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EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

The role of parents' and adolescents' critical reflection in the development of white youths' commitments to dismantling oppression

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Abstract

Given the access that white youth have to privilege and power, it is important to understand how they might develop life goals related to dismantling multiple forms of oppression, which we term critical purpose. Parents may support their children's critical purpose via their own critical reflection (understanding of the root causes of disparities in society), which may be associated with their child's critical reflection. Structural equation models of two waves of data from 351 white youth showed an indirect relationship between parent critical reflection and youth critical purpose through youth critical reflection. Bolstering white parents' critical reflection may be a strategy for supporting the development of white youths' commitments to future social justice action.

KEYWORDS
critical consciousness, critical purpose, critical reflection, white parents, white youth

INTRODUCTION

The social structure of the United States systematically confers power to white individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 2018). Moreover, race intersects with other hierarchically constructed social categorizations such as class and gender (Crenshaw, 1990; Davis, 2011). Accordingly, people with the privileges of whiteness are in positions to dismantle racism as a system of oppression as well as multiple other intersectional inequities. Race-based privileges are held by individuals of all ages, including young people (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Thus, this study investigated the developmental factors affecting white youths' understanding of oppression and their potential role in dismantling oppression. These reflections and attitudes may set the foundation for white youths' involvement in tackling oppression as adults (Obradović & Masten, 2007).

Prior theoretical and empirical work suggests that people who perceive and critique the systemic roots of inequalities can engage in individual and collective behaviors to dismantle observed and experienced forms of oppression (Diemer et al., 2016; Freire, 2016). This work has predominantly focused on those who are the most marginalized in society (e.g., in the U.S., young people of color who are also socioeconomically disadvantaged) and explored how they analyze and fight oppression (Diemer et al., 2016; Heberle et al., 2020); yet these processes of reflection and action may also be relevant for white youth. Specifically, white youth likely need to be able to understand how systems disproportionately limit opportunities for those who are marginalized before being able to engage in behaviors designed to eliminate such oppressive systems. These processes of identifying and acting against oppressive systems are the focus of the critical consciousness (CC) framework, the theoretical tool we used to inform our study of white youth's attributions about the causes of oppression and their role in fighting it.

Multiple contexts shape white youth's development of beliefs about racism and other forms of oppression (Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018); these include microsystems (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, families), exosystems (e.g., media), and the interactions between them (mesosystems; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Family contexts, especially youths' interactions with their primary caregivers, may be salient due to young people's proximity to these adults and the time they spend together. Primary caregivers impact how their children interpret and negotiate diverse societal contexts through implicit cues and direct

actions like conversations. This form of socialization may be particularly important during adolescence when key sociopolitical attitudes develop (Meeusen & Boonen, 2020). In this paper, we investigated how the primary caregivers' beliefs about the causes of social disparities (i.e., aspects of critical reflection) were associated with the development of similar beliefs among their children. We also examined whether adolescents' critical reflection indirectly explained the relationship between parental critical reflection and their endorsement of life goals centered on addressing inequitable social systems.

Critical consciousness and white youth

Our analyses were informed by the framework of critical consciousness (CC; Diemer et al., 2016; Freire, 2016; Watts et al., 2011). The CC framework can be traced to the work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Freire (2016), who believed that groups can move toward liberation when they analyze and challenge oppressive societal forces. Recent operationalizations of the CC framework (Rapa et al., 2020) include the components of critical reflection, critical action, and critical motivation. Our analysis included the component of critical reflection as well as a construct that we term critical purpose, which is not directly named in the CC framework but is related to both critical action and critical motivation.

Critical reflection encompasses youth's ability to perceive significant inequities in society, such as the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, and access to a good education between people of different social classes and races. Critical reflection is an important facet of CC as it demonstrates a cognitive understanding of the processes of oppression that lead to unequal outcomes for different groups in society, divided by aspects such as race and gender. In this study, we were interested in whether critical reflection among white youth was related to critical reflection among their primary caregivers and how critical reflection may be a factor in critical purpose among white youth.

