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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF WHITENESS IN SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT:
PREDICTIVE CONTEXTS AND TRAJECTORIES

by

Jesiah P. Salazar

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Human Development and Family Studies

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Logan, Utah

2024

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Role of Whiteness in Sociopolitical Development: Predictive Contexts and Trajectories

by

Jesiah P. Salazar, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2024

Major Professor: Dr. Diana Meter
Department: Human Development and Family Studies

The present study explores trajectories of critical consciousness development in White adolescents and the effect of sociopolitical discussions with parents and in the classroom on those trajectories. Longitudinal data were collected via online surveys. Participants were 994 White adolescents aged 13 to 18 from California, Minnesota, and West Virginia. This study utilized the data of 994 White participants aged 13 to 18. Participants were asked to self-report their willingness to engage in political behaviors, their awareness of inequality, and their sociopolitical efficacy. Participants also reported how frequently they discussed social and political issues at home and at school. Latent transition analysis revealed five distinct profiles of critical consciousness which were labeled acritical, armchair activists, politically indifferent, disillusioned naivete, and critically conscious. Participants were most likely to stay in their initial profile throughout high school. Further, participants who reached critical consciousness were unlikely to transition back to previous profiles. Those who transitioned between profiles often did so between the critically conscious and armchair activist groups. Family and

classroom discussions generally predicted lower likelihood of transitioning from the armchair activist to the critically conscious profile. Because political discussions seemed to predict lower likelihood of becoming critically conscious, future research should continue to longitudinally explore White youths' critical consciousness development and the content of their critical consciousness socialization. Future research should also examine critical conscious beginning at earlier ages, as the findings seem to indicate individuals' continuation in, rather than change from, critical consciousness profiles during high school.

(105 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Exploring the Role of Whiteness in Sociopolitical Development: Predictive Contexts and Trajectories

Jesiah P. Salazar

Critical consciousness is the ability to understand and challenge oppressive social systems, believe in one's power to create positive social change, and take actions toward making those changes. Sociopolitical development theory suggests that this awareness grows through a mix of social influences, opportunities for activism, and personal identity. Historically, this concept has been viewed as a way to empower youth of color to challenge systemic oppression, rather than just cope with it. Therefore, most research has focused on critical consciousness in youth of color. Recently, however, researchers have begun to explore critical consciousness among White adolescents. Using a person-centered approach, this study examines different patterns of critical consciousness in White adolescents and whether conversations with family and in the classroom predict changes in individual patterns of critical consciousness. The results revealed five distinct profiles, or groups, of critical consciousness among White adolescents: acritical, armchair activists, politically indifferent, disillusioned naivete, and critically conscious. The findings showed that White adolescents who are critically conscious in high school tend to remain so, although many move between the armchair activist and critically conscious groups. Family and classroom discussions about social issues were linked to a higher likelihood staying in one's profile and reduced the chance of becoming critically conscious. This research suggests that critical consciousness in White youth may be distinct compared to youth of color and can be influenced by family and classroom

environments. Understanding these distinctions can help educators and community organizers find better ways to foster critical consciousness in racially privileged adolescents.

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I have thought about this page – who to include, what to say – for nearly two years. Since the day I entered this program, I have received unending support, kindness, and generosity from friends and family. I could not have done this without them. No doubt, my circumstances have made completing this program challenging. Yet, through every second of it I have been the recipient of an immense outpouring of love and care from every person who possibly could have given it.

Despite two years of mentally listing all the people I want to thank, now that I am sitting at my desk, trying to write this page, I am at a loss for words. As I think back over the last two years and consider each person who offered me support, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. The opportunities I have been given should not have been possible under my circumstances, but because of the people in my corner, here I am.

This is not the most eloquently written page, but eloquence is difficult when you have no words. I cannot thank every one of you enough. For now, I hope a small section in this thesis will suffice.

Thank you to my family, for your encouragement and for teaching me at a young age to continue seeking knowledge. The curiosity you taught me has brought me here and continues to carry me forward in my career.

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Since I am thanking professors, I would also like to thank Dr. Amanda Ramos for helping me troubleshoot some of the problems I encountered while working through the analysis. Thank you for lending your expertise to this project.

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Jesiah P. Salazar

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews critical consciousness theory and its relevance in developmental science. The chapter also reviews sociopolitical development theory and the theory's stage model and introduces the need for further research.

Critical Consciousness

Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Freire's Theory

Paulo Freire introduced critical consciousness in his 1973 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. A Marxist, Freire's work primarily focused on proletarian farmers in Brazil who were economically oppressed by the wealthy ruling class. Unlike the sociological and economic level analysis found in most Marxist works, however, Freire focused on the psychological and educational aspects of oppressive systems. Specifically, he believed that education could be a tool of oppression by means of indoctrination, and that a new pedagogy was necessary to enable the oppressed to liberate themselves.

Two educational approaches were articulated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – banking education and problem-posing education. Freire (1973) explained that in the banking educational approach, teachers and students exist as opposites. Teachers were described as all-knowing arbiters of truth, and students as empty vessels in which to deposit the teacher's knowledge. It was theorized that this educational setup contributed

to the perpetuation of dominant, oppressive narratives. The purpose of this approach was to indoctrinate students to believe that the world was static and unchangeable.

Problem-posing education was Freire's (1973) counter to banking education. In this approach, the teacher and students were co-learners whose shared knowledge would lead to sociopolitical awakening. It was expected that students' (who were, at the time, adult Brazilian farmers) experiential knowledge would prove contradictory to the dominant narratives of the oppressive society. As contradictions emerged, the students and teacher would construct new ways to understand the world, eventually coming to a mutual understanding that social systems were socially constructed, and thus, changeable. This understanding, termed *critical reflection*, would empower the oppressed to act toward social reconstruction through *critical action*. Critical reflection and critical action together represent *critical consciousness*. Although the theory was originally tied to Freire's pedagogy, it has influenced other contemporary critical scholarship and become a focal point of developmental research, including antiracism, antifascism, feminism, and more (Aldana et al., 2019; Arbeit et al., 2020; Diemer et al., 2021; hooks, 1984; Watts et al., 2011). Some developmental scholars have postulated that critical consciousness is a key component of minoritized youth development (Watts et al., 2011), however, little is known of how it develops in majority-group adolescents.

Critical Reflection

Within developmental science, critical reflection is defined as the cognitive capacity to recognize, analyze, and critique oppressive social systems. It is the depth to which one critically analyzes social structures, systems, and their own place within them

(Freire, 1973). Freire described critical reflection as a process of unraveling and understanding social systems. Freire posited that through critical reflection individuals discover that social systems are socially constructed and, subsequently, that those systems can be reconstructed through action. To Freire, critical reflection was psychological liberation. He argued that through critical reflection, individuals realized the social world is not static unchangeable, but subjective to critical action.

Freire's (1973) description of critical reflection encapsulates some of the inherent difficulties in conceptualizing critical consciousness as a factor to be investigated scientifically. Efficacy, social analysis, and motivation all exist within the original construct of critical reflection. However, while related, these dimensions of critical reflection cannot all be measured using a unitary measurement tool (Rapa et al., 2020). Critical social analysis and motivation for action are distinct constructs (Rapa et al., 2020). Sociopolitical efficacy and critical reflection may not always cooccur (Hope et al., 2023). Thus, critical reflection in developmental science, for the sake of the scientific study of critical consciousness, is often operationalized as one's critical social analysis of systemic inequality (e.g., Diemer et al., 2017).

Given the unique nature of different oppressive systems, some scholars have produced measures to evaluate critical reflection of specific systems, like group-specific racism or hetero-sexism (Jemal et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2016; Shin et al., 2018). The systems-specific approach is important for understanding how individuals understand certain systems within society, however, a broader conceptualization of critical reflection is useful for measuring general sociopolitical development.

Critical Action

Critical action entails the specific behaviors one engages in to challenge oppressive systems. Freire (1973) conceptualized this as any action that spurred further critical reflection and promoted positive social change, however, there is some variation in how contemporary scholars conceptualize critical action. For some, critical action is primarily focused on cooperative, sociopolitical actions like demonstrating, participation in democratic institutions, or organizing (Diemer et al., 2017). For example, feminist scholar bell hooks (1994) argued that critical action was fundamentally collaborative political action. Contrarily, others suggest that critical action may more broadly consist of any political, communal, or interpersonal actions that intentionally challenge systemic oppression (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). This latter conceptualization is supported by Aldana et al.'s (2019) participatory action research study on youth antiracism. They found in their study that youth engaged in critical action at multiple contextual levels. Other studies have produced similar findings. Tyler et al. (2020) found that youths' specific actions were dependent on a variety of contextual factors, and Comeaux et al. (2021) found various strategies for antiracist resistance like informal support networking, classroom resistance to racially prejudiced comments, and organizing to support minoritized students' well-being.

One drawback to using very broad and inclusive conceptualizations of critical action is the challenge it creates for scientific research, as most quantitative studies do not assess the meaning or purpose behind particular civic actions. While critical action can involve various prosocial or communal behaviors, not all prosocial behaviors are critical action (Wray-Lake, 2023). Thus, critical action is generally operationalized more

narrowly as political behaviors aimed at dismantling and transforming oppressive social systems.

Praxis

Praxis, or the putting of theory into action, was central to Freire's (1973) theory. Originally, Freire contended that critical consciousness was both praxis and the product of praxis. In other words, critical reflection and critical action existed and occurred simultaneously, and as individuals engaged in praxis their reflection deepened and their actions became more advanced and cooperative. Freire (1973) outright rejected a binary view of critical consciousness, stating that reflection and action are co-occurring. In his original theory, reflection and action existed primarily within the teacher-student dialogical relationship. In other words, dialogue between students and teachers was critical action, and critical action was the process of reflecting. Dialogue, and the behaviors associated with it, were action and reflection at the same time. Empirical evidence demonstrates some support for the theorized relationship between reflection and action, but also suggests that critical consciousness development may involve more processes than just praxis and pedagogy (Banales et al, 2020).

Sociopolitical Efficacy

Some researchers have identified a weak relationship between critical reflection and critical action, challenging the notion that the two emerge in tandem (Aldana et al., 2019; Kiang et al., 2021). The gap between the two constructs is somewhat inconsistent with what Freire originally theorized, raising questions about how critical consciousness

develops and functions. Sociopolitical efficacy was identified as a third dimension of critical consciousness to bridge the gap between critical reflection and critical action (Rapa et al., 2022; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Sociopolitical efficacy reflects individuals' capability to affect social change and is reminiscent of Freire's notion that critical consciousness involves developing agency for critical action. Efficacy is largely related to one's sociopolitical context and is a major part of sociopolitical development theory's explanation of critical consciousness (Hope et al., 2023).

A Note on Measurement

Critical consciousness measurement has been a topic of debate for several years. Until recently, studies evaluating critical consciousness typically used proxy measures, as no universal measure had been developed (Diemer et al., 2017). Inconsistent measurements and conceptualizations of the dimensions of critical consciousness have raised questions about cross-study validity. Studies using different measures occasionally return contradictory results (Heberle et al., 2020). In response to this problem, several measurements of the different dimensions of critical consciousness have been developed over the past several years (Diemer et al., 2017; Jemal et al., 2020; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Shin et al., 2016).

Some measurement tools assess both critical reflection and action (e.g., Diemer et al., 2017), whereas some only assess critical reflection with items pertaining to specific social systems (e.g., Jemal et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2016). While each tool carries certain practical differences, the conceptualization of critical consciousness remains fairly consistent across all of them. Although some scales are more general than others, critical

consciousness consists of three main dimensions: critical reflection, critical action, and sociopolitical efficacy/critical motivation (Rapa et al., 2020).

Some evidence suggests that measures for critical action may not be specific enough to accurately measure critical action (Salazar et al., 2023). These measures (Diemer et al., 2017) assess sociopolitical behaviors, but do not always specify the purpose behind those behaviors, which raises questions about whether latent variables for critical action accurately measure the construct (Wray-Lake, 2023). Some scholars have created measures that specify the purpose of behaviors, like Aldana et al.'s (2019) *antiracist action scale*. The current study will utilize proxy measures of sociopolitical behavior rather than an established measure of critical consciousness as the data were collected prior to the creation of a measurement tool. However, I hope to mitigate some of the challenges of scale validity and create theoretical consistency by conceptualizing critical consciousness as the whole of its parts, rather than a set of distinct yet related constructs.

