For decades, psychological well-being (PWB), a multidimensional condition of life satisfaction and wellness, has been the subject of significant research and exploration (e.g., Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Past research has linked PWB to many aspects of life, including personality traits, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, family roles, vocational identity and career pursuits, biological regulation, and health outcomes, demonstrating the importance of understanding the factors which contribute to and influence PWB (Ryff, 2013). One set of elements to consider, especially in a

**ABSTRACT.** The goal of these 2 studies was to clarify the association between intersectional awareness (IA) and psychological well-being (PWB). Past research on this association has been mixed, with some studies identifying positive well-being outcomes (e.g., Fischer & Good, 2004; Yakushko, 2007) and others identifying negative well-being outcomes (e.g., Curtin et al., 2015; Greenwood, 2008). Study 1 examined the role of identity privilege, predicting that identity privilege would moderate the relationship between IA and well-being. Analyses indicated a positive relationship between IA and well-being, regardless of identity privilege ($\beta = .19$). Study 2 examined the role of identity privilege and identity group, as well as the role of critical consciousness and its factors: egalitarianism (CC-Eg) and critical action (CC-CA), predicting that any association between IA and well-being would be present for participants with high CC-CA, and intensified by CC-Eg. Analyses indicated that the overall relationship between IA and well-being was insignificant, but CC-Eg played the most important role in predicting well-being by interacting separately with IA ($\beta = .20$) and CC-CA ($\beta = .22$). Study 2 found that the association between IA and well-being was positive only for African American and Black people. Studies 1 and 2 suggest that the factors of critical consciousness uniquely interact with IA as it relates to well-being and that this association may be especially important for African American and Black people. These studies provide future researchers and mental health professionals with a framework for understanding how opinions and awareness of intersecting social hierarchies and injustices may be related to PWB.

**Keywords:** psychological well-being, intersectional awareness, identity, critical consciousness, privilege
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Intersectional Awareness (IA)

IA, which is a term used to describe the strength of an individual’s ability, regardless of social identity, “to perceive the combination of multiple forms of inequality, as well as to critique or reject the legitimacy of that inequality” (Curtin et al., 2015, p. 513). As a relatively new construct within the field of psychology, IA provides insight into the effects of engaging with social injustices.

IA is a product of a long history of individual and group experiences with oppression and activism, and research conducted on the topic of multiple and converging identities. IA has grown out of “intersectionality,” a term first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and has since been expanded by many other scholars (Cole, 2009). Within psychology, intersectionality has recently become a point of interest due to its implications for activism and social justice, as well as a tool for understanding the psychological effects of prejudice and discrimination (Rosenthal, 2016). Other common terms used in psychology literature include “feminism,” “consciousness,” and many more, but the current study will refer to the concept defined above as IA.

Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

PWB was developed and brought to the forefront of positive psychology by Carol Ryff, who refined previous theories and research to create a new, multidimensional measure of eudaimonic well-being (Abbott et al., 2006; van Dierendonck, 2004; Springer & Hauser, 2006). Ryff conceptualized PWB as the convergence of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). These unique dimensions have the potential to strengthen researchers’ estimates of positive functioning and PWB (Ryff, 1989; van Dierendonck, 2004). Research has shown that PWB and its dimensions may be related to an individual’s thoughts and beliefs about oneself, positive affect, and the development of self-esteem (Lightsey, 1996; Miville et al., 2004) as well as to personality traits (Lightsey, 1996). Specifically, Schmutte & Ryff (1997) found that openness to experience was associated with personal growth, agreeableness was associated with positive relations with others, and neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness were associated with environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. Additionally, higher PWB or stronger PWB can be particularly beneficial in the face of negative life events (Lightsey, 1996). Jetten et al. (2014) reported that PWB was boosted by a sense of shared group membership, providing individuals with the “psychological resources” to better navigate adversity and challenges through increased resilience and coping skills. These findings demonstrate that a better understanding of PWB will benefit the field of positive psychology and broader psychological research.

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In particular, individual understanding and grasp of these social systems, defined as intersectional awareness (IA), may be related to PWB (Yakushko, 2007). Furthermore, those very differences in privilege, which accompany individual identities, may affect the direction of the association between IA and PWB (Curtin et al., 2015). To develop the most inclusive and comprehensive wellness interventions, it is critical to understand the association between IA and PWB, as well as any differences rooted in identity.

