' (2022) macro PROCESS on SPSS. In the PROCESS, the Johnson-Neyman method showed that there were no statistically significant transition points found where the relationship between critical reflection and critical action changed based on gender identity centrality. The PROCESS did show that gender identity

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centrality was a statistically significant moderator at all points in the dataset wither varying strengths.

With the results from PROCESS, I created a graph in which I inputted 3 levels of gender identity centrality: gender identity centrality score at 0, gender identity centrality score at 2, and gender identity centrality score 4. Figure 2 represents three slopes of critical reflection predicting critical action at different levels of gender identity centrality. The orange line represents when gender identity centrality = 0, which shows that the relationship between critical reflection and critical action is low. Looking at the other lines, the middle blue line represents the relationship between critical reflection and critical action when gender identity centrality rating is 2. The top purple line represents gender identity centrality score of 4, and this line displays a slightly steeper slope than the other two. This slope indicates that the association between critical reflection and critical action is slightly stronger at higher levels of gender identity centrality.

Diagnostics. To assess if the model met the assumptions for regression analysis, I conducted post-analysis diagnostics.

First I assessed multi-collinearity by looking at the Collinearity Tolerance and Variance Influence Factor (VIF) for each variable. The Collinearity Tolerance for each variable was above .10, and the Statistic VIF for were below 10. For all variables except for the interaction variable between critical reflection and gender identity centrality, which was 10.70. Therefore, the only problematic collinearity found in this model was in the interaction variable.

Next, I looked for influential cases in the model by assessing the SDFit and SDBetas. For SDFit, the values were within the $|2|$ range (Field, 2018). For SDBeta values were less than 1, so considering both values, there were no influential cases that affected the regression coefficients.

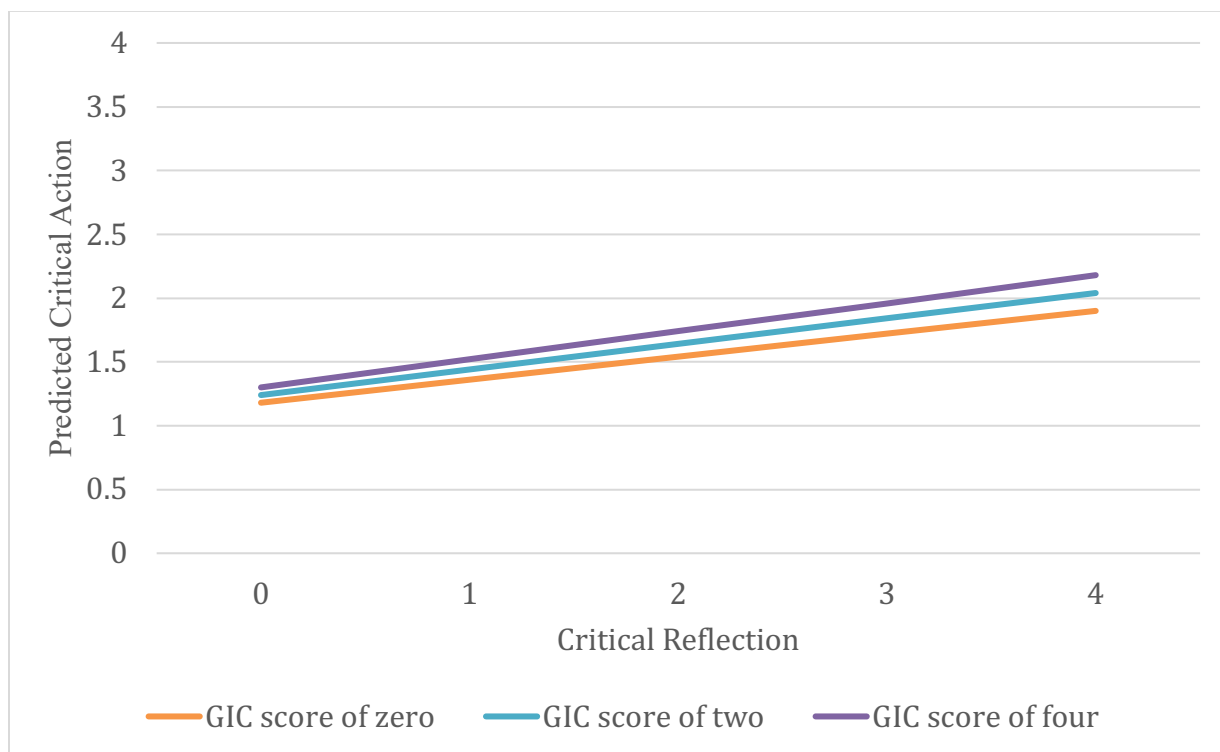
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I also analyzed the histograms for the Standardized Residuals for each outcome to assess the normality of the residuals. The residuals appeared to be relatively normal for both outcomes.

