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The Art of Social Justice: Examining Arts Programming as a Context for Critical Consciousness Development Among Youth

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Abstract

Critical consciousness has been linked to a range of positive outcomes, particularly among marginalized youth; yet, evidence on its developmental antecedents remains limited. The current study examines whether arts participation is associated with positive change in critical consciousness, and whether these associations differ by youth's social group status. The sample consisted of high school youth (N=2537; 10% Latinx, 7% Multiracial; 4% Black; 5% Asian; 72% White; 2% Other; 53% Female; Mage=15.69; age range=10–20). The results showed that youth with higher arts participation demonstrate higher growth in critical reflection and action, adjusting for baseline critical consciousness, other types of extracurricular participation, and demographic characteristics. The association between arts participation and critical action was significantly stronger for youth of color than for white youth, and the association between arts participation and critical reflection was marginally significantly stronger for white youth than for youth of color. These findings suggest that it is crucial to extend opportunities for arts involvement to all students, and to expand the ways in which arts involvement can promote critical consciousness for youth of varying dimensions of oppression and privilege.

Keywords

critical consciousness; arts participation; extracurricular activities; youth development

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Authors' Contributions

DI conceived of the study, performed statistical analyses, interpreted results, and drafted the manuscript; EG participated in the design of the study, the interpretation of results, and editing of the manuscript; EC participated in the interpretation of results and editing of the manuscript; EB participated in the conceptualization and performance of statistical analyses, interpretation of results, and editing of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Sharing Declaration

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not yet publicly available but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interests.

Introduction

Understanding the ways in which youth develop critical consciousness is crucial toward promoting this developmental competency, disrupting systems of oppression, and fostering youth well-being. Critical consciousness may be particularly powerful for the well-being of youth marginalized by society, as it is conceptualized to be an important tool marginalized communities can leverage to combat oppression (Freire, 1970). Examining the development of this construct is particularly important during adolescence, as more complex cognitive abilities allow youth to actively reflect on their personal beliefs and develop a structural understanding of fairness in relation to the social systems with which they interact (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Scholarship examining the developmental processes (e.g., socialization, dialogue) and contexts (classrooms, schools, peer groups, intervention programs) that might contribute to critical consciousness, and for whom, is growing; however, this area of literature is still nascent. In particular, little is known about how participation in extracurricular contexts may facilitate critical consciousness. Arts programming may be a particularly important context that can facilitate critical consciousness. A growing body of scholarship on social justice art suggests that youth programs can effectively promote youth's critical consciousness through intentional use of the arts for social justice education (Dewhurst, 2014). Additionally, general participation in the arts (without intentional integration of social justice pedagogy) has been associated with outcomes related to critical consciousness, and its known mechanisms. Despite this, arts participation has yet to be directly linked to critical consciousness in the empirical literature thus far. The current study addresses this gap, examining the relations between arts participation and critical consciousness outcomes, and exploring how these processes differ for youth facing relative levels of marginalization and privilege.

Critical Consciousness Development

Building on Paulo Freire's original theory of critical consciousness, scholars have recently conceptualized critical consciousness to consist of three components that relate to one another in mutually reinforcing ways (Freire, 1970; Watts et al., 2011). Critical reflection is most often conceptualized as an awareness of structural inequities, and at times, also includes a component of egalitarianism (the belief that society should be fair) (Diemer & Rapa, 2016). Political or sociopolitical efficacy is conceptualized as youth's perceived capacity to create social and political change (Watts et al., 2011); some scholars also refer to this as 'critical motivation,' describing both youth's self-perceived agency *and* commitment to effecting social change (Diemer et al., 2016). Critical action, the third component, is conceptualized as participation in individual or collective activities to challenge injustice (Diemer et al., 2016). As such, critical action conceptually corresponds with Westheimer & Kahne (2004)'s vision of a justice-oriented citizen. It is typically assessed by asking youth about participation in activities such as political campaigns and protests (Diemer et al., 2017), but more recent measurement asks youth about engagement in other kinds of activities that challenge injustice and include anti-racist actions like joining a club that works on race-related issues (Aldana et al., 2019). Based on the availability of data, yet aligned with recent assessments, the current study assesses critical action as a measurement of participation in social justice-oriented clubs.