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Intersectional Awareness (IA)

Although many factors influence PWB, one may be
opposing views and phenomena (Fischer & Good, 2004; Yakushko, 2009). Further, these emotional costs may impact other areas of life such as personal and professional relationships, due to increased instances of defensiveness and aggression often associated with engaging in socially taboo topics, negatively affecting an individual’s relations with others (Fischer & Good, 2004; Hercus, 1999; Yakushko, 2007). These conflicting findings emphasize the need to continue research on IA as it could have meaningful implications for the PWB of individuals and groups.

**Study 1: The Role of Identity Privilege (IP)**

One factor that might explain contradicting associations between IA and PWB is an individual’s degree of social privilege. Privileged identities are “historically dominant social identity groups who have access to power, resources, and opportunities and who enjoy the psychological freedoms associated with being the norm” (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016, p. 925).

Studies have shown that privilege influences the way an individual learns about, and is affected by, diversity. Among people from more privileged backgrounds, engaging with diversity and integral components of IA increases moral reasoning and critical thinking (Blankenship et al., 2017; Bowman, 2009). Conversely, among people from marginalized backgrounds, this trend has been absent (Blankenship et al., 2017; Bowman, 2009; Curtin et al., 2015). A study by Bowman (2009), for example, found that White students who took diversity classes saw cognitive gains, whereas people of color who took the same classes did not see critical gains. Bowman’s study acknowledged the importance of power and status differences between social identities and how they may affect the association between IA and PWB.

Additionally, when considering socially sensitive topics relating to IA, identity, and mental health, participants may feel negatively toward providing truthful answers that go against current social trends and values and may provide answers that portray them more positively (Fischer & Good, 2004). Providing socially desirable responses misrepresents true behaviors and attitudes and, in the instance of IA and PWB, may misrepresent how IA is or is not associated with PWB. Controlling for social desirability is a common practice in psychological research of sensitive topics, as per Fischer & Good (2004), and helps to clearly identify trends.

The current study was designed to provide a clearer picture of the association between IA, PWB, and IP. Further, the current study controlled for social desirability, but it was not the focus. Based on the findings from other studies presented above, I hypothesized that individuals with higher privilege scores would have a positive correlation between IA and PWB, whereas individuals with lower privilege scores (greater marginalization) would have no correlation between IA and PWB.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were provided access to the online study and recruited through word of mouth, social media, and emails. Emails were sent to students and staff at Macalester College and community members, and emails were obtained through the college’s Psychology Department and through collection by the researcher. To be included in the study, participants needed to be at least 18 years old and able to read English. No participants were excluded, and participants were not compensated. See Table 1 for demographic variables’ frequencies, percentages, and privilege codes.

**Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants (N = 379; ages 18–81, Mage = 25.46, SD = 13.27) were asked to complete a short questionnaire intending to collect demographic data. Participants answered questions about their gender identity, age, racial/ethnic identity, and socioeconomic status.

**IP.** The current study assigned IP based on the method used by Blankenship et al. (2017): Individuals were assigned scores based on the number of socially privileged identity categories with which they identified. For each of these categories, one identity was coded as privileged in the larger society. These were tallied, producing a total “score” of privilege. Scores ranged from 0 (least privileged) to 3 (most privileged, comparatively) based on gender, racial and socioeconomic identities, as done by Blankenship et al. (2017). For each identity category, one or several identities were coded as privileged in the larger society (see Table 1).

**IA.** IA (α = .86) was measured with a scale of IA, developed by Curtin et al. (2015). This measure was adapted from the work by Greenwood (2008) to be accessible to people of all genders, races, and degree of participation in activism. Additionally, the scale by Curtin et al. (2015) modifies Greenwood’s (2008) measure to focus
specifically on intersectional consciousness, updating the questions to better reflect the literature on intersectionality produced by its original founders such as Collins (1989) and Crenshaw (1991). Higher scores indicated higher IA (i.e., more awareness).