Although not a component of current operationalizations of CC, our analyses consider adolescents' *critical purpose*, which we define as having a life goal focused on addressing oppression in society, including systems of racism and other inequities. Critical purpose both draws on and extends the CC components of critical motivation and critical action in ways that may be particularly crucial for examining CC processes within white youth. Critical purpose is similar to critical motivation (Diemer et al., 2016), a construct that captures whether youth feel a sense of agency and motivation to participate in social change (Watts & Guessous, 2006). critical motivation, which has also been referred to as critical agency (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015) and sociopolitical efficacy (Diemer & Li, 2011), asks youth whether they are enthusiastic about and feel ready or able to take part in critical action—for example, one critical motivation question asks youth whether they agree that "It is important to fight against social and economic inequality"—critical purpose asks whether engaging in eliminating systems of oppression is part of the "externally oriented quest" that youth set for themselves (Damon et al., 2003, p. 20). Drawing on the work on youth purpose (Damon & Malin, 2020) and civic purpose (Malin et al., 2015), critical purpose asks whether youth have formed life goals around working towards social justice. Life goals are an element of purpose that is important for understanding whether youth have a stable intention to accomplish something meaningful to them and also a contribution to others. Life goals may center on personal, family, or vocational domains. For a type of youth purpose such as civic purpose, the life goals are specifically about "contributing to the world through civic or political action (Malin et al., 2015, p. 103)." Critical purpose is similarly domain-specific and aligns with having intent for taking critical action. In our conception of critical purpose, we care whether youth agree that fighting against oppression is part of their life goals. Asking about purpose is developmentally relevant for our sample, as purpose scholars have posited that solidifying various life goals begins in early adolescence (Damon & Malin, 2020).

Critical purpose can also be understood as extending critical action by addressing major weaknesses of the critical action construct as measured using existing scales. First, critical action items typically address behaviors that may not always advance social justice, especially when enacted by white youth, depending on the target of the action. Take, for example, the critical action item "Joined in a protest march, political demonstrations, or political meeting" (Rapa et al., 2020). Participating in a Black Lives Matter protest would be considered critical action because the BLM movement is focused on dismantling racial oppression. In contrast, participation in a white nationalist protest would not be because those movements are focused on upholding such oppression. The study from which we drew our data did not include enough information about the adolescents' behaviors for us to conclude whether actions they had taken could be considered critical actions.

In contrast, the critical purpose items explicitly referenced injustice, which may be a less ambiguous indicator of orientation against oppression. Second, items about beliefs and attitudes can provide a more developmentally appropriate indicator during adolescence when opportunities to participate in certain critical actions may not be available (e.g., parents may limit their adolescent children's participation in some actions, not of voting age, etc.). In sum, we used critical purpose to capture white youth's likelihood of taking part in critical actions now and in the future and to gauge the formation of a sustained commitment and life goal of working towards social justice.

Transmission of Parents' beliefs and youth development of critical consciousness

Our analyses focused on the familial context of CC development for white youth; specifically, we investigate the role of critical reflection of young people's primary caregivers (often, but not always, their parents). A large body of literature on

racial socialization among youth of color (Hughes et al., 2006) focuses on how parents influence young people's understanding of systems of oppression (Anyiwo et al., 2018). Studies have identified parent discussions of sociopolitical issues and parent support for challenging social injustice (e.g., racism, sexism) as promoting youths' reports of their CC (Diemer, 2012; Diemer et al., 2009; Diemer & Li, 2011). For instance, in a study of youth of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Diemer et al. (2009) found that parent–child discussions of current events predicted youth intent to transform social and economic inequality and engagement in social change activities. Research with Black families has shown that Black children with parents who attribute racial disparities in education to structural causes, in turn, make more structural attributions 2 years later (Bañales et al., 2020). These results suggest that parents' sociopolitical attitudes—and, in particular, their analysis of oppression—may play an important role in children's development of their own beliefs and commitments regarding social inequity.

As the CC framework has seldom been applied to white families, there has been less research on how white parents may support their children in developing analyses of social inequities and commitments to dismantling oppression. Many white parents talk with their children about racism in ways that diminish the role of structural racism (Baroli et al., 2016; Vittrup, 2018); such conversations may do little to develop youths' awareness of and desire to disrupt oppression. Baroli et al. (2016) found that a majority of parents conveyed a message that racism is "overt and individual, rather than systemic, pervasive, or historical" (p. 130). Their children, in turn, described racism similarly by focusing on overt acts of prejudice and discrimination. Similarly, less than a third of the parents interviewed by Gillen-O'Neel et al. (2021) were trying to help their young children understand "structures and systems that are in place…" (p. 12). When they did discuss systems, most parents framed systems of oppression as external objects; just two parents (of 35) explicitly discussed the child's role in these systems. Other research Zucker and Patterson (2018) has shown that parents with racial bias are more likely to use socialization practices that de-emphasize the role of racial discrimination. Accordingly, there is evidence that within white families, parents' own attitudes about social inequity are related to children's attitudes.