Sociopolitical Development Theory

Sociopolitical development theory (SPD) posits that critical consciousness emerges in stages via developmental processes at the intersection of critical social analysis, opportunity for action within contexts, sociopolitical efficacy, and critical action (Hope et al., 2023). Sociopolitical Development Theory is rooted in critical consciousness theory, but is broader in its conceptualization (Hope et al., 2023; Watts et al., 2003). Whereas critical consciousness originally focused on pedagogy, SPD expanded

it by combining Freire's (1973) praxis with developmental contexts, identity, and cultural assets (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Simply put, Sociopolitical Development Theory is an ecological framework for understanding the processes through which critical consciousness develops. It distinguishes critical consciousness as a measurable developmental outcome and proposes that its components (critical reflection, sociopolitical efficacy, and critical action) interact with sociohistorical contexts of racism, opportunity structures, and socialization to promote further levels of critical consciousness (Hope et al., 2023). By establishing critical consciousness as a developmental outcome and sociopolitical development as the process, the theory aims to disentangle some of the conceptual difficulties of Freire's original theory and enables scholars to study these phenomena at greater depth. The utility of SPD for framing the critical consciousness of youth from majority groups is not fully understood, however.

It cannot be overstated that SPD was originally conceptualized as a liberatory theory for Black youth (Watts et al., 1999). It drew inspiration from Black culture, spirituality, and liberation movements, and informed community programs for Black youth. Because of this, certain parts of the theory, like the importance of experiences of racism in sociopolitical development, may not apply directly to White adolescents. Some studies that utilized an SPD framework have included White youth, but few have used the theory to study White youths' critical consciousness explicitly (Plummer et al., 2021). White youths' critical consciousness may not fit directly within the sociopolitical development framework, however, I present an overview of the theory to contrast the ways White youths' critical consciousness may emerge compared to that of youth of color.

Five Statures: The ‘What’ of SPD

SPD theory posits that critical consciousness emerges in five stages: *acritical*, *adaptive*, *precritical*, *critical*, and *liberated*. Each stage includes unique characteristics reflective of interactions between the individual’s critical reflection, action, and sociopolitical efficacy. Components of each stage may manifest differently depending on certain contexts. For example, in contexts lacking opportunities for political action, someone high in critical reflection may not engage in political behaviors but may focus on interpersonal or community actions to challenge the effects of oppressive structures (Comeaux et al., 2021; Hope et al., 2023; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

The *acritical* stage represents a lack of awareness of inequality. Individuals in this stage demonstrate low levels of critical reflection, action, and efficacy. This stage is marked by just-world beliefs, or the belief that all people are treated equally and have equal opportunity regardless of SES, race/ethnicity, sex or gender, etc., as common in acritical individuals (Hope et al., 2023; Watts et al., 2003). This corresponds with what Freire (1973) and contemporary critical scholars call naïve or magical thinking (Jemal et al., 2020).

The *adaptive* stage is characterized by a developing awareness of inequality and simultaneous reinforcement of the status-quo. Inequality in this stage may be seen as something that either cannot be changed or should not be changed, so the individual learns to adapt to the oppressive system (Hope et al., 2023). In this stage, individuals’ civic or social actions may not necessarily constitute critical action. Rather, political behaviors may reinforce the status quo as the individual seeks self-elevation within the

system. This stage may be slightly different for individuals with more privilege than others. For someone who experiences marginalization, this stage involves adapting to the system to maximize personal benefit. A person who is privileged by the system may not need to adapt to it, but could reinforce it, intentionally or unintentionally (Duckitt & Sibley, 2016; Seider, 2011). Given the U.S.' history of racism and White supremacy, White youth who appear to be in the adaptive stage could actually be acting out of colorblindness, rather than adaptation (Dull et al., 2022).

The *precritical* stage involves individuals' continued development of critical reflection to a point where they begin to view adaptive behaviors as non-viable. In the precritical stage, awareness of inequality becomes more critical and evaluative of social systems (Watts et al., 2003). Recognizing oneself as a part of an oppressive system, the individual begins to see the need for radical social change, rather than personal adaptation to the system. Some empirical research indicates that the emergence of critical reflection may be connected to cultural socialization and social identity (Golden et al., 2021). Other work also suggests that experiences with racism predict increased critical reflection (Hope et al., 2020). It is less clear, however, what contributes to White youths' growth into the precritical stage. Experiences with other forms of marginalization at the intersection of other identities could predict sociopolitical development, however, the salience of Whiteness could also be a confounding factor (Godfrey et al., 2019; Hershberg & Johnson, 2019). Evidence indicates that critical reflection involves recognizing and identifying Whiteness and privilege, a distinct process from ethnic/racial identity development in youth of color (Dull et al., 2022; Helms, 1995). Thus, growth

into the precritical stage may involve different factors for youth of different racial backgrounds.

The *critical* stage of SPD is marked by high levels of critical social analysis. Individuals in this stage are highly aware of systemic injustices and want to challenge them. However, in the face of new knowledge of injustice, the creation of a more just society is a daunting task. Individuals in this stage, despite being highly reflective, may still spend time learning about what they can do to create social impact. Those in the critical stage are not necessarily political actors yet. Some studies have identified individuals with similar profiles (high critical reflection, low critical action) and labeled them “armchair activists” (e.g. Schwarzenhal et al., 2023). In one study, Schwarzenhal et al. (2023) found worse socioemotional outcomes for armchair activists compared to activists. It is possible that poor socioemotional outcomes for individuals in the critical stage could be due to feelings of inefficacy concerning social issues. SPD contends that efficacy and empowerment to create change may be context dependent and may be the difference between being critical and being liberated (Hope et al., 2023).

The *liberated* stage is the final stage of SPD. Liberated individuals are those who are highly critically reflective and who believe they can influence change. Much like Freire (1973) argued for the critically conscious, the liberated discover that malleability of the social world is possible. These individuals are fully agentic, acting to construct a more just society.

It should be noted that the stage model of SPD is not intended to be rigid. Scholars agree that certain contexts and assets may influence how each stage develops and manifests. Development across stages may not always be linear (Watts et al., 2003).

Instead of being a prescriptive model, the stage model of SPD is intended to be a tool to help scholars assess where individuals are in their development and what may be most helpful in fostering further development (Hope et al., 2023). The stage model is not used very often; the process model was introduced to address nuances in how critical consciousness develops and is more commonly relied upon. However, recent scholarship suggests that it may be a useful tool for evaluating sociopolitical development (Hope et al., 2023).

Sociopolitical Development and Privilege

Because SPD and critical consciousness are rooted in critical, liberatory theory, much of the literature understandably focuses on minority youth of color. Critical consciousness was originally conceptualized as a pedagogical theory intended to empower oppressed farmers in Brazil to economically liberate themselves (Freire, 1973). SPD was specifically created to emphasize social justice and empower Black American youth to fight systemic racism in its various manifestations (Watts et al., 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Due to the emphasis on minority youth liberation and the United States' racialized sociocultural environment, studies on White youth SPD and critical consciousness are sparse. Yet, many scholars agree that social progress requires the critical consciousness of both the privileged and the marginalized (Diemer et al., 2020; Dull et al., 2022; Hershberg & Johnson, 2019; Jemal, 2017).

The most obvious explanation for this gap in the literature is that models of critical consciousness and SPD were created to explain the development of

marginalized individuals specifically, not those belonging to the majority racial group. White youth therefore may not follow the same developmental stages of SPD, or may take a different path to critical consciousness than those who experience marginalization. Whereas SPD involves empowerment to challenge personally relevant systems of oppression for minority youth, it requires White youth to acknowledge and challenge some systems that privilege them. Indeed, some literature indicates that, to some degree, critical consciousness may not be as adaptive for White youth as it is for racially minoritized youth (Tyler et al., 2019). Specifically, White identity may be a barrier to sociopolitical development (Hershberg & Johnson, 2019). Whereas confronting systems of oppression generally leads to positive outcomes for youth of color, doing so may be psychologically disruptive for some White youth with colorblind attitudes, invoking feelings of fear and guilt (Maker-Castro et al., 2022; Spanierman et al., 2008). The potential negative outcomes associated with White youths' critical consciousness can be attributed to the way racist systems socialize narratives about race (Spanierman et al., 2008). White youth may be socialized to believe that social justice will lead to disadvantages to the dominant group; however, theoretically and empirically, privileged youth who actively fight social injustice likely experience positive outcomes too (Freire, 1973; Maker-Castro et al., 2022). Indeed, Freire (1973) argued that systems of oppression uniquely dehumanize those who are privileged, and thus, it is also to the benefit of privileged people to challenge those systems.

At the same time, feelings of guilt in recognizing one's privilege may catalyze change among White youth (Dull et al., 2022), which differs from the experience of confronting systems of oppression as a minoritized youth. The precursors to changes in

SPD may therefore vary between White youth and youth of color. In light of scant empirical evidence and theoretical challenges, some scholars have raised questions about how to assess critical consciousness and SPD among White youth (Jemal, 2017). Freire (1973) articulated that oppression was a problem for both the oppressed and oppressor as a dehumanizing and debasing system, but that the processes of critical consciousness are distinct between those two groups. Jemal (2017) argues that both marginalized and privileged must develop critical consciousness for the purposes of social justice. Further research is needed to understand how critical consciousness emerges in racially privileged youth.

Extensive research has found that multiple promotive, socializing contexts foster sociopolitical development in youth of color (Heberle et al., 2020). Specifically, schools, peers, and parents play a major role in how racial and ethnic-minority adolescents develop critical consciousness (Banales et al., 2020; Diemer & Li, 2011; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). However, these contexts are often connected to youths' experiences with racism, ethnic culture, and the sociohistorical impacts of American racism (Hope et al., 2023). Because American White youths' experiences with systemic racism privileges them, the relationship between sociopolitical development and socializing contexts may not function the same way as it does for minoritized youth. Some studies have demonstrated links between socializing contexts, such as intergroup contact, and distinct dimensions of critical consciousness (Dull et al., 2022), but few have explored critical consciousness in White youth using a sociopolitical development framework.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, using a sociopolitical development framework, I aim to explore White youths' profiles of critical consciousness using latent

profile analysis. Second, using latent transition analysis, I aim to assess the degree to which White youths' socialization contexts predict their sociopolitical development over time.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter establishes the theoretical assumptions underlying this study and reviews the existing literature related to critical consciousness, Whiteness and social privilege, and contexts for promoting critical consciousness.

Assumptions and Definitions

I approach this study using Critical Race Theory as a metatheoretical framework (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This study begins with the assumption that systemic racism exists and is salient in American society. Systemic racism can explain inequalities across racial and ethnic groups, including disparities in wealth, power, political representation, violence, education, incarceration, and more (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014). According to this framework, because systemic racism is embedded in American history, culture, and policy, the lived experiences of individuals across racial groups in the U.S. differ from each other. Though oppression exists at multiple intersections of social identity, the American experience with privilege and oppression cannot be disentangled from the U.S.' history of racism. Historical racism, including slavery, Jim Crow laws, redlining, segregation, anti-immigration laws, internment, colonization, and more, is inseparably interwoven with inequality across racial groups in the U.S (Malawa et al., 2021). Intersectional perspectives highlight that racially marginalizing systems impact individuals' experiences at the intersection of each of their social identities, suggesting

that racism pervasively and consistently contributes to experiences of privilege and marginalization (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). It should be noted that privilege and marginalization are not virtues or character traits; rather, they are the effects of systems. To experience either does not reflect anything about a person's character but does affect their experiences.

The term "Whiteness" is used frequently in this paper. Whiteness does not refer to some trait inherent to White people, but to a system that generally privileges White people. Whiteness should not be thought of as an essentialist trait, but as a consequence of racism. Whiteness includes colorblindness, White-normativity (the often hidden cultural narrative that to be White is to be normal), and the general invisibility of racism to those who are not directly harmed by it (Hazelbaker et al., 2022). Race is a social construct, and thus differences and inequalities commonly found across racial groups cannot be ascribed to race itself, but to the systems that have historically segregated and stratified racial groups (Castillo & Gillborn, 2023). Ideally, race should not be important, but because of our history it plays a salient role in how people across racial groups experience, analyze, and react to social systems, making race and the systems surrounding it important contexts to consider in developmental science. Thus, I posit that Whiteness, as a consequence of racism, is an important component of sociopolitical development because it influences the way individuals think about the systems in which they have been socialized.