To assess the homoscedasticity of the residuals, I looked at the scatterplots of the predictors (gender identity centrality and critical reflection) and Unstandardized Predicted Outcome with the Standardized Residuals. All three scatter plots reflected a close to even spread.

Figure 2

The relationship between critical reflection and critical action at varying levels of gender identity centrality



Note. GIC = gender identity centrality.

Overarching Aim 2:

Research Question 2A:

Critical reflection, gender identification, and their interaction explained 20.2% of the variance in critical action, $F(3, 1288) = 108.41$ ($p < .001$). Table 6 includes the regression

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coefficients, and a visual depiction of the results is shown in Figure 3. The solid line in Figure 3 represents the relationship between critical reflection and critical action for ciswomen. For ciswomen, those who had the lowest scores on critical reflection were predicted to have a critical action score of 1.56 ($p < .001$). Critical reflection was positively associated with critical action for ciswomen ($b = .28, p < .001$). The dashed line in Figure 3 represents relationship between critical reflection and action for cismen. For cismen, among those who had the lowest scores on critical reflection, the level of critical action was not significantly different from ciswomen. However, the interaction between gender and critical reflection was statistically significant ($b = -.081, p < .05$), which means that the association between critical reflection and critical action was similar for cismen and ciswomen, but overall the relationship was higher for ciswomen. The association between critical reflection and critical action is lower for cismen than for cismen.

Table 6

Coefficients from Linear Regression predicting Critical Action from Critical Reflection and Gender (n = 1289)

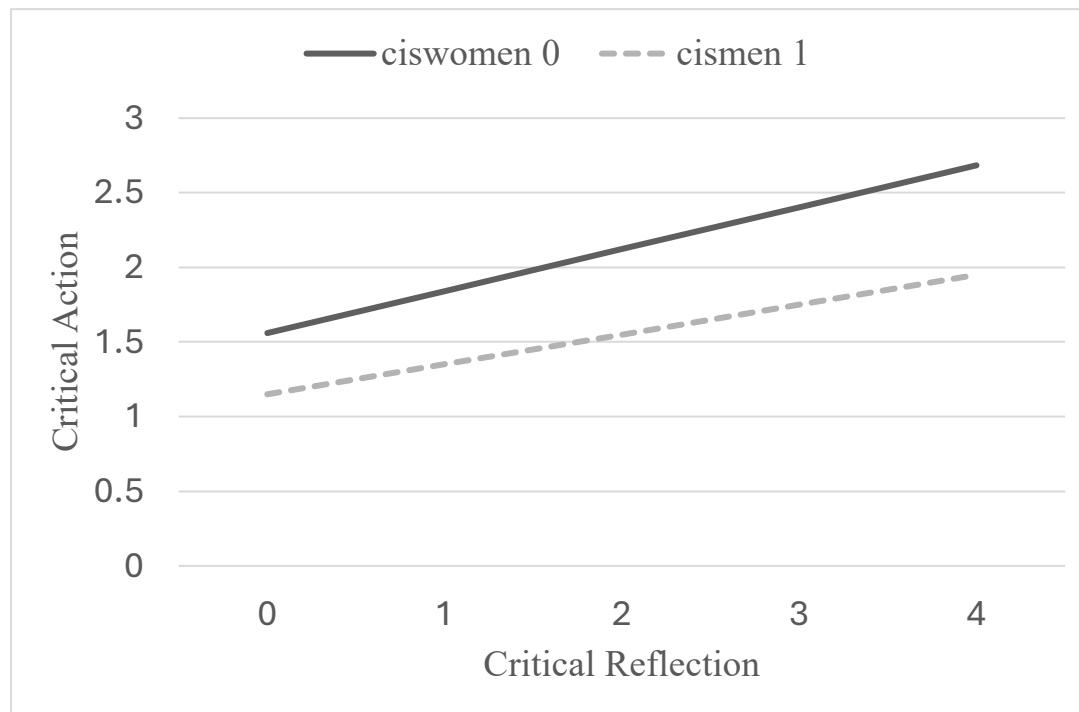
	Unstandardized Coefficient (SE)	Standardized Coefficient
Intercept	1.57 (0.18)***	
Gender	-0.41 (0.25)	-0.11
Critical Reflection	0.28 (0.03)***	0.38
Gender * Critical Reflection	-0.08 (0.04)*	-0.14

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; SE = standard error

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Figure 3

The relationship between critical reflection and critical between cismen and ciswomen.