The present analysis

The present study used data from a multi-reporter, longitudinal study to explore the relationship between white parents' critical reflection and the critical reflection and critical purpose reported by their adolescent children. We hypothesized that (1) youth whose parents reported being more critically reflective would also be more critically reflective of societal inequities, (2) youth who reported higher levels of critical reflection would also report stronger endorsement of the idea that combating social issues in the future was important to them, and (3) parental critical reflection would be linked to youth critical purpose as an indirect effect through youth reports of their critical reflection.

METHOD

Research context and procedure

We used a subset of data from the Connecting Adolescents' Beliefs and Behaviors (CABB) Study (Johnson et al., 2016), a multi-year, multi-reporter study of adolescent development among middle and high school students in the northeastern region of the United States. The analyses presented here used data from two time points and from only the adolescents and their parents who self-identified as white.

Youth participants were recruited via school sites and an online panel hosted by Qualtrics. For the school sites, administrators first consented for their school site to participate. Information about the study and consent forms was sent to parents electronically and on paper. Adolescents with parental consent provided assent themselves and then completed a survey on school grounds during a scheduled data collection time, supervised by trained staff from the research team. For the online panel hosted by Qualtrics, adult members of the online panel with eligible children were provided with information about the study. If they consented to have their child participate, the research team sent a link to the online survey, which adolescents completed at home. Parents who provided consent for their child to participate in either sample (school- or Qualtrics-based) received an invitation to complete a parent survey. They chose between completing the survey online or having a paper copy mailed to them—all participants who completed a survey received compensation for their time in the form of a gift card.

Time 1 data were collected between May of 2016 and December of 2016 for youth and between August of 2016 and February of 2017 for parents. Time 2 data collection for youth occurred between January of 2017 and December of 2017. An important context to consider when thinking about an individual's development is the historical context and larger patterns of events that one experiences. These data were collected during the Black Lives Matter movement and time 2 data at the beginning of former President Trump's presidency.

Participants

A total of 351 youth participated in the study; 197 youth had survey data at time 1 and time 2, 112 youth had data at just time 1, and 42 youth had data at just time 2. Of the 351 total youth, 303 youth also had parent data at time 1. Of the 197 youth with time 1 and 2 data, 192 also had parent data. Additional information about the number of participants with data for each variable can be found in the Table S1. All 351 youth participants and 303 parent participants self-reported their race as white only: i.e., they only selected white and did not select an additional race or ethnicity to describe themselves. Among

the youth participants, 55.0% identified as girls, 44.3% identified as boys, and 2 identified as non-binary. They were 14.39 (*SD* = 1.97) years old on average at time 1 and 14.99 (*SD* = 1.89) at time 2. Among the 303 parents, 15.7% reported identifying as men, 83.8% as women, and two participants identified as another gender. Parents were 44.74 years old on average (*SD* = 7.17) at time 1. Parents also reported their level of education: 42.6% did not have a 4-year college degree, while 56.8% had a 4-year college degree or a higher level of education. Two parents did not report their level of education.

Measures

Critical reflection

Youth and parents completed three items from the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017). Due to time constraints during data collection (we could only have surveys that took each youth participant 30–45 min and had multiple other measures on the survey), we could not include all eight items on the critical reflection subscale of the Critical Consciousness Scale. However, we chose items from the original measure that encompass forms of oppression particularly salient in the U.S. (race, gender, social class) and in domains that are easy to understand by youth and adults (education, jobs). The three final items were introduced with the following text: "Here are some questions about the way things might be in the United States. The questions are only about whether you think the statements are true. You can think some things are true even if you don't like them." Participants then responded to three items 1. "In the U.S., certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get a good high school education," 2. "In the U.S., poor children have fewer chances to get a good high school education," and 3. "In the U.S., women have fewer chances to get good jobs," using the response options Almost Never True, Usually Not True, Sometimes True, Usually True, Almost Always True, and "I don't know/I'm not sure." Responses of "I don't know/I'm not sure" were treated as missing. Parents responded to these questions at time 1, whereas youth responded to these questions at both time 1 and time 2.