In this study, I refer to Sociopolitical Development Theory, which has been monumental in the work of Black liberation. SPD began as Black liberation theory and continues to be a vehicle for research that benefits the lives of racially marginalized

communities and individuals. In this study, however, it is used primarily to contrast the study findings with its theoretical framework to demonstrate distinctions of White youths' critical consciousness to that of youth of color. SPD is a useful theoretical framework for analyzing critical consciousness development within the context of American racism. I chose to contrast my findings with those of previous SPD theoretical research not to appropriate, commodify, or reduce the power of the theory, but to demonstrate how the process of critical consciousness development may differ between majority and minoritized youth in the same national context. Radical social change requires the labor of all who are affected by systemic oppression, including those who are privileged by it (Jemal et al., 2020).

Process Model: The How of SPD

Watts and Guessous (2006) created a process model of SPD to address limitations to the stage model (Hope et al., 2023). The process model involves overlaps between the dimensions of critical consciousness and environmental factors. While the stages of SPD reflect certain profiles of critical consciousness, the dimensions of critical consciousness within the profile are part of an ongoing developmental process. This builds on Freire's (1973) theory that critical consciousness was not just a product, but praxis that leads to deeper critical consciousness.

The dimensions of critical consciousness do not solely contribute to SPD, however. Opportunity structures, which are promotive contexts that support critical consciousness development, may contribute to how critical consciousness manifests.

Opportunity structures could include classroom opportunities for discussions about social issues, chances to become involved in community programs, school government, and any other opportunity specifically designed to get youth critically engaged in socially transformative activities. Action that stems from opportunity structures could be interpersonal, communal, or political (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2006).

Other environmental factors are also important. Individual contexts, including personal history and socioeconomic status, may affect sociopolitical development (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). The specific, immediate sociopolitical climate also affects how critical consciousness manifests and develops (Hope et al., 2023; Rapa et al., 2022). Finally, sociocultural factors, specifically relating to experiences of oppression, social identity, and cultural socialization contribute to SPD (Briggs et al., 2021; Golden et al., 2021; Hope et al., 2020; Watts & Halkovic, 2022).

The sociocultural factors of SPD raise questions about how or if SPD “works” as a theoretical framework for privileged individuals. While experiences of marginalization and racial identity predict SPD, it is less clear how privilege functions within the processes of SPD. Some evidence suggests that privilege acts as a barrier to critical consciousness (Seider, 2011). Given the racial history of the United States and the central role race plays in SPD, it may be especially important to consider the role of Whiteness in in majority-youths’ critical consciousness.

Critical Consciousness and Whiteness

Critical consciousness has been applied to a variety of social systems, including racism, sexism, queerphobia, ableism, and wealth inequality (Diemer et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2018). Critical consciousness of specific forms of oppression are typically assessed within the populations that are affected by those systems. This approach is theoretically sound; a core tenet of SPD is that the sociohistorical contexts of oppression are fundamental to understanding the development of critical consciousness (Hope et al., 2023). Further, Freire (1973) suggested that critical consciousness was a process of liberation of the oppressed.

Despite the theoretical orientation toward marginalized peoples' self-liberation, scholars who study critical consciousness seem to agree that allyship and privilege are important concepts to consider. From calls to study the intersections of oppression and privilege (Godfrey et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2023), to arguments that it is necessary to study critical consciousness in privileged populations (Jemal, 2017), most agree that social change requires the labor of all (Plummer et al., 2022).

Scholars have wrestled with how critical consciousness develops and functions for privileged individuals. Although measures of critical consciousness have demonstrated strong reliability across scores of diverse groups, it is not clear whether demonstrations of sociopolitical allyship is functionally the same as critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2020; Tyler et al., 2019). Whereas marginalized youth learn to challenge systems that oppress them, privileged youth benefit from oppressive

systems, which could make engaging in actual, meaningful action to challenging these systems difficult (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004).

For example, in a study of positive youth development and critical consciousness, Tyler et al. (2019) found that critical reflection predicted positive youth development in youth of color but was negatively associated with PYD in White youth. Spanierman et al. (2004) identified several psychosocial “costs” to White individuals when asked to confront systemic racism, including feelings of guilt, fear, and empathy. While critical reflection is not limited to racism, it is possible that analyzing unjust systems in the U.S. requires some level of confrontation with racism and racial privilege, which may contribute to negative feelings and mitigating further reflection (Spanierman et al., 2008). Interestingly, political activism and critical action do seem to predict positive outcomes even among White youth, though more so for youth of color than for White youth (Frost et al., 2019; Maker-Castro et al., 2022).

Beyond the psychosocial implications of critical consciousness for White youth, there is also evidence that critical consciousness may simply develop differently across ethnic groups. In a latent-profile analysis of critical consciousness, Godfrey et al. (2019) found that profile membership was predicted by different ethnic backgrounds (i.e. Black and Chinese American). They suggested that the different ways members of each ethnic group experience racism could be related to how they develop critical consciousness. It seems likely that White youth who do not experience racial marginalization may develop critical consciousness differently than youth of color. Rapa et al. (2022) found that classroom climate was weakly correlated with critical reflection compared to other components of critical consciousness (e.g., critical action), and that the effect was even

smaller for White students. The evidence supports the notion that critical reflection is likely mostly related to individuals' actual experiences with marginalization, particularly racial marginalization (Diemer et al., 2017; Rapa et al., 2022). The evidence at hand raises questions about how individuals who are not racially marginalized but are privileged by racist systems develop critical consciousness.

It must be noted that White youth can and do face marginalization at other intersections of their social identities. Indeed, to be oppressed for one's sexuality, gender, or social class is not exclusive to racially minoritized individuals. The evidence at hand is not to suggest that Whiteness is the end-all of privilege, or that race is the only important factor in critical consciousness, but that it plays a salient role in how it develops. For example, Hershberg and Johnson (2019) found support for this through extensive interviews with working-class White men who, though economically marginalized, frequently made individual and fatalistic attributions to their own and others' oppression. One possible explanation for the findings is that masculinity and Whiteness are intertwined with meritocracy, which could complicate the processes involved in SPD (Miller, 2019). In a person-centered study, Dull et al. (2022) found that different profiles of "race consciousness" predicted critical action, indicating that race and racial context play an important role in White adolescents' SPD. Finally, Hazelbaker et al. (2022) proposed that awareness of racial privilege is a necessary step in children and adolescents' anti-racist development. All the evidence together suggests that Whiteness is an important, systemic context to consider in studying youths' critical consciousness.

Though privilege appears to be a confounding factor in youth SPD (Seider et al., 2011), certain contexts and opportunity structures are still likely to promote critical

consciousness among White youth. Researchers have found that parent and peer socialization, school climate, community involvement, and experiences of marginalization all contribute to youths' critical consciousness development (Heberle et al., 2020). Some studies have identified ways in which racial and ethnic socialization contribute to critical consciousness (Banales et al., 2020). However, few studies have examined predictive factors of critical consciousness in the context of Whiteness.

Profiles of Critical Consciousness

As previously established in Chapter 1, sociopolitical development theory posits five stages of development: acritical, adaptive, precritical, critical, and liberated. Each stage represents varying levels of the dimensions of critical consciousness, and each permutation of those dimensions holds distinct developmental meaning. For example, though the critical and liberated stages each involve high levels of critical reflection, they are distinguished by empowerment and action, suggesting that high levels of reflection may not necessarily signify the same levels of development across individuals. This is supported by research which has found outcomes for critically conscious youth differ based on their levels of sociopolitical efficacy (Godfrey et al., 2019).

Given apparent developmental differences underlying permutations of critical consciousness, person-centered approaches seem appropriate for the study of critical consciousness. Some studies have examined critical consciousness using person-centered approaches like latent profile analysis; however, few studies have done so to examine critical consciousness specifically in White adolescents.

Given the theoretical differences in how sociopolitical and racial contexts may affect White youths' critical consciousness compared to youth of color, it is possible that latent profile analysis may identify unique profiles of critical consciousness distinct to this population. Though limited evidence provides support for various portions of the stage model of SPD among White youth (e.g. Parigoris et al., 2024), the psychological and behavioral function of reflection and action could be distinct among this group and thus result in unique profiles. Whereas critical consciousness in minoritized youth involves becoming empowered in the context of social and political disenfranchisement, efficacy to create social change could be meaningfully different for youth who are not directly impacted and disenfranchised by racial injustice. In short, critical consciousness is likely socially, politically, and psychologically different for White youth than it is for youth of color. These potential differences could be represented by unique profiles of critical reflection, sociopolitical efficacy, and political behavior.

Studies have repeatedly found weak to moderate relationships between critical reflection and action, indicating that the dimensions of critical consciousness are theoretically related, independent constructs (Kiang et al., 2019). For example, studies in which staple measurement tools were developed found only moderate relationships between critical reflection and action (Diemer et al., 2017; Rapa et al., 2020). Individuals could be high in reflection but low in action (Aldana et al., 2019; Kiang et al., 2021), a phenomenon that may reflect the critical stage. Evidence from other latent profile analyses supports the existence of at least the acritical, critical, and liberated stages (Godfrey et al., 2019; Schwarzenhal et al., 2023), though these are likely not exhaustive. These profiles alone indicate that youth are either entirely unaware of inequality or

deeply analytical, excluding profiles for adolescents who may still be developing awareness and efficacy. Further, most studies have not incorporated sociopolitical efficacy as a dimension of critical consciousness, and some conflate it with critical motivation, a related but distinct construct (Hope et al., 2023).

However, limited evidence for the statuses of sociopolitical development exists primarily in studies with predominantly youth of color samples. Because sociopolitical development theory is heavily built on experiences of discrimination, racial/ethnic socialization, and sociohistorical contexts, it is less clear how sociopolitical development emerges in White youth and whether White youth follow the same patterns of development. Thus, the first aim of this study is to examine profiles of critical consciousness in White adolescents using latent profile analysis. The second aim of this study is to explore how family, peer, and school-based sociopolitical communication predicts sociopolitical development in White adolescents. This will allow for the examination of profiles of critical consciousness among White youth and if this differs from the statuses outlined in the theory of SPD for marginalized youth.

Contexts for Sociopolitical Development

According to the process model of SPD, critical consciousness and socialization contexts are both necessary components of sociopolitical development. Individuals with different profiles of critical consciousness may respond differently to certain contexts, For example, Wray-Lake and Shubert (2019) found that contexts for civic development predicted growth dependent on participants' age. Parents became less important, and

friends became more important for civic development in later adolescence, indicating that the role of each promotive context may depend on within-person factors (Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019). It is possible that contexts may predict transitions differently from profile to profile.

Further, given the evidence that critical consciousness may function differently based on experiences of marginalization, sociohistorical contexts, and privilege, it is possible that certain contexts may predict changes in critical consciousness profiles differently for youth of different backgrounds. Banales et al. (2020) found that relationships between voting, critical reflection, and sociopolitical action were different for Black and Latine adolescents. It is reasonable, then, to expect that White youths' critical consciousness profiles may be different within socialization contexts.

Communication

Consistent with Freire's (1973) belief that communication and dialogue were central to critical consciousness, several studies have identified communicative socialization as a predictor of civic development. Friends, parents, and schools all act as socializing agents through which children and adolescents learn to reflect on social structures and develop the capacity for political action (Heberle et al., 2020).

Family

Families likely play an important role in youths' critical consciousness. In a study by Wray-Lake and Shubert (2019), parent communication about social issues predicted civic development for younger-aged youth. Parents also play an important role in youths' racial and ethnic socialization, which predicts critical consciousness (Anyiwo et al., 2023;

Banales et al., 2020). Some work indicates that different approaches to racial socialization may lead to different outcomes, particularly for White youth (Dull et al., 2022). For example, parents of White youth often socialize colorblind attitudes during conversations involving race with their children in hopes that it will help prevent the development of racist beliefs (Dull et al., 2022). Though well-intentioned, evidence suggests that this approach could reinforce racial essentialism and could foster prejudiced attitudes (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Pahlke et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021) and could increase the likelihood that youth respond negatively to new information about social and systemic injustice (Spanierman et al., 2009).

On the other hand, parents who engage in race-conscious dialogue with their White children may foster a recognition of Whiteness, an important antecedent to critical consciousness (Hagerman, 2014; Hazelbaker et al., 2022). Parents who discuss social issues and avoid colorblindness may socialize critical reflection (Dull et al., 2022).

While studies have identified the ways in which parental socialization predicts specific dimensions of critical consciousness, more research is needed to understand how this context relates to critical consciousness as a holistic construct. Family communication leading to more developed critical consciousness in early adolescence may predict transitions through stages of sociopolitical development over time.