Diagnostics. Based on the Collinearity Tolerance and the Variance Influence Factor, no problematic collinearity was found in this model. The SDFits and SDBetas showed no influential cases. Residuals for the critical action was approximately normally distributed, and when the standardized residuals were compared to the actual outcome and each actual predictor, the spread was close to homoscedastic.

Research Question 2B:

Gender identity centrality and gender identification explained 8.60% of the variance in critical reflection, $F(3,1288) = 40.46$ ($p < .001$). Table 7 includes the regression coefficients, and a visual depiction of the results is shown in Figure 4. The relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection for ciswomen is shown in the solid line in the Figure 4. The intercept for ciswomen was 5.16, and feeling that gender was more important to identity was

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positively associated with higher critical reflection ($b_1 = .22, p < .001$). The relationship between these two variables for ciswomen is shown in the dashed line in Figure 4. As shown, the intercept for ciswomen was not statistically significantly different from the intercept for ciswomen. However, the interaction between gender identification and critical reflection was statistically significant ($b = -0.24, p = .20$), which means the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection was different between the two groups. Overall, the relationship was higher for ciswomen, and ciswomen did not show much association at all between gender identity centrality and critical reflection.

Table 7

Coefficients from Linear Regression predicting Critical Reflection from Gender Identity Centrality and Gender (n = 1289)

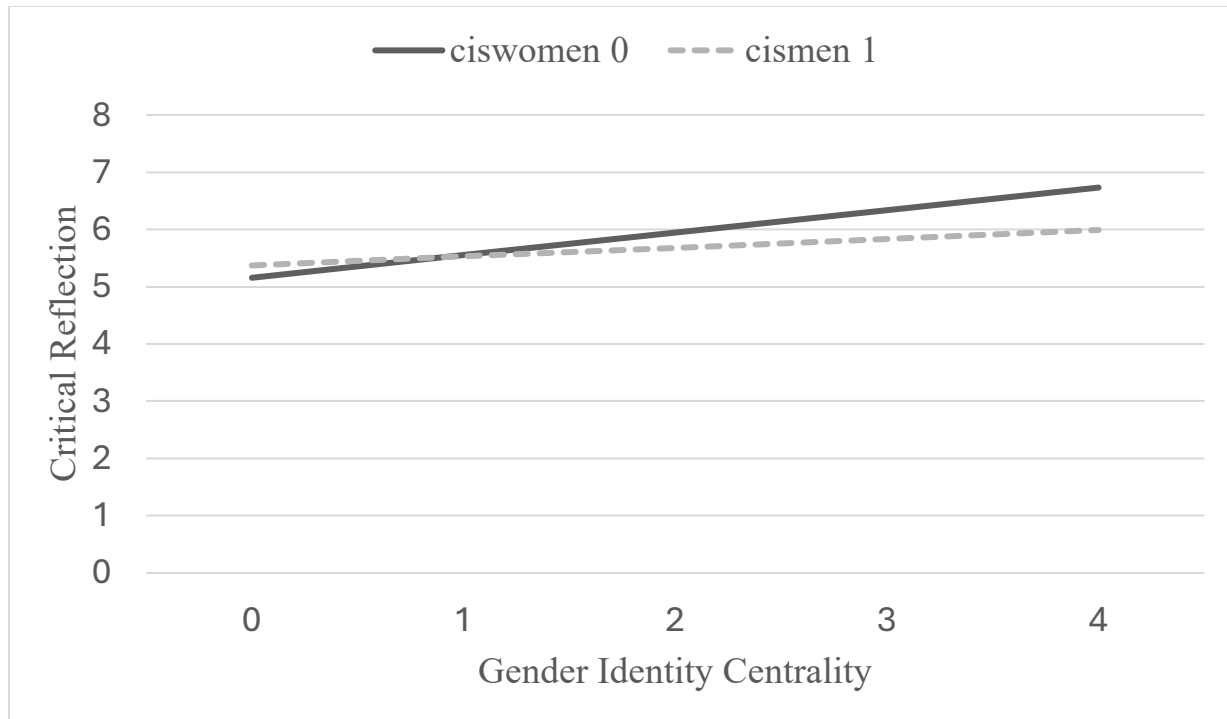
	Unstandardized Coefficient (SE)	Standardized Coefficient
Intercept	5.16 (0.23)***	
Gender	0.40 (0.31)	0.08
Gender Identity Centrality	0.22 (0.03)***	0.26
Gender * Gender Identity Centrality	-0.24 (0.05)***	-0.28

Note *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; SE = standard error

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Figure 4

The relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection between ciswomen and ciswomen.