Critical purpose

For adolescents only, critical purpose was measured at time 1 and time 2 using three items created by the study team. Youth were presented with the question header, "People may have different types of goals for their lives. Below is a list of goals. How important is each goal to you?" Then, on a response scale of "Not Important" to "Extremely Important," youth rated three life goals related to combatting social issues: "Fight for equality, fairness, and justice," "Work to fight social and economic inequality," and "Do something about racism or other forms of discrimination." The content of these three potential life goals was inspired by the critical agency scale in McWhirter and McWhirter (2015).

Analysis plan

The analyses were conducted in three steps; all analyses were conducted using M*plus* 8.6. Missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood estimation such that all analyses had an analytic sample size of 351. Although the number of youth at different time points differed due to attrition and recruitment (see Participants section), the analytic sample size is the number of unique youth that participated in the study. First, we evaluated the cross-sectional measurement properties of the multi-item measures using confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). We evaluated these models by examining the factor loadings as well as indices of model fit, including the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Models were considered a good fit to the data if the RMSEA and SRMR were less than 0.05, and the CFI and TLI were larger than 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015). Second, we conducted tests of measurement invariance across waves for the youth critical reflection and critical purpose constructs to determine whether the constructs were comparable over time (Kline, 2015). We determined whether the items were invariant across time points by assessing whether the model fit (RMSEA and CFI) substantially changed (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002).

Third, we estimated structural regression models to investigate the research questions. To assess our first and second research questions of whether youth whose parents reported higher critical reflection would have higher critical reflection themselves, which leads to higher critical purpose among those youth, we created a structural regression model with our parent critical reflection at time 1, youth critical reflection at time 2, and youth critical purpose at time 2. Youth critical reflection and critical purpose both had autoregressive controls, meaning that the variance of these variables at time 1 was accounted for at time 2. To address the third research question of whether parent critical reflection is linked to youth critical purpose indirectly through youth critical reflection, we estimated an indirect effect path. The model fit of the structural regression models was assessed using the same indices as the confirmatory factor analyses. A bias-corrected bootstrapping approach was used to test the significance of the indirect effect (MacKinnon et al., 2004). We accounted for the gender of youth and parent participants, the age of youth participants at time 1, and parents' level of education in all analytical models.

RESULTS

Measurement model

Table 1 shows the factor loadings from the CFA of the three time 1 constructs (parent critical reflection, youth critical reflection, youth critical purpose) and the two time 2 constructs (youth critical reflection, youth critical purpose). The model included correlated residuals between the same

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items at different time points. The model fit the data well (RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.051, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.957). All individual items had statistically significant factor loadings on the latent constructs they were hypothesized to measure.

Measurement invariance

Table 2 shows the results of the tests of measurement invariance. First, we tested for configural invariance (i.e., whether the patterns of factor loadings were the same at both time points). This model fits the data very well. Next, we estimated a model with factor loading invariance (weak or metric invariance). The changes in CFI and RMSEA were <.01, indicating that the factor loadings were invariant. Finally, we constrained the item intercepts to be equal longitudinally; these additional constraints also produced negligible changes in both the CFI (<.01) and RMSEA (<.01).

Structural regression model

The structural regression model of the hypothesized relations among the latent constructs, shown in Figure 1, provided an adequate fit to the data (RMSEA = 0.033, SRMR = 0.066, CFI = 0.966, TLI = 0.958). The standardized coefficients shown in Figure 1 can be interpreted as effect sizes: coefficients between 0.10 and 0.30 are considered small; between 0.30 and 0.50 are considered medium, and coefficients above 0.50 are considered large effect sizes (Kline, 2010). In the structural regression model, all latent variables were regressed on the covariates of youth gender, parent gender, youth age, and parent education level. Full results of the structural regression model, including covariate loadings, are presented in Table S2. Older youth had higher levels of critical reflection at wave 1, and youth gender was related to wave 1 and 2 youth critical reflection. No other patterns between covariates and the latent variables of the study were statistically significant.

TABLE 1 Standardized factor loadings in the measurement model.