Whether conceptualized as one, two, or three of the components discussed above, critical consciousness has been linked to a range of positive outcomes for youth, including occupational attainment (Rapa et al., 2018), academic achievement (El-Amin et al., 2017), mental health (Christens & Peterson, 2012), and empowerment (Watts et al., 2011). Importantly, critical consciousness was originally theorized as a tool for marginalized communities; thus, most of the recent developmental research on critical consciousness demonstrates positive outcomes specifically for youth who identify as people of color (POC) and youth of low-socioeconomic status (Heberle et al., 2020). Indeed, critical consciousness has been associated with decreased feelings of helplessness among young African American men, suggesting that youth facing structural inequities who can develop this "antidote" to oppression may experience particularly meaningful growth (Zimmerman et al., 1999; Watts et al., 1999). In addition, recent studies of critical consciousness have begun to include youth who face discrimination based on alternative dimensions of marginalization – for example, sexual or gender minority (SGM) youth (Chan & Mak, 2019). Amidst the well-established notion that critical consciousness is meant for marginalized groups and the recent scholarship examining critical consciousness development among marginalized youth, complex questions have emerged in the literature, including whether and how critical consciousness can be conceptualized in more privileged groups (i.e., can critical consciousness work to humanize those with the power to dismantle oppressive structures?) (Heberle et al., 2020). The current article contends with this juxtaposition, as it examines a construct meant for marginalized groups in both POC and white youth, as well as in both SGM and non-SGM youth.

What is Known about Predictors of Critical Consciousness Development?

Despite its importance in combatting oppression and contributing to youth development, scholars are only beginning to understand the developmental processes and contexts that promote critical consciousness. In his original theory, Freire emphasized the value of dialogue (conceived as "a process of learning and knowing") and critical thinking, in facilitating both reflection and action (Freire, 1970). Building off this theorizing, scholars have identified processes such as perspective-taking and critical curiosity (the desire to learn more about social inequity) as key steps to engaging in this process of learning and knowing (Clark & Seider, 2017). Socio-emotional skills such as empathy and tolerance are also considered important developmental antecedents to youth's beliefs about inequity and ability to reject oppressive systems (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). In addition, scholars have identified key social processes, such as parental socialization (parental attributions, racial socialization, discussion of current events) (Bañales et al., 2019), and support from peers, family, and community members to challenge social injustice, as conducive to critical consciousness development (Diemer et al., 2006).

Certain aspects of youth's contexts are also considered important for critical consciousness development. These include the presence of an open classroom climate in which youth can discuss social and political issues with respect for all opinions (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014), and the use of targeted school pedagogies (e.g., a problem-posing pedagogy to engage youth in critical dialogue, and a habits-of-mind pedagogy to develop skills like analysis and empathy) (Seider et al., 2017). One context outside of the traditional classroom environment

that has also been linked to critical consciousness development is that of cocurricular and extracurricular programming, such as critical consciousness-focused intervention programs. Although critical consciousness intervention programs range in content area from theater to science, a growing number of programs leverage creative and performing arts activities to facilitate critical dialogue toward critical consciousness (Heberle et al., 2020).

Indeed, art is a tool for creative expression and imagination that has historically been leveraged to challenge social injustice (Goessling, 2020). In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal (1979) describes his method of leveraging theatre games and techniques to engage marginalized communities in critical consciousness; he refers to artistic practices (theatre, photography, films, etc.) as languages that can be learned and leveraged to confront social injustice. For instance, Hip-Hop has long been a key platform leveraged by marginalized communities to challenge structural racism, resist colonial approaches of Eurocentric art, name their lived realities, and "make space for themselves" in the world (Gosine & Tabi, 2016). In addition to facilitating creative expression, art often requires activating the imagination (i.e., generating new ideas and feeling a sense of hope for new possibilities), which can facilitate one's ability to understand injustice and imagine new possibilities for a more just society (Bell & Desai, 2011). Thus, it may not be surprising that a number of interventions have encouraged youth to leverage art to engage in critical consciousness. In fact, one of the first documented critical consciousness programs, The Young Warriors Program, was designed to utilize art forms of rap music and film to engage young African American men in critical consciousness (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998). In a more recent, community-based theater program, a group of Hmong youth leveraged theater as a linguistic tool to name their experiences with oppression (e.g., facing racial stereotypes), and perform different ways of confronting injustice (Ngo, 2017). Both examples demonstrate how the arts can provide language to engage in critical dialogue about social issues, trigger imagination of new possibilities for a socially just world, and even engage in social action (e.g., performing ways to challenge oppressors). When arts participation is grounded in critical pedagogy directed toward addressing social inequities, art *is* critical action (Bentz & O'Brien, 2019). In addition to programs leveraging music, theater, film, and visual arts, a large body of scholarship documents the use of photography in photovoice among youth, a participatory research method to promote critical consciousness (Greene et al., 2018a).