Diagnostics. Based on the Collinearity Tolerance and the Variance Influence Factor, no problematic collinearity was found in this model. The SDFits, SDBetas, and cook's distance showed no influential cases. Residuals for critical reflection was approximately normally distributed, and when the standardized residuals were compared to the actual outcome and each actual predictor, the spread was close to homoscedastic.

Research Question 2C:

Gender identity centrality and gender explained 12.9% of the variance in critical action, $F(3, 1288) = 63.49$ ($p < .001$). Table 8 includes the regression coefficients, and visual depiction of the results is shown in Figure 5. A solid line in Figure 5 represents the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical action for ciswomen. The ciswomen who had the lowest

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scores on gender identity centrality were predicted to have a critical action score of 2.40 ($p < .001$). Feeling that gender was more important to identity was associated with higher critical reflection ($b = .16, p < .001$). The dashed line in Figure 5 represents the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical action for ciswomen. For the ciswomen who had the lowest scores on gender identity centrality, the level of critical action was not significantly different from ciswomen. The interaction between gender and critical reflection was statistically significant ($b = -.14, p < .001$), meaning that gender identification does moderate the relationship between gender identity centrality and critical reflection. This finding means that the association between gender identity centrality and critical action was similar for ciswomen and ciswomen, but overall, the relationship was higher for ciswomen. The association between gender identity centrality and critical action was also very close to zero.

Table 8

Coefficients from Linear Regression predicting Critical Action from Gender Identity Centrality and Gender (n = 1289)

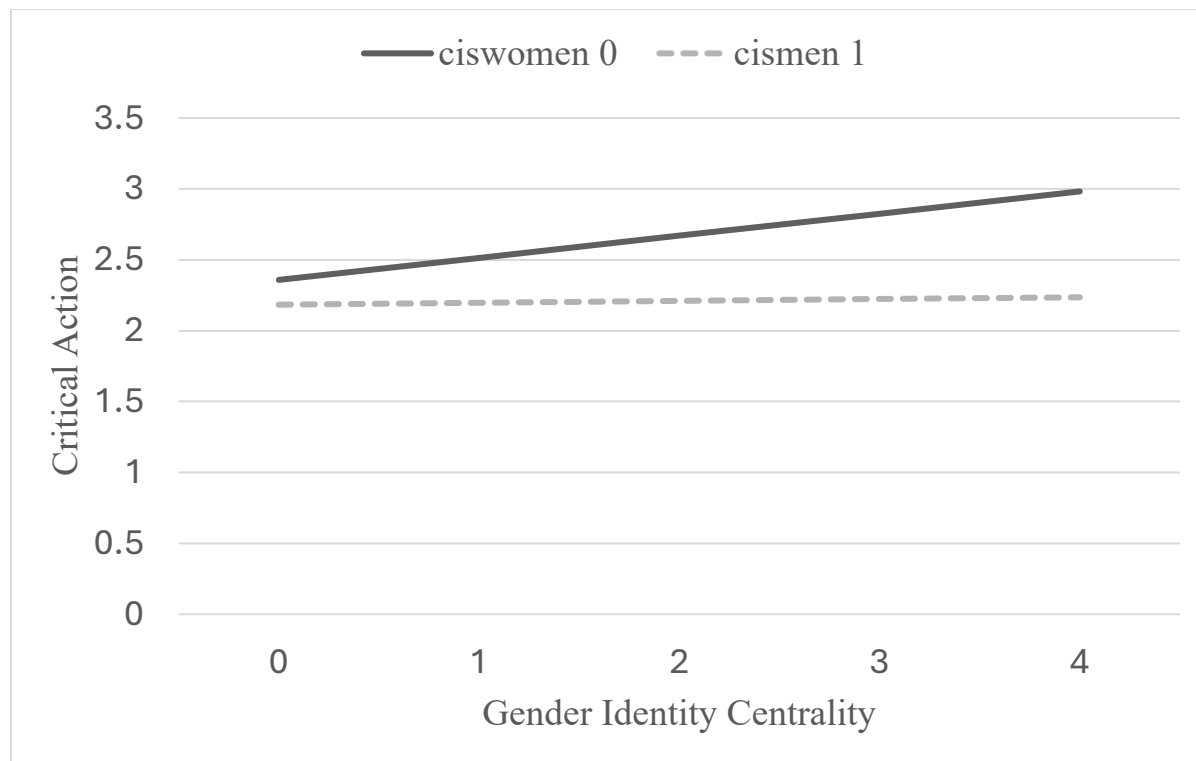
	Unstandardized Coefficient (SE)	Standardized Coefficient
Intercept	2.36 (0.16)***	
Gender	-0.18 (0.22)	-0.05
Gender Identity Centrality	0.16 (.02)***	0.25
Gender * Gender Identity Centrality	-0.14 (0.04)***	-0.23