**PWB.** PWB (α = .92) was measured with a shortened version of the Scales of PWB, originally developed by Ryff (1989). Ryff’s Scales of PWB were first developed and tested in 1989 (Ryff, 1989) and were assessed again by Ryff in 2014. Scores ranged from 1 to 6 where higher scores indicated better PWB.

**Social Desirability.** Social desirability (α = .75) was controlled for with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, originally developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960). This scale assesses an individual’s bias toward their degree of concern with social approval. The scale included 33 statements, and participants indicated if each statement was true or false as it relates to them personally (α = .88, Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Scores ranged from 0 to 33 where higher scores indicated more socially desirable behaviors.

**Procedure**

Institutional Review Board approval was received for the current study prior to data collection. Participants accessed the survey via a link retrieved from social media sites or emails. The survey commenced with a consent form. Participants who consented continued through the IA measure, the Scale of PWB, the social desirability control, and the demographics questionnaire. The order of the measures was randomized across participants to control for order effects. After completing the measures, participants were debriefed. The entire study was completed in 10 minutes, on average. All measures are available for public review on the Open Science Framework.

**Results**

A series of bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the associations between IA, IP, and PWB (see Table 2). Participants with higher IA tended to have better PWB. However, privilege score was not associated with either PWB or IA. Given that social desirability was associated with higher PWB and lower IA, all further analyses controlled for social desirability: social desirability was added to the following regression model to estimate its effects on, and isolate it from, PWB.

To examine the association between IA, IP,
PWB, a regression was conducted with PWB as the outcome and IA, privilege, and their interaction as predictors (see Table 3). Overall, these predictors accounted for a significant amount of variance in PWB, $F(4, 371) = 13.77, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .13$. The regression demonstrated that higher IA predicted higher PWB. Privilege, however, was not associated with PWB. Finally, there was no interaction between IA and privilege, indicating that the positive association between IA and PWB is consistent across all levels of privilege.

Additional regression analyses were run using individual privilege elements (i.e., race, gender, and socioeconomic status) as predictors, rather than the composite privilege variable. In this and all other regressions, results were consistent with the previous model: the positive association between IA and PWB did not vary by demographic factors.

**Discussion**

The findings of the current study did not support the interaction hypothesis that individuals with higher privilege scores would have a positive correlation between IA and PWB, nor that individuals with lower privilege scores (greater marginalization) would have no correlation between IA and PWB. Analyses showed that higher IA was associated with greater PWB, regardless of IP.

The findings of the current study and past research demonstrate that IA has a link to variables associated with the unique factors of PWB (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The regression conducted as part of the current study might have shown that higher IA is associated with higher PWB because IA has the potential to foster positive intergroup attitudes, and awareness of “out-groups,” which may combat the negative consequences of prejudice and thus improve social relationships (Curtin et al., 2015).

Additionally, the current study’s results are inconsistent with past studies (Fischer & Good, 2004; Hercus, 1999; Yakushko, 2007), which found that increased IA may be followed by negative emotional reactions, difficulty resolving conflicting views, and strains on relationships. However, this trend might not have been reflected in the current study because, as suggested, undergraduates in a uniquely safe environment that fosters critical thinking, and the development of the mental tools associated with higher IA, may provide individuals with the structure for grasping and engaging with a world complicated by prejudice and discrimination and avoiding the negative effects identified in other studies (Fischer & Good, 2004).
Further, the current study did not support the interaction hypothesis. This hypothesis was based on Bowman’s (2009) findings, which suggested that facilitated engagement with the concepts of IA may not be beneficial to people of color who may more regularly and more explicitly bear the negative effects of these phenomena compared to White people. However, the current study found that the association between IA and PWB was the same for those who have less IP as it was for those who have more IP. It is possible that the current study did not identify this interaction because IA is accessible for both privileged and marginalized identities and does not influence the association between IA and PWB (Curtin et al., 2015). Another possibility as to why the current study did not identify this interaction is because the measures used did not adequately determine privilege. IP was calculated based on the information gathered from the few demographic questions which were limited and generalizing.

The demographic questions also ignored important nuances between identity groups, in favor of calculating IP. Specifically, the population of the current study was predominantly White women of middle socioeconomic status. This lack of sample diversity most likely minimized the true trends within other identity groups. More attention should be paid to the way specific identities are or are not related to the association between IA and PWB by including more specific demographic questions.