Latent construct	Observed item	Standardized factor loading	Standard error
Time 1 Parent Critical Reflection	Q1: In the U.S., certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.92	0.03
	Q2: In the U.S., poor children have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.80	0.03
	Q3: In the U.S., women have fewer chances to get good jobs	0.65	0.04
Time 1 Youth Critical Reflection	Q1: In the U.S., certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.77	0.06
	Q2: In the U.S., poor children have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.59	0.06
	Q3: In the U.S., women have fewer chances to get good jobs	0.69	0.05
Time 2 Youth Critical Reflection	Q1: In the U.S., certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.94	0.03
	Q2: In the U.S., poor children have fewer chances to get a good high school education	0.66	0.05
	Q3: In the U.S., women have fewer chances to get good jobs	0.77	0.04
Time 1 Youth Critical Purpose	Q1: How important is each goal to you? – Fight for equality, fairness, and justice.	0.78	0.04
	Q2: How important is each goal to you? – Work to fight social and economic inequality	0.79	0.04
	Q3: How important is each goal to you? – Do something about racism or other forms of discrimination	0.87	0.04
Time 2 Youth Critical Purpose	Q1: How important is each goal to you? – Fight for equality, fairness, and justice	0.82	0.03
	Q2: How important is each goal to you? – Work to fight social and economic inequality	0.79	0.04
	Q3: How important is each goal to you? – Do something about racism or other forms of discrimination	0.92	0.03

Note: All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Results of longitudinal measurement invariance testing.

Model	Model χ^2	Degrees of freedom	CFI	Change in CFI	RMSEA	Change in RMSEA	Change in χ^2	p
Alternative null model	1064.543	78	–	–	–	–		
Configural invariance	50.282	42	0.99	–	0.024	–		
Weak (loading/metric) invariance	58.061	48	0.99	<0.01	0.024	<0.01	7.78	.25
Strong (intercept) invariance	73.194	54	0.98	<0.01	0.032	<0.01	15.13	.02

Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

At time 1, parent and youth critical reflection were positively correlated (β = .385, $p < .001$). Time 1 parent critical reflection was also positively correlated with time 1 youth critical purpose (β = .193, $p < .035$). Youth reports of critical reflection and critical purpose at time 1 were significantly related to their reports on those same constructs at time 2 (β = .428, $p < .001$ for critical reflection; β = .469, $p < .001$ for critical purpose), and this relationship functioned as an autoregressive control in our model. Parent critical reflection at time 1 was positively related to youth critical reflection at time 2 (β = .235, $p = .004$). There was also a positive relationship between youth reports of critical reflection at time 2 and their reports of critical purpose measured at the same time (β = .225, $p = .025$), after accounting for the variance in youth critical purpose at time 2 that can be explained by youth critical reflection at time 1 (β = −.147, $p = .184$).

We then tested the significance of an indirect effect of parent critical reflection at time 1 on youth critical purpose at time 2 through youth critical reflection at time 2. In the test of this indirect effect, both time 2 youth variables accounted for time 1 variation (see Figure 2). Although there is no direct effect from parent critical reflection at time 1 to youth critical purpose at time 2, the hypothesized indirect effect (β = .053) was significant with a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval between 0.003 and 0.139 ($p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

Understanding CC among white families is a crucial step towards dismantling oppression in the U.S. because white individuals benefit from the racial status quo and have the potential to use their power and privilege towards social justice. However, little research focuses on reports from white youth-parent dyads exploring the development of adolescents' commitments to social justice. We examined the relationship between parent and youth CC beliefs (operationalized as attributions of inequality to structural causes) to understand the role of parents as a primary developmental context in supporting white youth's CC. We further investigated links between youth CC beliefs and their identification with combating oppression as an important life goal to examine whether white youth connected their analyses of inequities and injustice in society to a future direction for their life actions. Further, we analyzed whether parents' CC beliefs supported young people's critical purpose through supporting youth CC beliefs.