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; SE = standard error

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Figure 5

The relationship between gender identity centrality and critical action amongst cismen and ciswomen



Diagnostics. The residuals for the outcome variable were approximately normally distributed, and when the standardized residuals were compared to the actual outcome and each actual predictor, the spread was close to homoscedastic. Based on the Collinearity Tolerance and the Variance Influence Factor, no problematic collinearity was found in this model. The SDFits, SDBetas, and cook's distance showed no influential cases.

Research Question 2D:

To conduct the analysis for this research question, I split the file to compare across two groups. I ran the same multiple regression analysis with the interaction as for Research Question 1d, and the results showered two models for each gender. The model for cismen was statistically significant, meaning that critical reflection and gender identity centrality accounted for 0.13% of

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the variance in critical action, $F(3, 1288) = 22.24$ ($p < .001$). For ciswomen, critical reflection and gender identity centrality accounted for 0.14% of the variance in critical action, $F(3, 1288) = 43.25$ ($p < .001$). For both regression analyses, the interaction of critical reflection and gender identity centrality was not statistically significant. For ciswomen, when gender identity centrality was zero, there was a positive association for critical reflection and critical action ($b = 0.29$, $p < .001$). Similarly, when critical reflection was zero, there was a positive association between gender identity centrality and critical action ($b = 0.06$, $p = .03$). For cismen, when gender identity centrality was zero, critical reflection and critical action were positively associated ($b = 0.15$, $p < .001$).

Diagnostics. I conducted post-test diagnostics for both the model for cismen and for ciswomen. For ciswomen the standardized residual of the outcome variable were close to normally distributed. The scatter plots between the standardized residuals and the actual outcome as well as the predictors all were close to homoscedastic. The Collinearity Tolerances were all below .01, but the Variance Influence Factor for the interaction variable was 16.54, higher than the cutoff for acceptable collinearity (Fields, 2018).

For cismen, the residuals for the outcome variable were approximately normally distributed, and when the standardized residuals were compared to the actual outcome and each actual predictor, the spread was close to homoscedastic. Based on the Collinearity Tolerance and the Variance Influence Factor, no problematic collinearity was found in this model. The SDFits, SDBetas, and cook's distance showed no influential cases.

Discussion

The critical consciousness framework has been used to understand how people recognize, think about, and challenge structures of inequality and oppression (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2011). Previous research in marginalized groups has shown that developing critical consciousness promotes positive outcomes for individuals and the community despite systemic constraints, such as those rooted in sexism (Heberle et al., 2020; Luginbuhl et al., 2016). Sexism is an unjust system that hinders people's choices and opportunities, especially for people who are not cismen. Awareness of how sexism operates in society and taking actions against sexism contribute to eliminating these unjust systems. Both cismen and ciswomen have participated in some ways to address sexism, but the way each gender group thinks about sexism and takes actions against it may be different (Estevan-Reina et al., 2021; Vial & Napier, 2017). To better understand critical consciousness on sexism, having a deeper understanding of how the privileged group thinks about their gender identity in the context of sexism (when compared to a marginalized group)s may contribute to answering questions on how to bridge the gap between these group's union in the effort towards social liberation.

The purpose of this study was to understand how gender identity centrality moderates the relationship between critical reflection and critical action on sexism. Additionally, I examined how those relationships differed between cismen and ciswomen with the intention to discover more about the difference between how privileged groups and marginalized groups engage with critical consciousness. Results confirmed that gender identity centrality strengthens the critical reflection to critical action link. For both cismen and ciswomen, the results showed significant associations among gender identity centrality, critical reflection, and critical action. However, the associations between the variables were stronger for ciswomen than cismen across all

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relationships. These findings highlight how systemic power dynamics may shape engagement with the critical consciousness processes.