The scholarship on socially engaged art demonstrates how the unique characteristics of artistic practice (i.e., creative imagination, perspective-taking, freedom in creative expression) position art as a tool for critical consciousness-building. However, the current study is the first to examine general arts participation - attendance or participation in one or more creative or performing art, such as theater, dance, painting, poetry, and music without an explicit social justice component - as a potential context and mechanism of critical consciousness development. Although general arts participation does not intentionally target social justice development in the way socially engaged art does, general arts programming may serve as a context in which youth can build skills and interact with others in a way that serves their critical consciousness development. This examination is a crucial next step for both theory and intervention; it provides initial evidence of potential developmental

mechanisms driving critical consciousness and highlights general arts programs as a potentially more widely accessible platform to youth than targeted intervention programs.

Why Might General Arts Participation Relate to Critical Consciousness Development?

Although participation in general arts programming has yet to be directly linked to critical consciousness development, many of the same processes that are active in socially engaged art are present in general arts, including opportunities for creative expression and imagination. In addition, arts participation has been shown to stimulate the development of socioemotional and cognitive skills such as tolerance, empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking (Greene et al., 2018b; Bowen & Kisida, 2019; Lampert, 2011), the very same skills that have been hypothesized to undergird critical reflection, according to the critical consciousness literature (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Clark & Seider, 2017; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998). For instance, several studies in arts education provide evidence that general arts participation may promote tolerance and perspective-taking in youth. One correlational study found that adolescents highly involved in theater were less likely to endorse making racist remarks, and more likely to report positive race relations, than their less-involved peers (Catterall et al., 1999). This association between arts participation and higher tolerance for others may be due to the collaborative nature of arts participation (Schellenberg et al., 2015), and of theater, specifically (Vasudevan et al., 2010); youth who are working together in a supportive and collaborative space may be more likely to connect with and understand one another, despite differences in race or other identity markers. Additional causal evidence supports this link, as adolescents randomly assigned to see a live theater production showed higher levels of tolerance than those in the control groups, adjusting for initial tolerance levels (Greene et al., 2018b). The same study also found that youth who saw live theater showed higher perspective-taking skills, but this link did not remain statistically significant with the addition of pre-treatment perspective-taking. One proposed mechanism the authors provide for the live theater production predicting higher levels of tolerance, and potentially perspective-taking, is that theater, like other art forms, allows for direct human connection that facilitates an understanding of others' experiences and emotional connections.

In addition to tolerance and perspective-taking skills, art can contribute to youth's empathy, compassion, and other prosocial skills. For instance, one recent experiment found that students randomly assigned to arts educational experiences displayed increased compassion for others and, among younger students, increased empathy (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). Several other experimental studies found that children assigned to group music programs demonstrated greater emotional empathy, sympathy, and prosocial skills (e.g., helping behaviors) (Schellenberg et al., 2015; Rabinowitch et al., 2013). The authors explain these findings by suggesting that music-making in a group setting provides the opportunity for youth to collaborate and "co-construct" their knowledge and skills, an important developmental mechanism for youth's learning; as a result, music facilitates social cohesion, togetherness, and other-directedness, contributing directly to youth's ability to empathize with others (Schellenberg et al., 2015; Rabinowitch et al., 2013; Vygotsky, 1980).

Finally, causal research suggests that participation in visual arts may be linked to improvements in critical thinking. For instance, one randomized study showed that students who participated in an art museum tour demonstrated higher critical thinking skills when analyzing a new painting than did students in the control group; this effect was especially strong for students from less advantaged backgrounds (Bowen et al., 2014). The authors attribute these findings to student engagement in open-ended, student-driven discussions during the museum tour, which was meant to guide the development and expression of their own unique interpretations of the art. Similarly, another study found that children who participated in a visual arts program demonstrated significant gains in critical thinking from pre-test to post-test (Lampert, 2011). The author points to the importance of art program characteristics such as an open-ended, inquiry-based structure for group discussion and the presence of a supportive and welcoming classroom environment. Given that parent, peer, and community support are key precursors to critical consciousness development among youth (Diemer et al., 2006), arts participation may help to facilitate youth's critical consciousness development by providing this safe and supportive environment for youth to build skills. Taken together, these findings suggest that various types of arts activities have the potential to contribute to the development of skills instrumental for critical consciousness, perhaps through art's unique ability of promoting social cohesion and togetherness, encouraging collaboration and dialogue that is student-driven, open-ended, and inquiry-based, and providing a supportive and welcoming space for youth to engage in skill development.