Friends

Using latent transition analysis, Wray-Lake and Shubert (2019) found that communicating with friends about social and political issues predicted growth into more engaged profiles of civic engagement for adolescents. The results of the study raise questions about whether peer and friend communication could be related to sociopolitical

development, a liberation-centric form of civic development (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Other studies have found evidence that peer networks may socialize critical consciousness for marginalized youth (Diemer & Li, 2011; Golden et al., 2021). For White youth in particular, peers may play an important and unique role in their critical consciousness. Evidence suggests that White youth who have more cross-racial friendships and engage in more conversations about race and ethnicity are more likely to engage in critical action (Dull et al., 2022). Someone socialized by their family to hold colorblind beliefs may require experiences with diverse ideas outside the home to undergo further sociopolitical development (Hazelbaker et al., 2022). It is possible, then, that peer communication could contribute to how critical consciousness manifests in White adolescents'.

Schools

Finally, extant research has identified school as an important context for youth critical consciousness. Freire (1973) theorized that education was central to critical consciousness, and multiple studies have corroborated that theory. For example, in a study of different pedagogical approaches in diverse youth, Seider et al. (2017) found that different pedagogies predicted specific dimensions of critical consciousness. Several studies have identified open classroom climate, the degree to which classrooms are safe environments for open discussion on social and political issues, as an important context for youths' critical reflection (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Rapa et al., 2022). For White students, classroom discussions may be particularly important for fostering critical consciousness, as they may expose students to new ideas and narratives that are less likely to be found at home (Dull et al., 2022). Discussions about social issues in the

classroom could help students recognize and reflect on social injustices and systemic inequalities, contributing to critical consciousness. Most studies regarding critical school socialization have centered on Black and Latine youth, however, and further research is needed to understand how classroom political discussion contributes to White youths' critical consciousness (Golden & Byrd, 2022; Kubi et al., 2022).

Whiteness, SPD Profiles, and Communication Contexts

It is possible that different profiles of critical consciousness may reveal distinct nuances in White youths' sociopolitical development that differ from existing theory. Some work indicates that the dimensions of critical consciousness are distinct yet related (Diemer & Rapa, 2016, Kiang et al., 2021). When researchers have evaluated these dimensions together, rather than as separate variables, they have identified unique outcomes based on different profiles of critical consciousness (Godfrey et al., 2019; Schwarzenhal et al., 2023). This evidence combined critical consciousness theory indicates that critical consciousness may best be studied as a holistic construct. Variable-centered approaches that focus on specific dimensions of critical consciousness may not fully elucidate how critical consciousness emerges in adolescence (Schwarzenhal et al., 2023). Thus, some research has highlighted the need for more person-centered approaches to understand the complex nuances involved in adolescents' critical consciousness (Briggs et al., 2023; Godfrey et al., 2019). Given the distinctions between how youth of color and White youth experience racialized social systems, utilizing

person-centered approaches may help elucidate the distinct nuances of White youths' critical consciousness that differs from that of minoritized youth.

Current Study

This study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring critical consciousness profiles in a national sample of White youth using latent profile analysis, and examining how family, peers, and schools contribute to transitions between those profiles over time using latent transition analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Data for this study came from the Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project, an accelerated longitudinal, mixed-methods study of 2,467 nine- to 18-year-old diverse youth (50% White) from California, Minnesota, and West Virginia. Data were collected in five waves from 2014 to 2018. Participants were surveyed on five domains related to civic development: civic beliefs, civic behaviors, civic skills, socialization contexts, and character (Syversten et al., 2015). The data from this project have all been deidentified and made available for public access through OSF. The original researchers offered a cleaned and imputed version of the data to use for this study. Data were coded according to the grade participants were in at the time of collection, rather than the data collection wave, to minimize missing data limitations and analyze transitions in as wide a sample as possible. Thus, all data were analyzed at the grade level, regardless of what grade participants were in during a given collection wave.

Participants

Participants for this study included a subsample of White adolescents from the original project. Because critical consciousness involves reasoning about social issues more relevant to older adolescents (Tyler et al., 2020), and to minimize the possibility of model invariance across time points, only participants with 9th to 12th grade data who participated at least two occasions were included in the sample. Missing data due to

attrition was imputed by the Roots project researchers; missing data for participants who aged out of the study were treated as missing.

Measures

Measures were developed by adapting existing measures and revising them to align better with the goals of the Roots project and the reading abilities of the adolescent participants.

Critical Consciousness

Data collection and measurement construction for this project began prior to the publishing of any established measures of critical consciousness. Today, Diemer et al.'s (2017) *critical consciousness scale* is frequently used to measure critical consciousness. Prior to the development of the critical consciousness scale, most studies utilized proxy measures of critical consciousness. Although the proxy measures used in this study are not exactly the same as the now established scales, they are conceptually similar in that they measure awareness of American inequality and political behavior.

Critical Reflection

Participants' reflection on injustice, unfairness, and inequality in the United States was measured using an adapted scale from Flanagan et al. (2007). This scale includes three items pertaining to political representation and unequal opportunity (e.g., "In America, certain groups have fewer chances to get ahead.") Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

McDonald's omega reliability coefficient was .73 and .71 for 12th and 9th graders, respectively, and .67 and .68 for 10th and 11th graders. Profiles were estimated using the observed variables rather than an aggregate score, but it should be noted that the lower reliability could have impacted profile estimation. Specifically, the second item of the subscale may have been problematic to internal consistency. Ultimately, this item was left in the analysis due to nuance it introduced to profile interpretation. This is highlighted in Chapter IV.

Critical Action

Critical action was measured by asking participants about their likelihood of engagement in a few political behaviors deemed most developmentally appropriate and relevant to the sample. These items were written specifically for the Roots study by Syversten et al. (2015) but reflect typical measures within civic development literature. Items include a range of possible interpersonal, local, and political behaviors (e.g., "Share my opinions about political issues with others" and "Participate in a rally or protest for a cause") and were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *I wouldn't do this* to (6) *I will do this or have already done this*.

This study used three of the original 10 items that were not confounded by age-related ability to engage in certain behaviors and to avoid overcomplicating the model. Some of the original items included behaviors that may be inaccessible to younger adolescents, such as "Vote in national elections" or "Volunteer to campaign for a political candidate." The three selected items represent behaviors broadly accessible at each age level, are representative of age-appropriate behaviors at interpersonal, communal, and political levels, and are consistent with other youth-formulated measures from other

research (Aldana et al., 2019). McDonald's omega reliability coefficients ranged from .78 to .81, indicating good internal consistency for the chosen items.

Sociopolitical Efficacy

Sociopolitical efficacy was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Reeb et al.'s (1998) *Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale*. Items assessed how capable participants feel of making a positive difference (e.g., "I can use what I know to solve real-life problems in my community"). Participants were asked to report how much they agree with each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*. McDonald's omega reliability coefficients ranged from .76 to .79, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 1*Profile Indicator Variables, Scales, and ω*

Variable Name for grade N	Item Prompt	Scale	McDonald's ω
<i>Critical Action</i>	Have you ever done or plan to do the following?	1 (I wouldn't do this) – 6 (I have already done this)	.78 to .81
gNCra2	"I share my opinions about political issues with others."		
gNCra3	"Participate in a rally or protest for a cause."		
gNCra5	"Talk to school staff about an issue to improve the school."		
<i>Awareness of Inequality</i>	How much do you agree or disagree with the following?	1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree)	.67 to .73
gNAoe1	"In America, some groups do not have equal chances to participate in government."		
gNAoe2	"In America, political leaders only listen to the opinions of certain groups."		
gNAoe3	"In America, certain groups have fewer chances to get ahead."		
<i>Sociopolitical Efficacy</i>	How much do you agree or disagree with the following?	1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree)	.76 to .79
gNEff1	I can make a positive difference in my community.		
gNEff2	Even though I am a teenager, there are ways for me to get involved in my community.		
gNEff3	I can use what I know to solve "real-life problems in my community.		

Communication Contexts*Family Communication*

Family communication about sociopolitical issues was assessed with a three-item subscale. Two items were adapted from Kahne et al.'s (2005) *California Civic Index*, and one was an original item written by Syversten et al. (2005) for the Roots project.

Participants were asked about how frequently their family discussed social and political issues (e.g., "In my family, I talk about times when people are treated unfairly.") Items

were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very often*. McDonald's omega ranged from .80 to .81, indicating good internal consistency. A separate variable representing the mean of the combined items at each grade was calculated and used for analysis.

Friends Communication

Communication about sociopolitical issues with friends was assessed using the same three items as the family subscale, but with "friends" in the place of "family" for each item (e.g., "My friends and I talk about problems facing our community"). Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very often*. McDonald's omega ranged from .77 to .78. A separate variable representing the mean of the combined items at each grade was calculated and used for analysis.

School Communication

Sociopolitical discussions in schools were measured using the same three items as family and friend communication modified to reflect the school context (e.g. "In my classes, I talk about politics and current events"). Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very often*. McDonald's omega ranged .70 to .74. A separate variable representing the mean of the combined items at each grade was still calculated and used for analysis.

Plan of Analysis

Analysis was conducted using Mplus statistical software and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS was used primarily for data preparation and

calculating descriptive statistics. Mplus was used to calculate variable omegas. Variables originally coded by time point were recoded to represent participants' grade at the time of data collection. Mplus was used to conduct latent profile analysis and latent transition analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Sample descriptive statistics were calculated for the overall sample and by average age and gender. Though it may be theoretically relevant, data on sexual orientation and gender diversity were unfortunately not collected in the Roots study and could not be included. Means, standard deviations, and skewness of each subscale were recorded. Pearson's correlation coefficients between predictors and profile indicators were also calculated.

Latent Profile Analysis

Latent profile analysis is a statistical approach used to identify unobservable subpopulations within the sample based a set of theoretically related indicators. Qualitatively distinct subgroups within the sample are categorized by unique configurations of the grouping variables (Spurk et al., 2020). Indicators for the latent profile analysis included those pertaining specifically to the dimensions of critical consciousness: critical reflection, critical action, and sociopolitical efficacy. Each individual item was included in the latent profile analysis to account for potential nuances in profile make-up. Keeping individual items separate allowed me to identify

measurement invariance more easily, which was evaluated in preparation for the latent transition analysis.

I tested for normality in the indicator variables to assess the appropriate estimation approach and whether data transformation was necessary. Due to data skewness and poor model fit, indicator variables were transformed using square-root transformations (Spurk et al., 2020). I estimated five profile solutions (two through six) for each grade. Following Ram and Grimm's (2009) suggestion for model selection, I compared models based on theory and fit-statistics. Bayesian and Akaike Indicator Criterion (BIC and AIC), entropy, Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test, and Bootstrapped likelihood ratio tests, which compare a model's fit to its $k - 1$ counterpart, were all assessed. The combination of theoretical value, low AIC and BIC values, higher entropy (confidence that profiles are distinct), and significant likelihood ratios were used to select the best model. I also assessed profile membership proportions to ensure profiles were not differentiated to a point of conceptual irrelevance (Weller et al., 2020). Models in which any profile included less than 5% membership were rejected.

After selecting the best fitting and most theoretically relevant model, profiles were interpreted and labeled according to theory and their construct configurations. Thresholds are reported for all variables within each profile and presented visually.

As a note, latent profile analysis may yield qualitatively or quantitatively different profiles. Qualitative differences are identified by differences in the shapes, or configurations of the profiles. For example, one profile may have low efficacy, low action, and high reflection, whereas another may have high efficacy and high action, but low reflection. Quantitative differences may be reflected by profiles representing uniform

levels of all the indicator values, such that each profile is below, equal to, or above the sample mean for each indicator (Spurk et al., 2020). Profile solutions constituted only by level differences may indicate that modeling the variables separately may be more appropriate. The LPAs yielded qualitatively distinct profiles, so I moved forward with the latent transition analysis.

Latent Transition Analysis

Latent Transition Analysis is a longitudinal extension of latent profile and latent class analysis that assesses the probability of participants transitioning from one profile to another between time points (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2022). Logistic regression can be used to assess whether certain variables predict the likelihood of a specific transition (Lanza et al., 2010).

Several steps were followed to complete the latent transition analysis (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2022). First, after identifying initial profiles, profiles were estimated for each wave to determine whether better-fitting, alternative models emerge at different time points and to assess measurement invariance. Profiles were consistent across ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades, however, there was measurement non-invariance at eleventh grade. Thus, partial invariance was assumed (Nylund, 2007) for the latent transition analysis. Explanations for the model variance are detailed in the results and discussion sections.