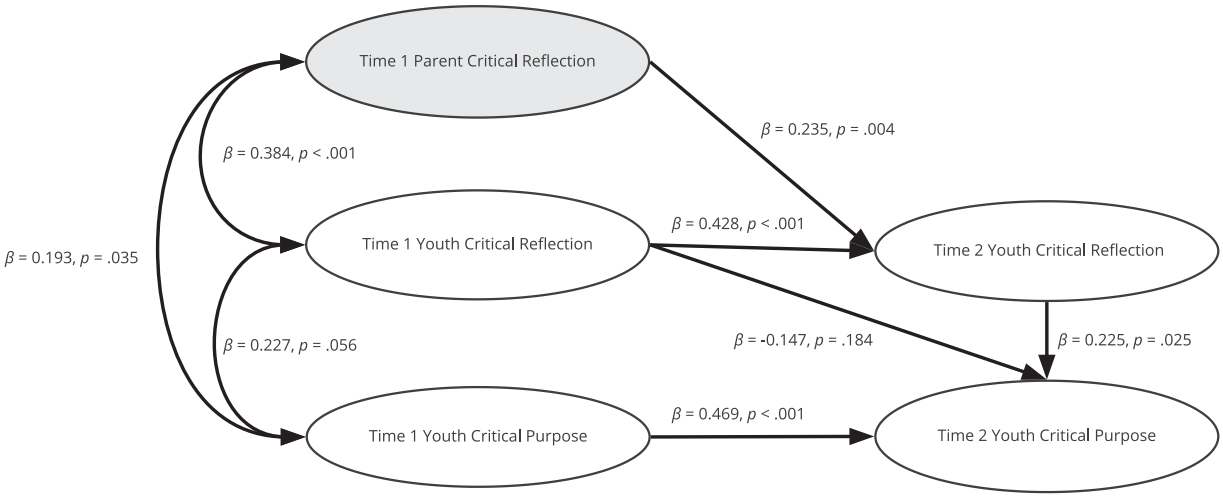

FIGURE 1 Structural regression model with estimated parameters as standardized coefficients. All latent variables were regressed on the covariates of youth gender, parent gender, youth age, and parent education level.

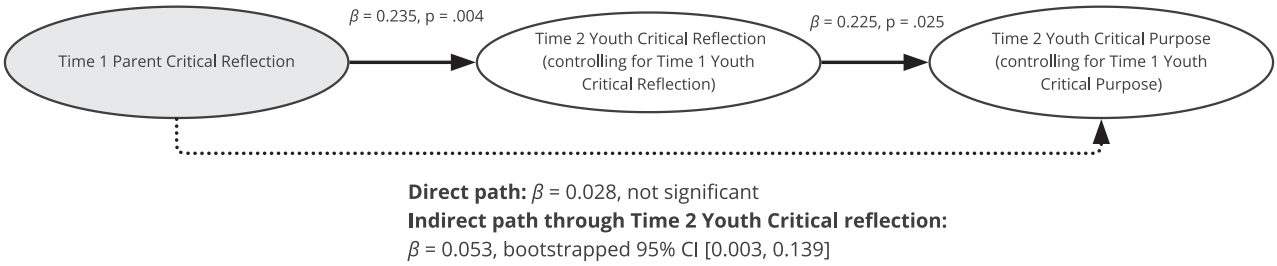

FIGURE 2 Test of the indirect path from time 1 parent critical reflection to time 2 youth critical purpose through time 2 youth critical reflections. All latent variables were regressed on the covariates of youth gender, parent gender, youth age, and parent education level.

We found that parents' critical reflection at time 1 was related to their children's critical reflection at time 2 (after accounting for adolescents' critical reflection at time 1), which was then associated with their critical purpose or their identification with undoing systemic inequities and injustice as a life goal. Furthermore, although parents' critical reflection at time 1 was not directly related to time 2 youth critical purpose, there was an indirect path from parental critical reflection to youth critical purpose via adolescents' time 2 critical reflection.

Characteristics of white youth's critical reflection

The development of critical reflection is likely a complicated developmental task that requires analysis of various forms of oppression. White youth may at first hold beliefs that mask or counteract a critically conscious analysis of oppression, including beliefs about meritocracy, justifications of the current status quo, and the appropriateness or desirability of some groups being socially dominant over others (Godfrey et al., 2019; Watts et al., 2011). Necessarily, for white youth, the process of forming critical reflection involves coming to terms with how the oppression of people of color is predicated on accumulated advantage for whites; thus, outcomes of CC for white youth may depend on their ability to accept their white privilege (Diemer et al., 2019). Although white youth may eventually be able to interrogate these understandings independently, integrating new understandings of how oppression functions in society may take time and exposure to different ways of thinking, including the influence of their parents' understandings of the root causes of societal inequity.

Nevertheless, the relationships between youth reports of critical reflection at the first time point and their reports of critical reflection at the following time point were moderate in magnitude, meaning that an individual's level of critical reflection (relative to their peers) is malleable over time. Some youth are experiencing increases, some decreases, and some may not be experiencing any changes. White youth's beliefs about social inequity may be in flux over time for several reasons. Youth may experience growth in critical reflection if they are prompted to reflect on their relative position in society and learn about systemic forces (e.g., policies, institutions) that have established and continue to perpetuate oppressive social structures. Settings that may foster these experiences include engagement in intergroup dialogue in educational or community settings (Frantell et al., 2019) and involvement in youth participatory action research projects (Toraif et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, white youth may also report lower levels of critical reflection over time due to difficulty maintaining a critically reflective stance. Research on the development of racial identity among white adults (Helms, 2019) outlines how white individuals may enter a state of disequilibrium after experiences that bring to their consciousness the realities of structural racism. Feelings of guilt and overwhelm can prevent this awareness from leading to further development of their racial identity. Future research should explore variations in longitudinal trajectories of critical reflection among white youth and examine how external factors may prompt growth or decline in critical reflection.