This thesis' findings on the connection between critical reflection and critical action confirms previous research on this relationship (Diemer et al., 2016; Freire, 1970), and the gender group comparison highlights that ciswomen may have overall higher critical consciousness for sexism. Amongst the full sample of participants, among only ciswomen, and among only cismen, all groups showed a positive relationship between critical reflection and critical action. Even though research question 2a's results showed that critical reflection and critical action were consistently higher for ciswomen than cismen, the association between critical reflection and critical action was similar between gender groups. Critical consciousness framework considers critical reflection to be an imperative step before critical action (Diemer et al., 2016). Research question 2a's results and previous research are consistent such that with higher critical reflection there is more likely to be higher critical action.

Although the associations between critical reflection and critical action were similar between genders, ciswomen overall had higher levels of critical reflection and critical action than cismen. According to the correlations by gender and the regression analysis for research question 2a, ciswomen's critical consciousness was consistently higher. This supports the hypothesis that ciswomen would have higher critical consciousness on sexism, which stemmed from previous research that ciswomen recognize sexism and take actions against it more often than cismen (Rodin et al., 1990; Swim et al., 2001). Critical consciousness research shows that when social issues relate to people's identity, they may be more likely to engage in the components of critical consciousness on that issue (Spears, 2011). Examining the relationship between critical reflection and critical action suggested that these critical consciousness components are related to

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one another in both gender groups, and the critical consciousness components are both higher for ciswomen than for cismen.

Another one of the main goals for this thesis was to examine how gender identity centrality played a role in fostering critical consciousness on sexism. The observed relationships between gender identity centrality and critical reflection/action aligned with studies emphasizing the impact of gender identity centrality on the critical consciousness process. Wang & Dovidio (2017)'s research that priming gender identity salience leads to higher perceptions and confrontations of sexism in ciswomen parallels this thesis' connections between gender identity centrality and the critical consciousness components. In research questions 2b and 2c, the results showed that gender identity centrality predicts critical reflection and critical action for ciswomen but not for cismen.

The observed lack of association between gender identity centrality and sexism critical consciousness for cismen in this study also parallels research that shows the difficulty of engaging privileged groups, cismen in this case, in critical consciousness (Seider et al., 2023). Research has highlighted these gaps, but there are still few specific implications within the critical consciousness methods and framework to support the privileged group's participation in ending sexism (Rapa & Godfrey, 2023). Both this previous research and the current findings indicate that research does not currently show a fruitful way to engage privileged groups in learning about and acting against social inequalities. Based on this thesis' results, learning about social inequality or increasing identity centrality may not strengthen critical consciousness in privileged groups.

The moderation of gender identity centrality on the relationship between critical reflection and critical action showed that identity may play a role in facilitating the reflection to

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action transition. This supports my hypothesis that gender identity centrality strengthens the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. People who reflect on sexism and its structural attributions and who then make connections to their own lived experience may be more willing to take actions towards eliminating sexism (Johnson et al., 2023; Spears, 2011). These results are consistent with research that marginalized groups who feel their identity is important to them also engage in critical reflection and critical action for social issues that relate to that identity.

Although the results show that engaging with social issues that are both important and connected to one's identity are associated with higher critical reflection and action, having a high sense of gender identity centrality could be a potential risk factor for ciswomen. Confronting and resisting sexist structures that have been systemically marginalizing a person based on their identity may be psychologically taxing, especially when that identity is central to who they are. The responsibility of addressing sexism should not only land on the ones who are marginalized by the system, and those who do participate in resisting these systems may require extra support and protection for their own psychological and physical health.

This study's results also suggest that cismen's gender identity centrality may not be associated with critical reflection and critical action. One possible explanation for this result could be that there are two subgroups of cismen with different patterns of results which cancelled each other out. One such subgroup of cismen may be those who have strong gender identity centrality, which reinforces their traditional sense of masculinity and their sense of belonging to a dominant male gender group. It is possible that for this group, high gender identity centrality could be associated with lower critical reflection and action about sexism. The other possible subgroup may include men who have rejected those ideas about their gender (e.g., rejected the

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idea that men should be dominant) and for whom a critical understanding of their masculinity may motivate them to think about and act to address sexism. For this group, lower gender identity centrality could be associated with higher critical reflection and action. The overall results displayed no association between gender identity centrality and critical reflection and action for cismen, however this result does not necessarily mean that gender identity centrality does not matter for cismen's critical consciousness. Further research can further investigate cismen's gender identity centrality with an addition of a qualitative question that digs deeper into what that centrality means for their identity.