After estimating the models at each time point, an unconditional latent transition model without covariates was estimated. The unconditional model provided likelihoods for transitions between profiles for each time point (Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019). Due to the planned-missing design of the original study, data for this project were limited to

cases that had data for at least two of the selected grade levels. Doing so limited the sample size but resolved missing data problems that resulted in non-positive definite errors. Most of the sample with ninth grade data came from cohorts that did not have data for later grades, limiting the amount of useable data at ninth grade. To include the ninth grade timepoint would require either limiting the sample ($n = 488$) or estimating massive amounts of missing data. Given that sample sizes need to be considerably large for optimal LTA results and that 488 cases would not be sufficient (Nylund-Gibson et al., 2022), and given the dubiousness and computational requirements of such a high level of missing data estimation (Lee & Huber, 2021), I opted to exclude the ninth grade timepoint from the analysis.

Predicting profile membership and transitions

The R3Step method for covariate prediction of profile membership was also used to assess whether location (i.e. California, Minnesota, and West Virginia) was associated with initial profile membership (Asparouhov & Muthen, 2014). Three main predictors, the family, peer, and classroom sociopolitical discussion subscales, were originally included in the model as exogenous variables to predict the probability of transition from one profile to another over time. Eleventh grade profiles and transitions were regressed on predictors from tenth grade and so on (Lanza et al., 2010). Initial results indicated that family and friend political discussions were highly correlated on certain regressions, and friend and classroom political discussions were highly correlated at others. To avoid issues with multicollinearity, friend political discussion was removed from the final analysis. Gender and peak family income were originally included as covariates in the

logistic regressions but were removed due to consistent nonsignificance. Due to missingness in the data and the way Mplus handles cases with any missing exogenous variables (listwise deletion), Monte Carlo integration was used to estimate missing values for the predictor variables.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter details results from the statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, item correlations, the results of the latent profile analysis and model selection, and the results of both the unconditional and conditional latent transition analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are detailed below in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5. The final number of participants included in the analysis was 994 (53.1% girls). Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item used for the outcome variables. It is important to note that due to the planned missingness design and use of 100 datasets in the LPA and LTA analyses, in our calculation of descriptive statistics and correlations I relied on a grand mean dataset compiled from the multiple imputed data set. In grade 10, critical action indicator means ranged from 2.74 to 3.93, with standard deviations from 1.32 to 1.39. Awareness of inequality indicator means ranged from 3.39 to 3.58, with standard deviations ranging from 0.92 to 1.01. Finally, indicators for sociopolitical efficacy had means from 3.69 to 3.84, and standard deviations from 0.88 to 0.92.

Table 2*Class Indicator Descriptive Statistics for Grade 10*

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	
					Deviation	Skewness
g10CRA2	672	1.00	6.00	3.06	1.39	0.15
g10CRA3	672	1.00	6.00	2.74	1.32	0.42
g10CRA5	750	1.00	6.00	3.93	1.37	-0.83
g10AOE1	670	1.00	5.00	3.39	0.98	-.039
g10AOE2	672	1.00	5.00	3.44	1.01	-0.28
g10AOE3	672	1.00	5.00	3.58	0.92	-0.66
g10EFF1	672	1.00	5.00	3.78	0.92	-0.70
g10EFF2	672	1.00	5.00	3.69	0.90	-0.73
g10EFF3	672	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.88	-0.96

Table 3*Class Indicator Descriptive Statistics for Grade 11*

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	
					Deviation	Skewness
g11CRA2	833	1.00	6.00	3.18	1.38	0.12
g11CRA3	833	1.00	6.00	2.84	1.42	0.45
g11CRA5	705	1.00	6.00	4.02	1.26	-1.04
g11AOE1	833	1.00	5.00	3.42	0.98	-0.38
g11AOE2	833	1.00	5.00	3.52	0.99	-0.30
g11AOE3	833	1.00	5.00	3.51	1.00	-0.63
g11EFF1	833	1.00	5.00	3.71	1.01	-0.82
g11EFF2	833	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.91	-0.71
g11EFF3	833	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.92	-1.02

Table 4*Class Indicator Descriptive Statistics for Grade 12*

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	
					Deviation	Skewness
g12CRA2	870	1.00	6.00	3.21	1.39	0.15
g12CRA3	870	1.00	6.00	2.97	1.49	0.45
g12CRA5	766	1.00	6.00	4.23	1.23	-1.15
g12AOE1	870	1.00	5.00	3.36	0.99	-0.37
g12AOE2	870	1.00	5.00	3.52	0.97	-0.41
g12AOE3	870	1.00	5.00	3.53	0.99	-0.58
g12EFF1	870	1.00	5.00	3.75	0.94	-0.77
g12EFF2	870	1.00	5.00	3.70	0.90	-0.65
g12EFF3	870	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.89	-0.88

Descriptive statistics were also collected for the independent variables at grades 10 and 11.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables*

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.	
					Deviation	Skewness
10th Grade						
Family	672	1.00	5.00	2.95	0.90	-0.07
Classroom	672	1.00	5.00	2.96	0.79	-0.22
11th Grade						
Family	833	1.00	5.00	2.98	0.92	-0.04
Classroom	833	1.00	5.00	2.99	0.81	-0.16

Correlations

Correlations between mean predictors (i.e. family, friends, and classroom discussions of social issues) and profile indicators for the following grade are detailed in Table 6. Overall, family and classroom discussions were significantly correlated with every indicator of critical consciousness one year later. Discussions with family was generally more highly correlated with political behaviors than classroom discussion. Correlations for other profile indicators were more mixed across grades.

As a note, profile indicators were transformed for skewness. The indicators in the table represent the transformed variables.

Table 6

Correlations between predictor variables and subsequent-year CC indicators

	<i>Political Behaviors</i>			<i>Awareness of Inequality</i>			<i>Sociopolitical Efficacy</i>		
	CA2	CA3	CA5	AOE1	AOE2	AOE3	SF1	SF2	SF3
Grade 10 Predictors	Grade 11 Indicators								
Family	.440**	.413**	.417**	.289**	.327**	.346**	.500**	.437**	.462**
Classroom	.294**	.296**	.370**	.207**	.276**	.249**	.451**	.405**	.430**
Grade 11 Predictors	Grade 12 Indicators								
Family	.386**	.316**	.372**	.216**	.257**	.243**	.431**	.325**	.386**
Classroom	.316**	.248**	.365**	.165**	.254**	.232**	.428**	.310**	.379**

** . significant at the $p \geq .01$ level

Latent Profiles Across Grades

Profile solutions were calculated using Mplus statistical software. Based on the descriptive analysis of the latent profile indicators, square root transformations were applied to the indicators to account for item skewness and consequently improve model fit and interpretability. Latent profiles were then calculated for two, three, four, five, and six-profile solutions for each grade. Model selection for the latent transition analysis was based on a combination of model fit indices (i.e. Bayesian Information Criterion, Akaike Information Criterion, entropy, Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio, and Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio), profile membership proportions, and theoretical interpretability.

Model Selection

Model fit statistics and indicator means for the grade nine profile solutions are detailed in Table 7. Based on the model selection criteria, the four-profile solution was determined to be the best model for interpretation and analysis. Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test ($p < .001$) indicated the four-profile solution was a significantly better fitting model than the three-profile solution. Although AIC and BIC continued trending downward and the Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Tests indicated better model fit for both the five and six profile models, profile proportionality was too low in some profiles to be useful (i.e. less than 5%). Class membership proportions were all over five percent for the four-profile model.

Table 7*Fit Statistics for Grade 10 Profile Solutions*

<i>N</i> Profile Solution	AIC	BIC	Adj. BIC	Entropy	ALRT	BLRt
2	3075.08	3212.08	3123.15	0.856	<.001	<.001
3	2591.21	2777.20	2656.44	0.755	<.001	<.001
4	2293.90	2528.74	2376.29	0.813	0.115	<.001
5	2085.26	2369.03	2184.82	0.803	0.248	<.001
6	1961.61	2294.31	2078.34	0.818	0.208	<.001

Examination of the indicator means for profiles in each model (see Table 8) aided in model selection. Indicator means are detailed in Table 8. The four-profile solution contained highly distinct profiles with qualitative differences. Profiles in the five-profile solution were nearly indistinct from those in the four-profile model. The newly added profile in the five-profile solution was qualitatively and quantitatively similar to another profile in the four-profile solution and was thus deemed uninterpretable. The four-profile solution was selected for further analysis. After selecting the best fitting model, the LPA was rerun using the full imputed data set to ensure accuracy of results. Finally, four-profile solutions were run using mean-centered indicators for each grade to check for measurement invariance and aid in profile interpretation.

Table 8*Indicator Means for Grade 10 Profile Solutions 2 - 6*

<i>Profiles for N profile solution</i>	CA2	CA3	CA5	AOE1	AOE2	AOE3	SF1	SF2	SF3
2									
Profile 1	1.333	1.323	1.638	1.617	1.639	1.498	1.586	1.589	1.635
Profile 2	1.774	1.674	2.043	1.873	1.894	1.931	1.985	1.958	2.013
3									
Profile 1	1.288	1.255	1.55	1.513	1.538	1.305	1.4	1.402	1.491
Profile 2	1.471	1.41	1.864	1.78	1.789	1.775	1.853	1.828	1.892
Profile 3	1.944	1.835	2.118	1.912	1.943	1.999	2.039	2.016	2.054
4									
Profile 1	1.492	1.461	2.035	1.729	1.767	1.699	1.766	1.756	1.828
Profile 2	1.266	1.238	1.389	1.443	1.503	1.245	1.361	1.38	1.442
Profile 3	1.437	1.337	1.164	1.798	1.787	1.812	1.891	1.852	1.898
Profile 4	1.881	1.773	2.131	1.905	1.93	1.984	2.028	1.999	2.046
5									
Profile 1	1.559	1.474	2.051	1.805	1.812	1.832	1.896	1.87	1.943
Profile 2	1.438	1.336	1.171	1.794	1.797	1.813	1.891	1.858	1.901
Profile 3	1.205	1.157	1.155	1.462	1.508	1.269	1.388	1.395	1.407
Profile 4	1.428	1.427	2.038	1.605	1.641	1.399	1.524	1.528	1.618
Profile 5	1.998	1.903	2.161	1.93	1.966	2.019	2.053	2.031	2.065
6									
Profile 1	1.211	1.162	1.167	1.456	1.508	1.257	1.379	1.386	1.384
Profile 2	1.433	1.333	1.168	1.791	1.793	1.811	1.886	1.853	1.903
Profile 3	1.443	1.441	2.05	1.578	1.62	1.182	1.572	1.603	1.745
Profile 4	1.572	1.482	2.053	1.803	1.81	1.836	1.904	1.878	1.963
Profile 5	1.455	1.464	2.031	1.749	1.778	1.77	1.601	1.563	1.409
Profile 6	2.001	1.907	2.162	1.935	1.971	2.027	2.056	2.033	2.07

Profile Interpretation

The centered means of each indicator revealed partial model invariance. Profiles from tenth grade were somewhat different from those in eleventh and twelfth grade. Plotting the indicator means revealed distinct patterns of indicator variables in each profile. Plots of the indicator means are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. Profiles were

assessed and interpreted based on the qualitative differences created by indicator means. Each profile represented qualitatively distinct subpopulations in the sample.

Tenth Grade Profiles

In tenth grade, the first profile was significantly below the sample average on all indicators of critical consciousness. These participants expressed general disagreement with the existence of American inequality and were low in sociopolitical efficacy. The indicator means also suggested this group felt less willingness to engage in sociopolitical behaviors. Due to its consistency with the acritical stage of sociopolitical development, this profile was labeled “acritical” (Watts et al., 2003).

The second profile was distinct from the acritical group in several ways. Means for efficacy and awareness of inequality indicators were relatively high for this group. Based on the indicator means, these participants were willing to engage in some action to address issues at school, but not protest social issues or express political opinions. This group did not have strong opinions about whether the realities of American inequalities; means for awareness of inequality indicators suggested these participants had not considered whether American society and government was equal or not. Interestingly, this profile, though qualitatively consistent across grades, exhibited a sharp drop in willingness to engage in political behaviors after ninth grade. Given the general expressed disinterest in social issues within this group and unwillingness to engage in explicitly political behavior, this profile was labeled “politically indifferent.”

The third profile was characterized by the highest means across all indicators. This subpopulation was far more likely to engage in political behaviors, recognize

American inequality, and feel highly efficacious to create positive social impact. This group was labeled “critically conscious.”

The fourth profile was characterized by relatively high efficacy and reflection, but relatively low action. Sociopolitical efficacy for this profile was slightly higher than the politically indifferent group and lower than the critically conscious group. Means for awareness of inequality were higher than acritical group, but lower than critically conscious group. Finally, the means for critical action were only slightly higher than those of the comparable to the acritical group and significantly below the sample average. Taken together, this profile is conceptually distinct from the statuses articulated in SPD (Hope et al., 2023). Whereas the critical stage in SPD is characterized by high reflection but lower action and efficacy, the profile here is characterized by high reflection *and* efficacy but low action. This profile is more consistent with what some scholars refer to as “armchair activists” who are empowered and reflective, but do not engage in behaviors necessary to actually create social change (Schwarzenthal et al., 2023).