It may also be useful to focus specifically on how the knowledge which accompanies greater IA interacts with a person’s feelings toward that knowledge. It is possible that this knowledge alone, without any accompanying feelings of agency or ability to affect change, may lead an individual to feel helpless and overwhelmed. However, if an individual feels empowered to act and that they can benefit themselves or their community, it is possible that they would experience feelings of empowerment, connection, and improved PWB (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Curtis et al., 2015; Diemer et al., 2014; Downing & Roush, 1985).

Thus, one potentially useful concept is critical consciousness (CC), the extent to which individuals can acknowledge and reflect critically on social inequalities and systems of marginalization, understand the need for justice, and build the capacity to pursue social action and activism (Diemer et al., 2014; Freire, 1973; Godfrey et al., 2019). Specifically, the elements of CC highlight the differences between being a part of activist groups and communities and feeling agency and capacity for activism. Several studies have found that these elements of CC are associated with different PWB outcomes (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Diemer et al., 2014; Diemer et al., 2016; Downing & Roush, 1985; Godfrey et al., 2019), and demonstrated that the unique factors of CC have potential implications for IA, and that the intersection of IA and CC can have considerable impacts on PWB for people with a variety of identities.

Study 2: The Role of Critical Consciousness (CC)

Study 1 aimed to provide insight into the association between IA and PWB, and findings showed a positive correlation between IA and PWB that was consistent across a range of IP. Study 2 aimed to clarify the association between IA and PWB by including the role of CC, and its factors, in this association.

CC is composed of unique factors which interact in significant ways: critical reflection (perceived inequality) measures the “critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered constraints on educational and occupational opportunity,” critical reflection (egalitarianism) reflects the “endorsement of societal equality, all groups of people treated as equals within society,” and critical action indicates the “participation in social and political activities to change perceived inequalities” (Diemer et al., 2014). Egalitarianism (CC-Eg) and critical action (CC-CA) are of particular interest to the current study because, together, they offer insight into the question of not just how people feel about social injustices and hierarchies, but how much agency they feel to pursue action in the face of inequalities.

Godfrey et al. (2019) investigated how the factors of CC impacted socioemotional and academic PWB for racially diverse youth. They found that youth with both high levels of CC-Eg and CC-CA had worse socioemotional outcomes and academic PWB compared to other groups with lower levels of CC-Eg and CC-CA. Godfrey et al. (2019) theorized that this trend was caused by youths’ new engagement with complex systems of inequality (elements of IA) yet few opportunities to build and exercise agency. Although these youth were engaging with elements of IA, those who lacked the opportunities to act on their knowledge of injustice were more likely to feel overwhelmed and powerless than youth who have yet to engage with these topics (Godfrey
needed to be at least 18 years old and able to read English. No participants were excluded. See Table 1 for demographic variables’ frequencies, percentages, and privilege codes.

**Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants (N = 174, ages 22–72, M = 37.31, SD = 10.75) were asked to complete a short questionnaire intending to collect demographic data. Participants answered questions about their gender identity, age, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and level of education and household income for themselves and their family, if financially dependent.

**CC.** CC was measured by the CC Scale, developed by Diemer et al. (2014). Participants responded to 14 questions within two subsections, which were randomized. Five questions corresponded to CC-Eg (e.g., all groups should be given an equal chance in life; α = .76) and nine to CC-CA (e.g., participated in a civil rights group or organization; α = .87). The current study found that the CC-Eg scale had good internal reliability (α = .88). For the CC-Eg subscale, mean scores ranged from 1–6, and higher scores reflected greater dissatisfaction with current social structures. For the CC-CA subscale, mean scores ranged from 1–5 and higher scores reflected greater feelings of agency and activism. The current study found that the CC-CA scale had good internal reliability (α = .89). The third subscale, Critical Reflection—Perceived Inequality, was excluded because it includes similar questions as the IA measure by Curtin et al. (2015), yet the IA measure assesses perception and understanding of intersecting inequalities more broadly.