Relations between parent and youth: critical reflection

Parent and youth reports of critical reflection were positively correlated both within and across the two time points, but the relationships were only moderate in magnitude. However, the across-time association between parent critical reflection at the first time point and youth critical reflection at the second time point was present over and above the stability between youth critical reflection at times one and two. This finding extends the literature on white parents' socialization by demonstrating that parents' critical reflection is related to their child's critical reflection, as previously shown within a Black sample (Bañales et al., 2020). Although our survey did not directly ask about instances of race-related talk and other mechanisms of parental socialization, parents with higher levels of critical reflection may be more likely to discuss elements of oppression, such as systemic racism, in their household conversations, which may support youth's critical reflection. In addition, it is also possible that youth prompt critical reflection among their parents, leading to the correlated critical reflection in the dyads. Although much research on socialization has examined how parents influence their children in a top-down fashion, recent scholarship has highlighted how children exercise agency within socialization processes, creating a bidirectional relationship (Hatemi & Ojeda, 2020; Pedraza & Perry, 2020).

Youth critical reflection to critical purpose

Youth reports of critical reflection were related to their reports of critical purpose, which ties young people's cognitive awareness of oppression to a commitment to be involved in behaviors addressing oppression in the future. However, the effect size was small, meaning that some young people with high levels of critical reflection do not also endorse a critical purpose, and some youth may have a critical purpose while lacking an analysis of oppression.

A model of white youths' involvement in racial justice allyship developed by Thomann and Suyemoto (2018) points to an understanding of oppression emerging first at an abstract level. When the individual begins to incorporate empathy and self-reflexivity into their understanding, their awareness of oppression becomes more than just a fact they can recite about the world and becomes a deep engagement connected to their relationships with self and others. White youth who can abstractly reflect on inequities in society may only develop critical purpose when they can also make

meaning of their experiences with others and themselves through the lens of CC. These processes should be investigated in future research.

Another factor in the path from critical reflection to critical purpose may also be the young person's assessment of their skills and knowledge for tackling the systemic issues they perceive. A young person who understands that entrenched disparities between groups have structural causes may not commit to tackling these disparities if they do not feel they can be effective change agents. Among youth with similar levels of critical reflection, those with stronger self-efficacy related to taking social justice action may be more likely to commit to these behaviors as life goals. Accordingly, aspects of critical efficacy should be included in future research to investigate its potential role in the link between critical reflection and critical purpose.

Parents supporting youth's critical purpose

Our research demonstrated that white youth's critical purpose is indirectly related to their parents' critical reflection through their own critical reflection. This indirect effect was statistically significant but of a small magnitude, suggesting that other indirect and direct pathways to youth critical purpose likely are at play. Additionally, while an indirect path was found through a mediational model, due to the study's design, a causal link was not established. More specifically, while we theorized that youth's critical reflection at time 2 could be feeding their critical purpose at time 2 and constructed our models to represent this, youth critical purpose can be driving youth critical reflection. However, this preliminary finding points to one way white youth may develop aspirations to challenge oppression. Young white people may experience a rise in their critical reflection in the context of parental critical reflection, and this explains how parental critical reflection can support youth in adopting goals about addressing inequities and injustices during their life course.

Recent research by Dull et al. (2022) found that young white adolescents who were surrounded at home, among peers, and at school in "racially conscious" contexts had greater levels of engagement in the types of actions that are associated with anti-oppression work, such as participating in civil rights groups and attending protests. This research complements our work by demonstrating that young people who are likely receiving CC-aligned messages in multiple contexts—school, home, and peer groups—are more likely to take CC-aligned action or have CC-aligned aspirations. In our research, we only examined the influence of parents, which may account for the minimal ability to explain variation in white youths' critical purpose. Nevertheless, our work makes an important contribution to research by Dull et al. (2022), who show that "race conscious" inputs in youth contexts can manifest as commitments to social justice through changes in adolescents' awareness of structures of oppression.