Eleventh and Twelfth Grade Profiles

The eleventh-grade profile and twelfth-grade solutions (see Figure 2) yielded two similar profiles to the critically conscious and acritical profiles in the other two grade levels. Two of the profiles, however, were manifestly different. The first represented shift in what was once the politically indifferent profile. This group was characterized by similar levels of sociopolitical behavior to the politically indifferent group, but low sociopolitical efficacy. Specifically, this group disagreed that they were capable of making positive changes in their community and seemed unsure of how to use their own skills to solve community problems. This group also expressed disbelief in unequal

American political representation and equality of opportunity. This group also diverged even further in twelfth grade, increasing in political action (i.e. attending protests) and decreasing in perceived capacity to make positive changes. Given this group's low efficacy and growing disbelief in American inequality, this group was labeled "disillusioned naive."

The other unique profile from eleventh and twelfth grade is similar to the armchair activist profile but distinguished by elevated levels of sociopolitical action. Though still relatively low compared to the critically conscious and disillusioned naive groups, this group was much higher in their willingness to address issues at school than in the previous year. Taken together, the two profiles unique to eleventh grade could reflect certain changes in the broader sociopolitical climate during data collection.

Approximately 635 of the 984 participants for whom data exists at eleventh grade came from the same cohort. It is possible that many of the participants used in this study were in eleventh grade during the politically charged climate of the 2016 presidential election, which could have affected individuals' political behaviors and beliefs at the time. The implications of these changes are discussed further in the discussion chapter.

Figure 1

10th Grade Four Profile Solution

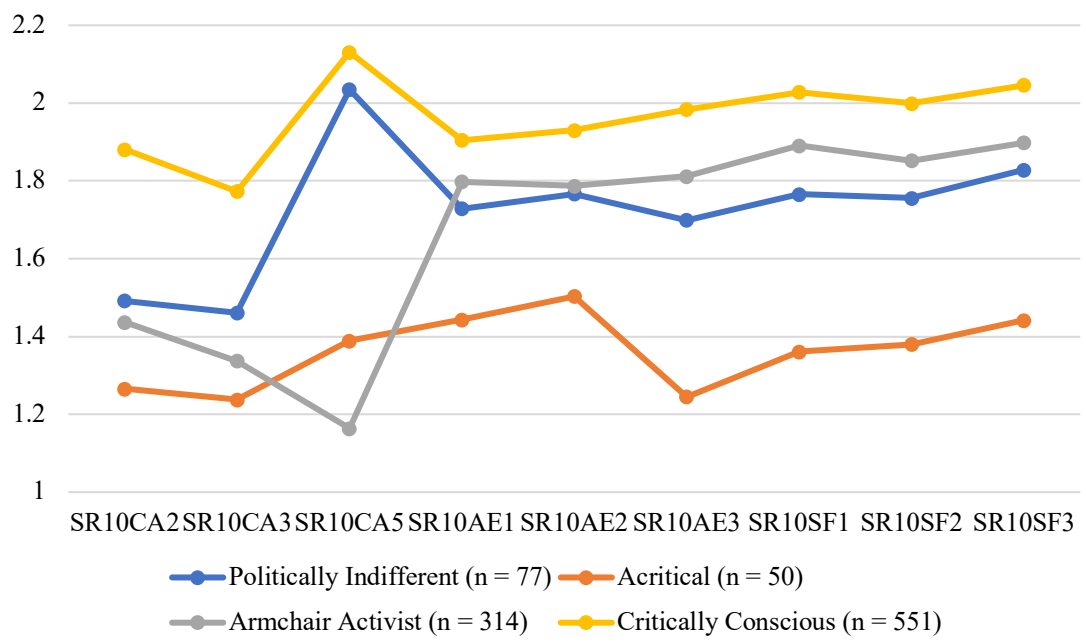
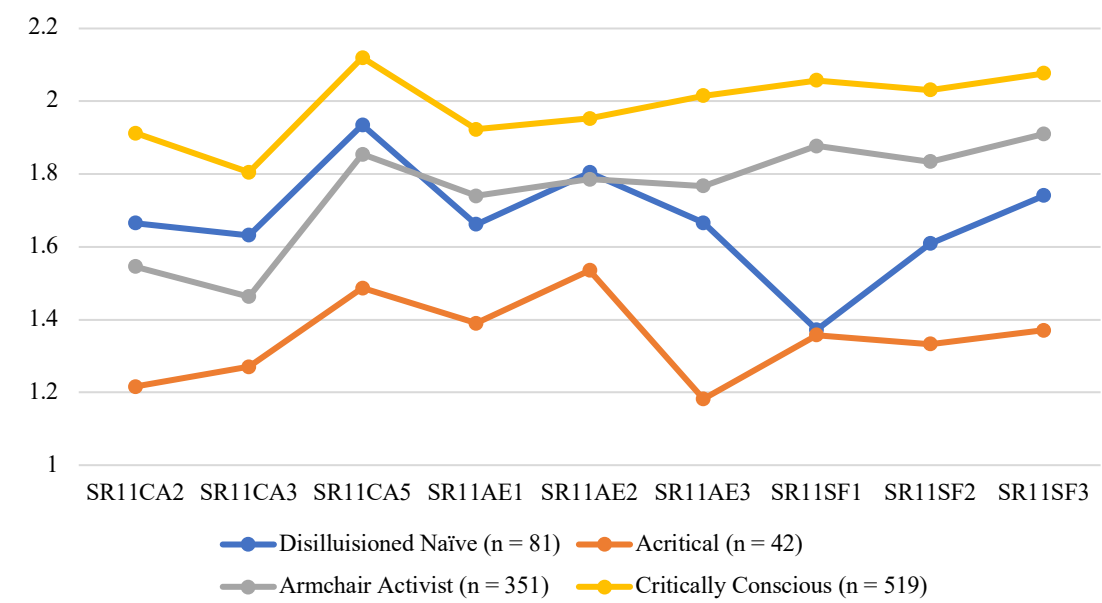


Figure 2

11th and 12th Grade Four Profile Solution



Transitions Between Profiles by Grade

The R3Step method for covariate prediction of latent classes was used to assess whether participants' geographical location predicted initial class membership (Asparouhov & Muthen, 2014). The multinomial logistic regression found that for the most part, participants' starting geographical location did not significantly predict initial profile membership. California participants were 62% less likely to be in the critically conscious profile than the politically indifferent profile ($p = .05$). No other effects were statistically significant.

A Note on Measurement Invariance

Four-profile solutions were estimated using the same indicators collected at each grade. Because models between grades were not nested, model fit statistics could not be used to compare profile solutions, however, each model had entropy above .7 and significant BLRT results, indicating that models for each grade had good model fits. As detailed in the profile interpretation section, varying indicator means indicated some changes in the measurement model at different grades. While most of the profiles remained relatively consistent across grades, there were important distinctions in the eleventh-grade profiles.

Unconditional Latent Transition Analysis

Transition probabilities for each time-to-time profile pattern were generated using an unconditional latent transition analysis. Transition probabilities represent the percent

likelihood of participants in a given profile moving to another given profile at the next time point.

Tenth to Eleventh Grade

Transition probabilities from tenth to eleventh grade ranged from zero to 0.828. The politically indifferent group was most likely to transition to the eleventh-grade armchair profile (64.8%), followed by the disillusioned naivete profile (16.3%). 10.7% of politically indifferent participants transitioned to the critically conscious group, whereas 8.2% moved to the acritical group. Those in the armchair activist group were most likely to stay there (62%) or move to the disillusioned naivete group (21.2%). 12.2% of these participants transitioned to the critically conscious profile, and only 4.6% of them transitioned to the acritical profile.

Those in the acritical group were most likely to stay in the acritical group (38.9%) followed by transitioning to the eleventh grade armchair activist profile (35.3%). 20% of the acritical cases transitioned to the disillusioned naivete group, and only 2% moved to the critically conscious profile.

Those in the critically conscious profile were again most likely to stay in the critically conscious profile (82.8%). A small number of these participants transitioned to the armchair activist profile (14%), and 3.2% transitioned to the disillusioned naivete profile, but none moved directly to the acritical group.

Eleventh to Twelfth Grade

From eleventh to twelfth grade, those in the acritical profile were again most likely to stay in the acritical profile (66.5%), but 28.6% of these transitioned to the armchair activist profile. Participants in the critically conscious group were consistent in

that they were generally unlikely to transition (81.7%). Those from the eleventh-grade disillusioned naive profile were both most likely to transition into the armchair activist profile, followed by staying in place. All unconditional transition probabilities are detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

Unconditional Transition Probabilities

<i>10th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Armchair	Critically Conscious
PI	0.163	0.082	0.648	0.107
Acritical	0.238	0.389	0.353	0.020
Armchair	0.212	0.046	0.620	0.122
Critically Conscious	0.032	0.000	0.140	0.828
<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>12th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Armchair	Critically Conscious
D.N.	0.204	0.159	0.567	0.069
Acritical	0.058	0.665	0.286	0.001
Armchair	0.084	0.087	0.676	0.153
Critically Conscious	0.062	0.000	0.121	0.817

Latent Transition Analysis with Covariates

The conditional latent transition model was estimated using the predictor variables at each time point, controlling for gender and family income. Logits were generated from logistic regressions and transformed into odds ratios. Given the size and frequency of movement into the armchair profile, this group was chosen as the reference class.

Due to small sample proportions in some of the groups, and thus, smaller probability proportions for certain transitions, some of the logistic regressions yielded perfect prediction, or complete separation. Due to the low sample proportions in certain transitions, the perfect prediction results from the logistic regressions were nonsignificant and cannot be interpreted as generalizable. Specific regressions with perfect prediction, along with the proportion of participants within those particular transition probabilities, are detailed below and are labeled as such in Tables 10 and 11.

Tenth to Eleventh Grade

The only significant effects for tenth to eleventh grade were in transitions from the armchair group. Armchair activists who had political discussions with their families in tenth grade were 1.96 times more likely to transition to the disillusioned naive profile compared to staying armchair activists. Conversely, classroom discussion was associated with a sharp decrease in the odds of transitioning to the disillusioned naive group (OR = 0.13). Transitioning from the armchair activist group to the acritical group was significantly less likely when participants had political discussions with their families (OR = 0.69).

Some of the logistic regressions resulted in perfect prediction, likely due to low transition probability proportions. Some transitions were simply unlikely to happen and were represented by very few participants. For example, in the transition from acritical to critically conscious, family and classroom discussions predicted complete separation. Class discussions also predicted complete separation in the transition from indifference to critically conscious compared to the transition from indifference to armchair activist. This is likely due to the small number of people who actually made these transitions.

Most of the results were insignificant despite the magnitude of the odds ratios. Again, this is probably a function of small transition proportions and are not generalizable.

Eleventh to Twelfth Grade

Once again, for the smaller profiles like the acritical and politically indifferent groups, small probability proportions and group sizes resulted in perfect prediction. Though some of these effects may be interesting, they must be interpreted with caution and cannot be considered generalizable due to non-significance. For example, staying in the acritical profile was positively predicted by political discussion with family and negatively by political discussion in the classroom. These results were theoretically interesting, however, they also resulted in complete separation because the sample proportions in these profile transitions were so small.

There were some interpretable significant effects in the likelihood of transitioning out of the armchair activist profile. Armchair activist participants who had political conversations with their families were 48% less likely to transition to the critically conscious profile than stay in the armchair activist profile. Interestingly, those who had political conversations in class were significantly less likely to transition to the critically conscious profile than stay in the armchair activist group, and more likely to transition to the acritical group.