**IP.** As in Study 1, a total “privilege score” was calculated based on the method of category assignments used by Blankenship et al. (2017). Questions regarding the level of education and household income for participants and their families were included to gain more accurate information on participants’ socioeconomic status, expanding the original questions about socioeconomic status from the method by Blankenship et al. (2017). For the level of education, all forms of higher education (i.e., above a high school diploma or equivalency) were coded as privileged due to the findings that those with higher education degrees continue to “earn more and have lower rates of unemployment compared with workers who have less education” (Torpey, 2021). For annual household income, $25,000 and up was coded as privileged based on the average regional minimum wage across the

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited through the MTurk Crowdsourcing marketplace and were compensated $1.25. To be included in the study, participants
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U.S. ($11.80 per hour; Smith, 2019) and determining that those who make more than this income bracket hold more financial privilege, on average. Participants’ privileged social identities were tallied, producing a total “score” of privilege. Scores ranged from 0 (least privileged) to 5 (most privileged, comparatively). This information was to track the effect of distinct group identities on the association between IA and PWB and to calculate and assign “privilege scores” (see Table 1).

IA, PWB, Social Desirability. The current study used the same scales as Study 1: The IA measure, Ryff’s Scales of PWB, and the Social Desirability Scale.

Procedure
Institutional Review Board approval was received for the current study prior to data collection. Participants accessed the survey via a link retrieved from the MTurk Crowdsourcing marketplace. MTurk has been found to be a reliable participant recruitment method, producing samples that are as reliable as community and internet recruitment methods, and are representative of the U.S. population (Shin et al., 2018). Participants who consented continued through the IA measure, the Scale of PWB, the CC Scale, the social desirability control, and the demographics questionnaire. The order of measures was randomized across participants. After completing the measures, participants were debriefed. The entire study was completed in 13 minutes, on average. All measures are available for public review on the Open Science Framework.

Results
To examine the associations between all study variables, a series of bivariate correlations were conducted, including IA, critical reflection (egalitarianism; CC-Eg), critical action (CC-CA), IP, social desirability, and PWB (see Table 4). No significant correlation was found between IA and PWB. However, IA was positively associated with CC-Eg, and negatively associated with IP. Further, CC-Eg was also negatively associated with IP. Because social desirability was correlated with PWB, all further analyses controlled for social desirability.

Before testing the key study hypothesis, differences in PWB based on gender, sexual orientation, race, income, and education were tested with univariate ANOVA tests. The analysis included a variable that separated race into several groups: Asian (including Asian, Asian American, and/or Pacific Islander), Black (including Black and African American), White, and a group for all additional racial identities (combined Hispanic or Latino, Indigenous, multiracial and “other”). See Table 5 for the complete ANOVA results. A main effect of race was found, suggesting that PWB differed significantly by racial identity: participants who identified themselves as Black or African American (M = 4.27, SD = 0.14) reported the highest PWB, followed by participants who identified themselves as White (M = 4.24, SD = 0.10), then other racial identities (M = 4.13, SD = 0.20), and Asian, Asian American and/or Pacific Islander (M = 3.85, SD = 0.14) reported the lowest levels of PWB.

To examine the effects of IA, CC-Eg, CC-CA, and IP on PWB, a linear regression was conducted with PWB as the outcome and IA, CC-Eg, CC-CA, and their interaction variables as simultaneous predictors (all variables were centered at the sample mean). In addition, IP and its interaction with IA were also included (see Table 3). Overall, these predictors accounted for a significant amount of variance in PWB, F(10, 162) = 4.87, p < .001, adjusted $R^2 = .23$. Although the linear regression did not demonstrate that IA significantly predicted PWB, it did reveal a marginal interaction between IA and CC-Eg and a significant interaction between CC-Eg and CC-CA (see Table 3).

The interactions between IA and CC-Eg, and CC-CA and CC-Eg, were followed up by using simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). Given the pattern of both of these interactions, it was appropriate to examine the correlations between IA and PWB and between CC-CA and PWB as functions of CC-Eg: to examine if there was a difference in participants association between IA and PWB depending on if they had reported high or low CC-Eg. A total of eight new variables were computed. Two new versions of the CC-Eg variable were created for these analyses, centering one at the maximum CC-Eg score and centering the other at the minimum CC-Eg score. In turn, these centered CC-Eg variables were used to compute all relevant interaction terms.