Another alternative explanation of the results suggesting no association between gender identity centrality and critical reflection/action is that cismen's critical consciousness may be connected to other external factors, such as being exposed to social movements, social media usage, or education level. Another alternative explanation is that critical consciousness components may be connected to other internal factors or other aspects of identity. These considerations lead to a question of what the critical consciousness theoretical framework in privileged groups, cismen in this study, may be missing. Cismen engaging in critical action to address sexism is important as their actions have shown to have a strong influence on limiting sexism in others and therefore emphasize the importance of privileged group's participation in ending social inequalities (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). Therefore, continuing to research how to engage these privileged groups in critical consciousness could contribute to social liberation for themselves and marginalized people.

Implications

Considering that this study has implications for both groups, cismen and ciswomen, I will first describe the implications for ciswomen and cismen, and lastly describe how the results inform the critical consciousness framework overall.

First, for ciswomen the study's findings indicate that gender identity centrality could contribute to actions aimed to eliminate sexism, such as joining community organizing groups for women supporting women or voting for politicians who support propositions that promote gender equality. Spaces in which ciswomen can foster collective dialogue, and self-reflection that enhances gender identity centrality, could strengthen the pathway from critical reflection to critical action, as the results suggest. Additionally, considering that high gender identity centrality may be a potential risk factor for ciswomen's health, it may be important to continue to utilize those spaces for ciswomen to use as protection and support if they are able to continue participating in resistance against sexism.

Second, for cismen the results imply that the importance of being a man to their identity did not appear to relate to how much they critically reflected or critically acted. These results may mean that whether or not a man embraces their male identity as an ally, their male identity centrality may not be the determining factor in the way they engage with resisting sexism. However, it may also be that the results for cismen overall hid two subgroups of cismen: one subgroup with high gender identity centrality and low critical reflection/action and another subgroup with low gender identity centrality and high critical reflection/action. Understanding men's perception of their male identity may give clues to how they view sexism and thus act or not act to address it. Finally, Russell et al. (2024) suggested that there must be a set of attitudes

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and ideologies underlying men who support feminism, and the current study did not specify how gender identity centrality was included in that set of ideologies for this population.

Third, the differences in results and implications for cismen and ciswomen highlight the current ways in which privilege and oppression operate in the U.S., which in turn can inform the way people think about critical consciousness. This thesis suggests that there are currently differences in how cismen and how ciswomen engage in eliminating a system that effects both gender groups. The results point out that the way in which people engage in thinking about society and themselves may be different for each of these groups. These observed differences in engagement could be a result of the sexist system currently in the U.S. To respond to that system with the goal to eliminate it, people may need to acknowledge the current functioning of that system, which is that power and privilege still exists. Beyond only thinking about critical consciousness regarding sexism, this thesis also aimed to understand critical consciousness amongst groups of privilege and groups experiencing marginalization. The analysis suggested that there may be differences in the way people engage in work that personally affects them and what does not personally affect them. This finding means more work can be done to discover what does predict critical reflection and critical action in cismen, or other groups of privilege.

Finally, this thesis connected critical reflection and critical action with gender identity centrality, which similarly connects the two variables as critical motivation does from the three-part component model of critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2011). Critical motivation, which is the perceived capacity or believe in one's ability to make change, often includes the skills and access to resources for engagement (Diemer et al., 2015). Research has connected critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action together. For example, having high critical motivation may mean also having high critical action. My research questions

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addressed a different view on motivation: specifically, how gender identity centrality may serve as an identity-based motivator.

Identity-based motivation theory suggests that social identities (e.g. gender identity or racial identity) informs people of the likelihood they could succeed or fail in a certain domain (e.g. education) based the context of social inequalities, such as gender or racial inequality (Pinedo et al., 2023). Marginalized youth who are exposed to positive information about their identity group's outcomes are more motivated to achieve tasks moving towards success. For example, girls who were shown graphs that girls graduate high school are high rates were more likely to spend more time on homework than girls who were shown graphs that boys graduated high school more than girls (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012). For marginalized groups, having role models or examples of success appears to relate to tending to a task or being more motivated to complete that task than for those who do not have that example. For critical consciousness, identity based motivation may be effective as a bridge between critical reflection and critical action when tied to effective strategies and role models for creating change (Pinedo et al., 2023). The combination of critical motivation, which includes said effective strategies, and identity-based motivation can further explain the links of critical consciousness for youth.