Table 10*Odds Ratios for Family Discussions*

<i>10th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Critically Conscious	Armchair
PI	1.95	2.03	0.39	-
Acritical	0.33	0.25	PP+	-
Armchair	1.96***	0.69***	0.87	-
Critically Conscious	0.74	PP-	1.49	-
<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>12th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Critically Conscious	Armchair
D.N.	PP+	1	PP+	-
Acritical	PP-	PP+	PP+	-
Armchair	1.14	1.04	0.52***	-
Critically Conscious	PP+	0.09	0.85	-

***is significant at the .001 level

PP+ is positive perfect prediction

PP- is negative perfect prediction

Table 11*Odds Ratios for Classroom Discussions*

<i>10th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Critically Conscious	Armchair
PI	0.44	1.04	PP+	-
Acritical	0.62	1.63	PP+	-
Armchair	0.13**	1.31	1.2	-
Critically Conscious	0.28	PP-	0.922	-
<i>11th Grade Profiles</i>	<i>12th Grade Profiles</i>			
	D.N.	Acritical	Critically Conscious	Armchair
D.N.	PP-	0.82	PP+	-
Acritical	PP+	PP-	PP-	-
Armchair	PP-	1.31*	0.39***	-
Critically Conscious	PP-	PP+	0.42	-

***is significant at the .001 level

PP+ is positive perfect prediction

PP- is negative perfect prediction

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Research on critical consciousness and sociopolitical development has repeatedly demonstrated ways in which social identities, experiences of discrimination, and socialization can foster critical consciousness in minoritized youth. Yet, little is understood about critical consciousness in youth with racial privilege. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring profiles of the dimensions of critical consciousness (Watts et al., 2003) among White adolescents, and how they transition between profiles over time. The findings from this project add to the literature in several ways. First, White youths' profiles of critical consciousness were inconsistent with theoretical statuses of sociopolitical development describing the critical consciousness of people of color, indicating that critical consciousness may manifest differently in youth based on certain social privilege. Second, White youth were unlikely to transition between profiles during high school, indicating that profiles may have developed and embedded earlier than late adolescence. Finally, family and classroom contexts were primarily associated with staying in one's profile.

Critical Consciousness Profiles

The latent profile analysis identified unique configurations of political behavior, awareness of inequality, and sociopolitical efficacy that were both similar and distinct from those detailed in sociopolitical development theory. Consistent with theory, an

acritical profile and a critically conscious profile (i.e. “liberated”, per SPD) were present at each grade level. The two other profiles, however, are unique in that they do not represent any previously theorized status of critical consciousness.

Acritical

The acritical group, characterized by low levels of each critical consciousness dimension, was consistently one of the smallest groups, proportionally. Most participants indicated some degree of awareness of inequality, but this group strongly disagreed with the notion that the American government and opportunities were unequal. This may make this group conceptually distinct from the acritical status of sociopolitical development theory; whereas the acritical status is characterized by unawareness of inequality, the group in this study actively rejected inequality’s existence. Interestingly, despite disagreeing that unequal opportunity exists, this group also exhibited the lowest levels of sociopolitical efficacy. This could be consistent with the meritocratic ideals with which youth with social privilege are often socialized (Duckitt & Sibley, 2016). It may be that for the acritical group, efficacy was not a question of political power, but of personal capability. Thus, in this group’s perception, one’s capacity to get ahead in life or affect positive communal change could be more related to personal ability and effort than opportunity and social position.

Given that this group disagreed with the existence of inequality, rather than simply being unaware or not having an opinion, it may be that this profile does not necessarily represent a starting point for sociopolitical development (Hope et al., 2023; Watts, 2003), but a distinct, divergent pathway. It is important to note the proportionality

of this profile was consistently low but increased in proportionality by twelfth grade. Twenty-three participants who started in the acritical profile in tenth grade ended high school in the same group. It was exceptionally rare for any participant to eventually transition from acritical to the critically conscious group, suggesting that this transition may not be a normative part of sociopolitical development. Though several participants transitioned from acritical to the armchair activist or disillusioned naivete profiles, only two of those early acritical participants eventually transitioned to the critically conscious profile. Perhaps most importantly, most participants were never in the acritical profile. Those with this profile tended to stay in this profile and not transition into a different one, further supporting that being in an acritical stage likely not a normative part of sociopolitical development for White youth. Rather, the acritical profile in this study appears to designate a group that does not experience critical consciousness.

Critically Conscious

The critically conscious group was consistently the largest group in each grade. This profile, consistent with sociopolitical development theory, was characterized by high levels of action, reflection, and efficacy. Generally, participants who started in the critically conscious profile tended to stay in the critically conscious profile throughout high school. Those who transitioned into this profile during high school were also highly likely to stay in it in the subsequent year. This suggests that those high in critical consciousness may be unlikely to change in their awareness of inequality, sociopolitical efficacy, and willingness to engage in political action.

Though most participants in the critically conscious profile remained there, there was a moderate sized group of participants who transitioned to the armchair activist group. Hope et al. (2023) suggest that context may play an important role in whether individuals can engage in political actions at a given time. Opportunities for critical action and personal motivations for action were not evaluated in this study but may be an important avenue for future research. Though some youth may still be critically conscious, various contextual factors could affect whether they engage in sociopolitical behaviors. For example, middle adolescents whose family and friends do not attend protests may not have the capacity to attend these events alone, although they might engage in this behavior if close others did. This is compounded by the issue of privilege and the motivations of individuals who are critically active for minoritized groups (Dull et al., 2020). It is possible that youth who do not necessarily feel the direct effects of certain forms of systemic injustice may feel less personal responsibility or motivation to address those systems. Further research is needed to understand the contextual factors and personal motivations involved in privileged youths' critical action.

Armchair Activists

The armchair activist profile was proportionally large compared to the other profiles, though smaller than the critically conscious group. These were participants who had relatively high reflection and efficacy but were low in sociopolitical behaviors. This profile is distinct from anything articulated in sociopolitical development theory, but it is consistent with findings from other empirical work (Schwarzenthal et al., 2023). Participants in this group generally stayed in the armchair activist group throughout high

school, though some transitioned to either the critically conscious or the disillusioned naive profiles. Interestingly, twice as many participants moved to the naïve profile as they did to the critically conscious profile in the tenth to eleventh grade transition. The next year, however, this trend reversed; transitions to the critically conscious profile remained relatively stable, but transitions to the naïve group dropped from 22% to just over 8%. This could suggest that the transition to eleventh grade was driven by some external factor, or it could be that late high school is a time of political encampment. This group may have more agency to engage in sociopolitical issues as they gained more autonomy with development. Interestingly, conversations with family and in the classroom seem to stifle critical consciousness during the transition to 12th grade.

This group also shifted during eleventh grade in that they were more willing to engage in political behaviors and had slightly elevated levels of sociopolitical efficacy. It is not clear what caused this shift. One possible explanation could be that many of the participants may have been in eleventh grade during the 2016 presidential election. The divisive and tumultuous sociopolitical climate of the time may have driven some people to engage in more political behaviors than before as political issues became more salient (Wray-Lake et al., 2018).

Notably, this group expressed far greater willingness to challenge more proximal issues at school during eleventh grade than previously. It is not clear why this might be. It is possible that these participants, with lower sociopolitical efficacy than the critically conscious group, would opt to address more proximal issues over broader social problems due to a lower sense of efficacy to change said social problems. It is also possible that these individuals may not have been directly impacted by social injustices,

and thus targeted more proximal, personally relevant issues in their microsystem (Quiles et al., 2023).

Finally, the armchair activist group exhibited a gap between critical reflection and action commonly observed in the critical consciousness literature. While these two dimensions have been found to be weakly related, the results from this study provide a more nuanced look at how they go together, particularly within White youth. The presence of moderately high efficacy in the armchair activist group suggests that efficacy may not necessarily mediate the relationship between reflection and action for socially privileged youth, as is commonly theorized for minoritized groups (Hope et al., 2023). Other research has postulated that another dimension of critical consciousness, critical motivation, may be an important factor in bridging reflection and action (Diemer et al., 2016). Whereas sociopolitical efficacy represents empowerment toward action for youth of color, its presence in the armchair activist profile suggests that White youth may not necessarily lack in empowerment, but need something else to inspire political action. The results of my study highlight the need for more research to understand the armchair activist profile, including examining the role of social responsibility, critical motivation, and opportunities for action that may bridge the gap between awareness of inequality and behavior to address it.

Politically indifferent

The politically indifferent profile was only present in tenth grade, replaced by the disillusioned naive group. This profile was proportionally the second smallest; most participants at this point had developed some degree of critical consciousness or diverged

from it (i.e. acritical profile). This is consistent with researchers' suggestion that critical consciousness can develop to varying degrees at younger ages (Saavedra et al., 2023). Interestingly, participants who started in the politically indifferent profile were most likely to end high school in the armchair activist group. This group was slightly lower in sociopolitical efficacy and critical reflection than the armchair group and hovered significantly below the sample averages, indicating a general lack of opinion on social issues. Interestingly, this group did indicate that they were willing to do things to address school issues, but were less likely to engage in political behaviors like attending public protests.

In eleventh grade this group split. Most participants moved to the armchair activist group, while few transitioned to the critically conscious group. Most of the remainder transitioned into the disillusioned naivete profile. Given the relatively small number of participants who started in this profile, it is possible that the split represents members of this group moving from indifference to some level of either awareness of inequality or rejection of its existence. In other words, members of this profile may have stopped being indifferent during high school and started thinking about and trying to understand social issues. In 11th grade, the politically indifferent profile no longer existed, suggesting that most participants underwent some level of sociopolitical change or socialization during or prior to high school. By 11th grade, most participants held some level of belief about political and social issues beyond having not thought about those issues.

Disillusioned Naivete

The disillusioned naïveté profile was characterized by significantly lower than average means on some of the critical reflection items and all the sociopolitical efficacy items. More specifically, this group generally disagreed that inequality of opportunity or political representation existed, though they were more inclined to say that political leaders only listen to certain groups. This group indicated that they did not feel capable of making positive differences in their communities but were closer to the sample average on knowing how to solve community problems. Despite their lack of efficacy, this group did engage in some political behaviors during twelfth grade. It is possible that some participants viewed community actions and political behaviors as distinct, which could explain why this group had such low efficacy but willingly engaged in political behaviors in twelfth grade. Another possibility is that participants in this group were developing burgeoning but limited behavioral autonomy. Participants gaining independence from home and family may have felt greater autonomy to engage in school-based activities where they were more independent and separated from home, but still relied on family political positions and behaviors for their civic engagement. This could also explain why family discussions of social and political issues were a stronger predictor of staying in one's profile than transitioning to others.

It is also important to note that the combination of low critical reflection and increasing political behavior suggests that this group does not represent some form of critical consciousness, but something else. Not all political action can be constituted as critical action (Jemal et al., 2020; Saavedra et al., 2023), and theoretically critical action should be motivated by critical reflection (Rapa et al., 2020). Many participants in this

group transitioned into armchair activism in twelfth grade – only about 20% of participants stayed in this group from eleventh to twelfth grade. It is possible that the meaning inherent in this profile changed from eleventh to twelfth grade. Whereas in eleventh grade people in this group were unlikely to engage in political action, in twelfth grade they were. This could be a function of profile misplacement or a limitation of this analysis – some people who felt discouraged due to sociopolitical climate may have moved from the armchair group to the naïve group during eleventh grade, but by the next year were able to rebuild their efficacy, but not behavior. It is possible that some armchair activists did not actually decrease in their critical reflection, but did decrease in their efficacy, resulting in placement in this group. It is also possible that some people did decrease in critical reflection during this time, but this seems unlikely, given the tendency for participants to not transition out of the critically conscious profile or to the acritical profile. It seems likely that people who experienced declines in sociopolitical efficacy due presidential election related stress (Wray-Lake et al., 2018) may have been placed in this group.

Interestingly, several participants from the critically conscious and armchair groups transitioned to the disillusioned naïve group in twelfth grade. Though many of the politically indifferent participants transitioned to this group, most of the disillusioned naïve cases came from the armchair activist group. This could be due to the aforementioned election-related stress and hopelessness, but it is also possible that some in the armchair group actually declined in critical reflection. Further research is needed to assess whether youth ever significantly decrease in their levels of critical reflection, and if so, whether that is a function of sociopolitical privilege.

Transition Probabilities and Profile Stability

Across all grades, participants were generally most likely to not transition rather than transition into a different profile of critical consciousness. Overall, the analysis did not find a distinct, linear pathway for White youths' critical consciousness development. Many participants started high school as critically conscious and stayed there. This suggests that critical consciousness develops prior to the high school years for many White youth. Research on sociopolitical development often focuses on late adolescence and emerging adulthood because it is a time of identity growth and increased autonomy, however, critical consciousness can begin to be socialized far earlier (Saavedra et al., 2023; see also Hazelbaker et al., 2020). It may be that, while emerging adulthood and late adolescence are important times for sociopolitical development, critical consciousness socialization begins at a younger age. Extensive research on racial-ethnic socialization has identified several messages about race and ethnicity that youth begin internalizing at an early age. Given strong connections between racial-ethnic identity and critical consciousness in youth of color (Golden et al., 2022), it is possible that dominant or counter-narratives earlier in life for White youth could influence how they understand and think about American inequality during adolescence. Hazelbaker et al.'s (2022) model for White antiracist development posits that the process for antiracism begins in childhood and involves myriad socializing influences. Though critical consciousness is not limited to reflections on racial inequality, critical consciousness in White youth could be related to messages received early in life that are experientially unique to them given their privileged social position.