Linear regressions were then rerun with each of these centered variables in turn. Although these associations were not individually significant, the difference between them was significant, as identified by the significance of the interaction variable. In other words, higher IA was only associated with better PWB if participants also had high levels of CC-Eg (see Figure 1.a). Similarly, higher CC-CA, or greater agency and participation in action to produce social change (Diemer et al., 2014), was
only associated with better PWB if participants also had high levels of CC-Eg (see Figure 1.b). Overall, individuals with high CC-Eg who reported the highest levels of IA and CC-CA also reported the best levels of PWB, respectively.

In the initial regression, although participants’ general IP was significant as a main effect (α = .22, p = .002), its interaction with IA was not (α = .02, p = .80). Thus, a series of linear regressions were conducted to identify if the above-mentioned identity groups independently interact with IA to predict PWB. Interaction variables were created with IA and each identity group. These variables, in addition to the independent identity group variables, acted as the predictor variables, and PWB was the outcome variable for each regression. For gender, sexual orientation, income, and education, the interaction terms were not significant (αs ranged from –.05 to .12, ps ranged from .12 to .63). For race, however, the interaction between Black and African American identity and IA was significant (α = .17, p = .05).

General Discussion

Together, Study 1 and Study 2 contributed to the development of knowledge on IA and PWB in the United States. Study 1 analyzed varying levels of IP in the association between IA and PWB, and Study 2 examined two factors of CC, CC-Eg, and CC-CA to determine how the acceptance or rejection of current social systems, and feelings of agency, contribute to the association between IA and PWB.

Importance of Egalitarianism

The current studies contributed to the past mix of findings, supplying support for both sides of the argument that IA does and does not improve PWB. Several studies have demonstrated that higher IA can result in increased negative emotions such as anger, poor self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, guilt, powerlessness, and burn out and that these emotional experiences can negatively impact social interactions, relationships, and ultimately PWB (Fischer & Good, 2004; Hercus, 1999; Yakushko, 2009). In the context of the current studies, low CC-Eg and low CC-CA explain how higher IA may result in negative emotional experiences and worse PWB.

However, many studies (including Study 1) have identified a positive correlation between IA and PWB. Studies which have identified this positive correlation have highlighted that increased IA is often related to improved perspectives on diversity,
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ability to grapple and involve oneself with social inequalities, increased feelings of independence and self-sufficiency, and improved group cohesiveness (Curtin et al., 2015; Fischer & Good, 2004; Greenwood, 2008; Yakushko, 2007). In the context of the current studies, these findings are likely the result of high IA in conjunction with greater CC-Eg, as well as greater CC-CA.

The Role of Identity

The current studies propose that most individuals and groups may be affected by IA in similar ways, with an exception to Black and African American people who may experience unique outcomes. Neither Study 1 nor Study 2 detected any significant differences in the association between IA and PWB for most privilege and identity groups. This suggests that, for most, greater IA is associated with more positive mental health outcomes, regardless of privilege or identity: an increased awareness of interdependent social systems and hierarchies may result in improved autonomy, self-sufficiency, value of personal development and group relationships (Greenwood, 2008; Yakushko, 2007), all of which are key elements of a healthy PWB.

Although Study 1 and Study 2 found that IA affected most identity groups similarly, Study 2 found that a higher IA was especially associated with better PWB for Black and African American participants. This finding is similar to a study by Bartholomew et al. (2018), which found that Black and African American women, who have a specific set of experiences and trauma associated with their gender and racial identity in the United States, benefited in unique ways from improving their ability to understand interdependent social hierarchies. Bartholomew et al. (2018) analyzed Black Lives Matter’s healing justice toolkit and compared it to Pablo Freire’s concept of CC and found that the reflection and action components of CC, practiced through mindfulness and discussion activities, helped women in Black Lives Matter navigate their trauma within a sociopolitical context and work toward healing for themselves and their communities. Specifically, by being in community and moving through the healing justice toolkit, and ostensibly the components of CC, Black Lives Matter members expanded their understanding of societal issues and gained a basis to historically and temporarily contextualize Black women’s health and PWB (2018). The findings by Bartholomew et al. (2018) suggests that perhaps increased critique and active healing in the face of intersecting social hierarchies and injustices promotes well-being in Black women especially, and that more work needs to be done to uncover other unique experiences for different identity groups.