Limitations and future directions

The present analyses were limited in several ways. First, the data were not nationally representative of white families, so conclusions are not broadly generalizable. Furthermore, due to the limited sample size, we could not conduct analyses by different types of dyads; for example, we could not compare dyads of different gender combinations or dyads with lower socioeconomic status against higher socioeconomic status. It is important to consider these within-group differences in future work, especially given that oppression in U.S. society is multifaceted. Analyses that employ an intersectional perspective may reveal complex ways in which white individuals' multiple social positions influence their understandings of oppression.

Future work should also consider whether reflecting on a system of oppression—and the way to measure these processes—is equivalent for youth who benefit from said system and those who are disadvantaged by it. Despite calls to address the intersectional lived realities of individuals (Godfrey & Burson, 2018), much of the quantitative work on CC treats each "axis" of oppression in silos. We ask participants to share their critical reflection on a system, one system at a time. Future research may consider whether the process of understanding structural racism, for example, is distinct for a white young person versus a young person of color. And furthermore, even if the cognitive process is demonstrated to be equivalent (as some studies have shown through measurement invariance testing [e.g., Maker Castro et al., 2022]), what about the emotional and relational aspects of critical consciousness (Wallin-Ruschman, 2018)?

A more nuanced understanding of how critical reflection and critical purpose differ based on the topic of interrogation is important, too. Thus far, critical consciousness processes are conceptualized as an "average" across multiple dimensions of oppression, spanning race, gender, socioeconomic status, and more. The authors encourage expanding these dimensions in future work to be more inclusive while probing participants' experiences with specific forms of oppression vis-à-vis the sociohistorical and political context. For example, the moment immediately after the murder of George Floyd, when issues of racial justice were in the public consciousness, may have had implications for critical reflection, critical purpose, and critical action on racism specifically. Combining multiple dimensions of oppression when considering critical consciousness requires further empirical inquiry. This type of investigation may be particularly important as scholars propose that white individuals may enter into CC via different issues based on their lived experiences (Goodman, 2011). For example, young white people who experience marginalization due to their sexuality may first develop a structural understanding of heterosexism before developing analyses of other forms of oppression. Understanding the uniqueness of critical consciousness processes for different "-isms" may be fruitful for mapping pathways to consciousness-raising in more domains for youth.

We also encourage future research examining the directionality between critical reflection and critical purpose, posing possibilities for bidirectional relationships. In this study, we tested an indirect effect whereby youth critical reflection precedes youth critical purpose. We reasoned that young people's expanded understanding of the world around them informs the formation of a purpose that targets those revealed inequities. However, our analyses showed that the indirect effect was weak, and we acknowledge the possibility that youth may form critical purpose first—for example, through role models (Johnson et al., 2016)—and that their intention results in actions such as seeking greater understanding and engaging in dialogues that then build their critical reflection. In fact, critical consciousness processes have been theorized to be recursive in nature (Suzuki et al., 2023), and the specific relationship between critical reflection and critical purpose may be as well.

The data for this study were collected around the time of the 2016 U.S. election cycle, a moment in history that impacted the sociopolitical development of young people (Kennedy et al., 2019; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). The sociopolitical climate may have affected white youth and parents' beliefs about social inequity and the socialization processes between them (for example, the frequency and nature of conversations about current events) and how they shared these beliefs on a survey. Future research could include variables that explicitly measure the influence of participants' sociopolitical context, for example, by asking about their news media consumption. To better understand the development of white youth as allies, studies will need to consider other socialization forces in their environment, such as school and peers.

CONCLUSION

All youth have the potential to disrupt systems of oppression, and white youth may have a unique opportunity to leverage their positions of privilege to engage in social justice efforts. A critical analysis of how oppression is constructed can support white youth in declaring goals of combating injustice, and parents may contribute to this developmental shift and commitment. How white parents interpret oppression is related to how their children make sense of oppressive structures and thus indirectly supports white youths' commitment to anti-oppression efforts. Our results suggest multiple points at which white youth's commitment to social justice action can be supported, including supporting parents' critical reflection and supporting youth's own CC-based beliefs. Youth may even be prompting these discussions, having beliefs more aligned with allyship than their parents. Furthermore, white youth may only commit to allyship as a life goal when they have integrated reflections of their own privilege into their sense of self and developed motivations and capacities for taking action. As a group with profound power due to their race, understanding the development of a structural analysis of disparities in society is an important step in understanding the formation of white youths' commitment to social justice efforts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We do not have any conflict of interest to report.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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