Another possible explanation for participants' tendency not to transition is that critical consciousness and understandings about inequality are more related to ideological identity than they are to actual awareness of inequality. For individuals who endorse meritocratic ideals, it may not be that they are unaware of inequality but that they believe inequality is an individual and personal problem, rather than a social one. Thus, participants who did not transition across profiles may not have stayed in place due to stagnation in the dimensions of critical consciousness, but because they were committed to certain ideological stances. Those who transitioned from politically indifferent or disillusioned naivete may have undergone some degree of ideological identity exploration during the study time frame.

There were some clear transitional patterns that stood out. First, those in the armchair activist profile were most likely of any to eventually transition to the critically conscious group. Those who transitioned to critically conscious during high school were likely to stay there. However, many who started as critically conscious had transitioned to the armchair activist profile by the end of high school. Those who went from critically conscious to armchair activist in eleventh grade were unlikely to go back to being critically conscious in twelfth grade. Hope et al. (2023) acknowledged that opportunities for action may fluctuate, which could have influenced participants' trajectories in this analysis, but this is an unlikely explanation given participants were asked about their likelihood of certain behaviors, rather than actual actions. Because of this, it seems more likely that White youths' social position allows them the flexibility to not engage in social justice causes, particularly when those causes are related to issues that do not directly affect them. There is also a question of whether critical to armchair participants actually

declined in their critical reflection, or if their transition was solely a function of reduced willingness to participate in political behaviors. It is possible that lower critical action is a function of decreased critical reflection, as evidence suggests the two are likely related (Banales et al., 2020; Diemer et al., 2017). Still, most of the critically conscious youth in this study remained critically conscious, however, the transitioning groups were large enough to warrant further investigation.

Transitioning to the acritical group was rare and varied. Only a handful of participants remained in this group throughout 10th-12th grades. Those who transitioned into it typically did so from the armchair or naïve groups, but these cases were uncommon. While researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that racial privilege and socialization may contribute to colorblindness or unawareness of inequality (Pahlke et al., 2021), more research is needed to understand the nuances of these beliefs. The participants in this study typically passed through armchair activism when transitioning to the acritical group, but the number of people who made this transition was quite low. It seems that youth with some awareness of inequality are unlikely lose that awareness, but some could.

For a small handful of participants, the disillusioned naivete profile seemed to act as a crossroads for their critical consciousness. Participants transitioned into the disillusioned profile from indifference, armchair activism, and being acritical, and transitioned to both critically conscious and armchair activism, or stayed the same. Unfortunately, with multiple possible transitions, it is difficult to interpret these results due to small subgroups of transition patterns. Some work suggests that broader sociopolitical climate can influence adolescents' civic engagement, but this work is

primarily with diverse youth of color (Miller et al., 2021; Wray-Lake et al., 2018).

Sociopolitical events may push youth to think about social and political systems and issues, resulting in changes in critical consciousness. For those who follow these events, challenging these systems may be daunting or psychosocially challenging (Spanierman et al., 2009). It is possible that moving into the disillusioned naivete profile had something to do with the sociopolitical climate at the time, but this analysis is insufficient to evaluate if that is the case.

The Impact of Political Discussion

Interpretation of the covariate LTA is limited due to complete separation on some of the logistic regressions. It is likely that there were simply too few people who made certain transitions, like those who moved directly from acritical to critically conscious, which resulted in complete separation by the predictor variables.

Perfect Prediction

Though insignificant, some perfectly predicted transitions are interesting and may warrant further investigation. For the most part, the perfect predictions indicated that discussions with family and in classrooms led to more critical consciousness, some indicated that family and classrooms could also be related to participants to making unexpected transitions, like from critically conscious to acritical. Because these results are nonsignificant, they cannot be interpreted as any more than due to sample characteristics and limitations. The perfect predictions occurred primarily during the

eleventh to twelfth grade transition. It is possible that there was less variation in how participants transitioned during this time period, leading to low transition proportions and complete separation. It is not clear why this might have happened, though it could be that political polarization in 2016 resulted in stronger encampment and fewer sociopolitical transitions (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2019). Schwalbe et al. (2017) found that 2016 voters were heavily polarized in that they viewed their views as objectively correct, and those who disagreed with them as highly biased. It is possible that this illusion of objectivity (Schwalbe et al., 2017) could have had some impact on high school students at the time, affecting their critical consciousness and limiting the number of people who transitioned to different profiles.

Family Discussions

Significant effects were limited to transitions from the armchair profile. From tenth to eleventh grade, family discussions about social and political issues made armchair activists twice as likely to transition to the disillusioned naivete group, compared to staying in the armchair profile, but 31% less likely to transition to the acritical group. Interestingly, family discussions did not predict transitioning from the armchair group to critical consciousness. It is important to note that this study did not account for the actual content of the discussions, but rather, whether the discussions were taking place. The findings indicate that family political discussions could be related to sociopolitical stability, rather than change, for some groups. Parents could play an important role in modeling critical action for adolescents (Diemer and Li, 2011), thus, it could be that White youth who are not taught how to engage in political action are less

likely develop critical action and move into the critically conscious profile. This could explain why armchair activists were more likely to transition to the disillusioned naivete group. Witnessing major social issues unfold in real-time could have been eye-opening for youth who did not have the skills to do something about it, leading to declines in sociopolitical efficacy (Godfrey et al., 2019).

It is important to note that family discussion also predicted a significantly lower likelihood of transitioning to the acritical profile from tenth to eleventh grade, suggesting that though family discussions were not necessarily associated with transitioning between armchair activism and critical consciousness, they could have limited movement in the other direction. Interestingly, family discussion predicted 48% lower odds of transitioning to the critically conscious group from armchair activism, suggesting that family discussion for this group primarily predicted non-movement. Combined with the perfect prediction of families discussion for staying in the acritical profile, it seems likely that family political discussion encompasses a wide range of socialization approaches that lead to different critical consciousness outcomes (Diemer & Li, 2011; Duckitt & Sibley, 2016; Dull et al., 2020). Family socialization practices may remain consistent from childhood through high school, which would explain the general lack of movement.

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion about social and political issues was also only significant for the transition out of the armchair activist profile. From tenth to eleventh grade, classroom discussions predicted 87% less likelihood of transitioning to the disillusioned naivete group, contrasting family discussions. Though this study does not account for the

content of the classroom discussion, higher presence of classroom discussions of social issues could be indicative of more open classroom climate, which likely plays an important role in helping White youth navigate exposure to social injustice (Rapa et al., 2021; Spanierman & Todd, 2009). Having discussions in classrooms could offer an important context for fostering critical consciousness in that it could allow exploration of a broader range of ideas and perspectives than may be present within the family system. Interestingly, classroom discussion did not predict transitioning to the critically conscious profile, which also suggests that something more than classroom socialization may be necessary for White youths' critical consciousness.

It is possible that, though classrooms seemed to be protective of students' efficacy, some other pedagogical component is needed to inspire critical action (Seider et al., 2017). Seider et al. (2017) found that teacher modeling of civic action played an important role in youths' critical action. Though White youth may be aware of social inequalities and feel capable of creating positive change, something more than political discussion may be needed for critical action. Rapa et al. (2020) argued that critical motivation, the degree of responsibility one feels to address social issues, may be an important bridge between adolescents' critical reflection and action. Though findings about critical motivations' mediating effect have been mixed (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2016), previous studies have primarily examined this construct among youth of color, rather than White youth. It is possible that critical motivation could be important in bridging the gap between reflection and action for youth who are less directly impacted by certain oppressive systems. Further research is needed to examine if

this is the case, and if so, how families and schools can foster critical motivation in White youth.

Interestingly, in the eleventh to twelfth grade transition, classroom discussions predicted 61% less likelihood of transitioning from armchair activism to the critically conscious profile. This further supports the notion that though classrooms may be supportive of learning about inequalities and maintaining efficacy, something more is required for helping White youth become involved in actively challenging unjust social systems. At the same time, and perhaps most surprisingly, classroom discussions also significantly predicted 31% greater likelihood of transitioning from the armchair activist profile to the acritical profile. It is possible that for some people, discussion about social issues triggered negative reactions that contributed to entrenchment in acritical beliefs. This would be consistent with research demonstrating that exposure to social injustice can trigger psychosocial and emotional reactions in White people that could be associated with fear and avoidance (Spanierman & Todd, 2009). It is also possible that some classrooms promoted more meritocratic ideas, socializing acritical thought, but the data is insufficient to assess this.

Future Directions and Limitations

This study identified four distinct profiles of the dimensions of critical consciousness in White youth and examined the ways they transitioned between those profiles in their high school years. Notably, most participants remained in their starting profile throughout high school, with some fluctuation. More specifically, adolescents who

changed profiles during high school predominantly did so between the critically conscious and armchair activism profile. Interestingly, family and school generally predicted lower likelihoods of transitioning from the armchair profile to the critically conscious profile. However, the explanations for these transitions are still somewhat unclear. Moving between these two profiles is likely a matter of one's willingness to engage in critical action. Future research should explore whether fluctuation in one's commitment to political action is indeed a function of sociopolitical privilege, socialization, or something else.

The nuanced differences between the acritical and disillusioned naivete groups should be further explored. The acritical profile is diametric to the armchair activist and critically conscious profiles, but the disillusioned profile is not. This profile instead demonstrates how some White youth feel about their capacity to effect change. Further research could further explore the meanings youth hold about their sociopolitical efficacy and relationship with broader social systems.

Finally, the study participants were in high school during the 2016 presidential election. Extant research has identified ways in which the political climate shifted and exacerbated political polarization (Schwalbe et al., 2017). It is possible that adolescents were also affected by this shift, which may be represented in the results from eleventh and twelfth grade. To the best of my knowledge, little research exists that examines how changes in the broader sociopolitical climate and momentous political events impact White adolescents' critical consciousness. This may be an important avenue for future research.

This study has several limitations. Due to a limited sample size, some predictors resulted in perfect separation of the transition probabilities, making interpretation difficult. Latent transition analysis requires larger samples as the number of profiles and transitions increase, and the data I was able to utilize was limited. Thus, any results from this study with perfect prediction cannot be interpreted as generalizable and require further investigation to understand whether there are any true effects.

Second, though latent profile analysis has many strengths for the study of critical consciousness, it also carries some limitations. Although entropy was acceptable for each profile solution, there is still a small chance that some participants were misplaced at some time points. Further, profile assignment could have been dependent on certain indicators that were more different across profiles than others, like the sociopolitical efficacy items. For example, some people assigned to the disillusioned naivete profile could have had slightly higher levels of critical reflection than their profile assignment suggested, but were assigned to the profile anyway due to decreased sociopolitical efficacy. This limitation must be considered in any interpretation of the profiles and transitions.

Widely used measures of critical consciousness measures had not yet been published and circulated at the time of data collection. Though the measures used in this study are consistent with more current conceptualizations of critical consciousness, they may not represent the full scope of critical consciousness as it is understood in the current literature. Further research could examine the findings of this study further using more updated measurement tools.

Finally, I was unable to assess the relationship between friends and profile transitions due to multicollinearity. Friends play an important role in adolescent development generally and may influence adolescents' sociopolitical values, beliefs, and behaviors. Removal of friend influence from the analysis, though necessary to complete the analysis, leaves important questions unanswered. Friend discussions were found to have multicollinearity with both family and classroom discussions for different transitions. Thus, the relationship between adolescents' sociopolitical status and their friendships is likely nuanced, complex, and related to family and classroom influences, but this analysis was inadequate to evaluate those relations. Further research is needed to understand the association between friendships and critical consciousness. The literature on cross-racial/ethnic friendships is a good starting point (Dull et al., 2022), but it is also important to investigate within-group socialization among White youth, especially since many White youth maintain friendships mostly within race group (Plummer et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Understanding critical consciousness in socially privileged youth is an important part of scientists' ongoing pursuit for justice and equity (Diemer et al., 2016). Furthering the study of critical consciousness will enable and empower youth to engage in socially transformative action that creates a more just society for all. Inherent in this goal is the understanding that oppression is a problem for all people to solve. As scholars continue to advance theory and empiricism in this field, research that explores how to incorporate

privileged allies into the work of social justice will enable greater opportunities for coalition building and collective action by rising generations.

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