Implications

The results of Study 1 and Study 2 provide new insight and clarification into the association between IA and PWB and highlight implications for multiple aspects of theory and practice. Past research has produced mixed results in determining the association between IA and PWB, and the current studies suggest that identity groups, CC-Eg and CC-CA may play important roles in predicting this association. Those who wish to develop mental health care interventions on the basis of IA must consider these factors in order to develop the most comprehensive and effective interventions. In an effort to provide people of every race, gender, sexual orientation, income, or education with the best (mental) health care, it is critical that researchers and care providers know how these processes affect individuals and groups differently.

If there is even a chance that people experience the relationship between IA, CC, and PWB differently, as suggested in Study 2, then future studies must strive to understand these differences, or else risk providing inadequate interventions or care by assuming homogeneity. The findings of the current studies suggest that, for mental health interventions to produce PWB benefits, participants must first identify or establish egalitarian values or else risk worse PWB outcomes.

The finding that egalitarianism plays a role in the association between IA and PWB, and that this trend is present among specific populations, may be of particular interest to universities and college students. Similar to past research, the current studies (Curtin et al., 2015; Greenwood, 2008) identified that young adults, college students, and activists were more likely to have a positive association between IA and PWB, likely due to their higher levels of CC-Eg (Muheljic & Drace, 2018).

This finding should be leveraged by college students and universities for developing their own mental health interventions on campuses: because college students are more likely to hold egalitarian values, they may be more likely to respond positively to interventions based in raising IA. This in turn could have benefits for university communities and would warrant administration investment. Additionally, the findings of the current studies may encourage university faculty and administrators
to integrate IA and CC-Eg into curriculum and programming on campus as an indirect route to boosting students’ PWB. Overall, college students and universities may want to examine the findings of the current studies and investigate how they might support their individual efforts to boost the PWB of their communities.

In addition to mental health interventions, the findings of the current studies have implications for universities and the general public, and how specific context may or may not prevent Black and African American universities and the general public, and how specific findings of the current studies have implications for PWB of their communities. A mix of experiences and opinions may result in uplifting each other. Black and African American communities centered on providing support and uplifting each other. Black and African American students, on the other hand, may be engaging with topics versus Black and African American people in the general public. Perhaps, on the one hand, Black and African American people in the general public may be more aware due to everyday and lifelong experiences with injustice.

This difference suggests that there may be differences in the way Black and African American college students are able to engage with these topics versus Black and African American people in the general public. Perhaps, on the one hand, Black and African American people in the general public may be more likely to be engaged with communities centered on providing support and uplifting each other. Black and African American students, on the other hand, may be engaging with these topics primarily in classroom settings where there may be a mix of experiences and opinions. A mix of experiences and opinions may result in a learning environment that is more exclusive and make Black and African American students aware of social hierarchies and injustices in ways that are more detrimental than beneficial to their mental health. University communities may want to learn from organizations for Black and African American people in the general public, and increase efforts to facilitate inclusive and respectful classrooms, in order to make the association between IA and mental PWB more accessible to Black and African American students.

The results of Study 1 and Study 2 may also have significant implications for current and future social justice movements. Activists, allies, and organizers alike should note how IA and the factors of CC interact to influence PWB. Specifically, the association between CC-Eg, CC-CA, and PWB may be useful to those who engage with social justice movements, used as a guide for participation while maintaining a healthy PWB. Study 2 identified that, for participants with high CC-Eg, CC-CA was positively associated with PWB; for those who believed in equality for all groups, greater agency, and participation in social and political actions (Diemer et al., 2014) was associated with better PWB. Activists and organizers should use this finding to support their members and allies by constructing programming, education and events around increasing egalitarianism and agency, and encouraging engagement with actions and events. The mental health of activists and allies is critical for the momentum and longevity of a social justice movement.

Limitations and Future Research
Although these findings on the relationship between IA and PWB are important, it is also necessary to note some important limitations and recommendations for future research. First, these studies were conducted in the United States, and the definitions of the factors included are culturally specific. Additionally, it is important to consider the meaning of PWB, and the implicit assumptions maintained by the current definition and the psychology community. Although the current studies referred to PWB as fairly universal, it is highly likely that many participants or groups would define it differently for themselves. To best quantify and track mental health changes, methods need to account for differences associated with group membership and definitions. Understanding differences in definitions will also improve researchers’ ability to fully measure and explain differences in the relationship between IA and PWB.