Limitations

Interpreting the results of this study require considering limitations, including difficulty measuring critical reflection and action, lack of examining intersectionality, and considering only binary genders. Critical consciousness theory intentionally defines critical action narrowly as to makes sure the actions done are in specific association with reflections and intentions to eliminate oppression. Even though the measure intentionally asked the participant about their actions in correspondence their desire to eliminate sexism, the actions can still be interpreted

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without that desire. The action of voting or attending a protest could be for causes supporting oppression, and this thesis' measure does a bare minimum to take these important nuances into account. Additionally, the measures for critical reflection on the structural attributions of sexism only stated "women" and did not include other groups that are also marginalized in sexism, which reflects that the measures themselves are biased towards cisgender. The measures including only "women" and "men" reinforce a cissexist interpretation of sexism that does not take into account the privileges ciswomen benefit from in a cissexist society.

Another limitation is that this thesis only considered gender and did not take intersectional identities into account. Multiple aspects of a person's identity can change the way they experience social issues. Considering how a black man's gender identity centrality influences the relationship between critical reflection and critical action could be different to a white woman's. These overlapping identities add nuance to structural inequalities and may also require specific ways of critical consciousness engagement in the effort towards social liberation.

The thesis' limited scope supported my reasoning to focus only on gender; however, it is still important to recognize missed information from analysis on expanding beyond gender identity. Similarly, the research only focused on the gender binary. More research can focus on examining critical consciousness on sexism with gender groups outside the gender binary. Despite these limitations, the study still expands the literature on privilege in critical consciousness on sexism and the way in which gender identity centrality differs between gender.

Future Direction and Conclusion

Even though the current study's focus is limited, further research on critical consciousness in relation to sexism and gender could include considerations beyond the gender

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binary and incorporate cissexism into their understanding of gender-based oppression as well. Cissexism is systemic discrimination against people who identify with a gender that is different from the sex they were assigned to at birth and expanding research to include people beyond the gender binary may help in advancing towards stopping gender discrimination. As mentioned in the limitation section, the critical reflection measure used cissexist words that excluded other groups. Further research can include groups beyond the gender binary or intentionally define sexism with more inclusive language. Additionally, asking open-ended questions may help researchers better understand what gender identity centrality means for all groups of people, including non-binary individuals or even cismen. Qualitative analysis would allow for a more in depth understanding of the way the participants interpret gender identity and what that means for their own sense of self as well as their critical consciousness.

Another area for future research is developing various workshops or interventions specifically created for either privileged groups or marginalized groups. This could involve creating educational programs that teach about systemic inequality and supports self-reflection on one's life experience. Then examining the outcomes of these workshops would provide researchers, educators, and advocates with insight into how to support critical consciousness in various groups and protect marginalized groups from the potential risks they may face when engaging in critical consciousness.

For cismen, the privileged group represented in this thesis, research can continue to examine the factors related to developing critical reflection, such as workshops and school events focused on gender inequality. Researchers and educators can focus on ways to uplift cismen in their participation in dismantling inequality. This may mean reframing common language around privilege. Instead of approaching acknowledging privilege with guilt or defensiveness, cismen

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could work together in workshops to understand sexism or other social inequalities as preventing themselves from accessing all their humanity. A shift in perspective could leave cismen feeling more motivated to join the efforts against social inequality rather than feeling more firmly placed in their place of privilege.

Additionally, developing critical consciousness does not necessarily have to start with critical reflection. Involving men in organizations and focusing on the critical action aspect of critical consciousness on sexism could initiate a sense of purpose and community that could then lead to further reflections on social inequalities and the aspects of privilege in their life experience.

Future research can also examine the benefits of critical action to further understand how actions evolve into policy or cultural change. Currently researchers assume that critical action elicit change on a systemic level. However, there are no studies that follows individual or collective actions and their direct outcomes. A longitudinal study could track how individual or collective critical action is directly associated with change-making policies and critical consciousness outcomes.

This thesis demonstrates how adolescent's gender identity centrality strengthens critical consciousness processes for ciswomen but not for cismen. This finding highlights the systemic oppression that occurs in how identity centrality connects to the way people think about and act on the systems that advantage some and disadvantage others. Contrasting privileged and marginalized groups adds to the literature on privilege through the lens of critical consciousness and spotlights the need for more specific methods to dismantling sexism in ways that supports all groups of people's participation in its end.

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