Second, the measures and procedures used in Study 1 and Study 2 could be refined to better understand and isolate trends, especially as they
relate to IP and groups. The results of Study 1 and Study 2 suggested that most groups, regardless of IP or identity, were affected similarly by IA. This finding may lead healthcare providers to take a “one-size-fits-all” approach toward administering IA interventions with the goal of improving PWB. However, future research should approach this finding that most groups are similarly affected by IA with caution due to weaknesses in the methodology. Social and cultural definitions of identity, group membership, and privilege are difficult to quantify due to their evolving and subjective nature. The current studies used the method by Blankenship et al. (2017) to quantify privilege, yet this method focused on “total” privilege and neglected important factors that contribute to privilege, such as specific race, gender, or class group identity. Study 2 attempted to account for differences by race, gender, sexual orientation, education, and income, but the question of the differences in privilege associated with these different identity groups remains.

Additionally, Study 1 was constrained by its lack of detailed demographic questions, especially as they relate to socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status varies greatly in the United States and can be connected to multiple other aspects of life (Pulsifer et al., 2019), and Study 1 drew from a population of college students who are more likely to come from families with greater socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Although Study 2 included more demographic questions on factors related to socioeconomic status, this method provides only a shallow analysis of such a complex factor and phenomena. The current studies’ failings in detecting different aspects of privilege and lack of socioeconomic variety may explain why neither study found a significant interaction between IA, identity group, or privilege and PWB. To truly determine if or how the association between IA and PWB is affected by identity, future studies should dive deeper into individual aspects of unique identity groups, such as race, gender, class, ability, etc., and develop better methods for quantifying, and assessing the effects of, social IP.

Third, although the current study examined the association between IA and PWB, it is important to consider that this association may be driven by PWB, as suggested by the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Psychology by Fredrickson (2004). This theory suggests that individuals’ emotions lead to complementary actions or feelings that may be narrow or broad depending on the emotion. In other words, it may be the individual’s PWB that impacts their engagement with elements of IA. In the context of this theory, the findings of the current studies may suggest that participants reported high levels of IA because they also reported higher PWB, rather than the inverse. The existence of this theory suggests that there is still more to learn about the relationship between, and the cycle of, PWB and engagement with IA.

Fourth, the current studies only assessed participants’ association between IA and PWB at one point in time. Future studies should examine how these processes change over time and with cognitive and social development. A longitudinal model will help determine how interventions and workshops may impact their intended audience. More research must be conducted to develop effective and age-appropriate interventions so that everyone can gain the most PWB benefits.

Finally, future research could analyze potential benefits of grounding an intervention method or space in a shared identity or experience. In other words, interventions may be most effective if they can raise IA and CC-Eg in a space that specifically acknowledges and values a specific group identity or experience and builds agency to take action. It is critical that interventions are developed in a way that empowers rather than discourages and highlights faults in the system rather than within the individual or specific groups. This way, any trends identified may more accurately represent the experiences of the group and population, and will place those experiences, and the people, back at the center of the research. More holistic research methods may help clarify the association between IA and PWB for individual identity groups and lead to more informed and comprehensive mental healthcare interventions. The progress of future studies and interventions, and their effectiveness, is necessary for developing advanced and intersectional mental health care.

Conclusions
Although the current studies did not focus on social justice or community action, further research on themes associated with intersectionality and PWB may be especially beneficial for those who wish to make social change. PWB is important for everyone and influences the ways and the extent to which people feel comfortable and confident engaging with the world. And as the world continues to diversify and globalize, it is critical to understand how such changes will impact everyone’s mental health and PWB.
References


Author Note. Materials and data for this study can be accessed at https://osf.io/g7bvx/. We have no known conflict of interest to disclose. This study was supported by the Macalester College Department of Psychology.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lydia S. Simpson, 7056 56th Ave NW, Seattle, WA, 98117. Email: lydiasimpson29@gmail.com

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