Evidence from the critical consciousness literature suggests that the same socioemotional skills (i.e., tolerance, empathy, perspective-taking, critical thinking) promoted in arts-based settings are necessary skills for the development of critical reflection (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Clark & Seider, 2017; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998). For instance, in an article examining critical consciousness and career development, the authors emphasize the importance of skills like empathy, social tolerance, and altruism in youth's development of critical analysis (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). The authors note that individuals who support the belief that certain social groups should dominate others (i.e., social dominance orientation) also lack socioemotional skills of empathy, social tolerance, and altruism that are necessary for engaging in critical analysis of social structures. Another study examining youth's desire to learn about social justice issues found that students value exposure to new perspectives from their peers as a way to open their minds to new ideas and trigger their critical curiosity (Clark & Seider, 2017). Thus, perspective-taking may facilitate youth's desire to *learn* about social justice issues, serving as a key step toward critical reflection. Finally, the critical consciousness literature has historically emphasized the importance of critical thinking in critical consciousness development, noting that "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking" (Freire, 1970; p. 92) and that, "Critical consciousness is critical thinking, applied to the societal realm" (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998; p. 66). In other words, youth need to be able to think critically before applying the skill to examining the structures of society. By stimulating skills such as critical thinking, empathy, tolerance, and perspective-taking, general arts programs may also facilitate critical reflection and initiate the process of critical consciousness development.

In addition to promoting underlying skills for critical reflection, arts participation may promote civic and sociopolitical activities that either overlap with, or are adjacent

to, indicators of critical action. For instance, correlational research demonstrates a positive association between arts participation and civic and sociopolitical behaviors (e.g., participating in student government and school service clubs, voting, or participating in a political campaign) for low-SES youth (Catterall, 2012). Findings from a propensity score matching approach revealed that youth with higher participation in performing arts activities had higher levels of early adult voting (Thomas & McFarland, 2010). Moreover, in this study, arts participation was a stronger predictor of voting than all other extracurricular activities included (academic, sports, journalism, and vocational), and participation in government or civic classes was unassociated with voting. Although these studies did not specifically measure critical consciousness as an outcome of arts participation, they provide evidence that arts participation is linked to sociopolitical activities that have either been used to assess critical action (e.g., Diemer et al., 2017) or have been closely linked to critical consciousness development (e.g., Diemer & Li, 2011). Building on this research linking arts participation to underlying critical consciousness skills and adjacent or overlapping sociopolitical outcomes, the current study is the first to examine the direct relationship between arts participation and critical consciousness.

Differences by Social Group Status

Critical consciousness has been conceptualized as a tool that marginalized groups can leverage to counteract structural barriers to social mobility and attain occupational success (Watts et al., 1999; Rapa et al., 2018). Most studies examining critical consciousness thus limit their sample to racial minority or low-SES youth (Heberle et al., 2020). This decision, importantly, recognizes racism and classism as prominent dimensions of oppression. However, it is also important to extend this literature to understand the ways in which critical consciousness develops among youth facing other forms of oppression – including cissexism (Shin et al., 2018) and heterosexism (Shin et al., 2016). Youth who are not heterosexual or cisgender may face high levels of discrimination – particularly in the high school context – that can result in negative mental health consequences (Herek & Garnets, 2007). However, few studies have given attention to the development of critical consciousness among sexual and gender minority (SGM) populations (e.g., Poteat et al., 2020). It is crucial to understand the nuanced ways in which critical consciousness development may differ for different groups of marginalized youth. The ideal way to do this would be to examine specific differences in critical consciousness development for racial subgroups (i.e., Black or African American youth, Latinx youth, see Diemer & Rapa, 2016) or SGM subgroups (i.e., gay youth, bisexual youth, trans youth). Unfortunately, the current data does not allow for such a nuanced level of analysis. Given the subgroup sample sizes in the current dataset, this study takes an initial step toward exploring these nuanced differences across marginalized groups by comparing relations between arts and critical consciousness development among youth of color and white youth, and among SGM and straight, cisgender youth.

In addition, although it is well-established that critical consciousness is meant specifically for marginalized groups, there is disagreement about the extent to which critical consciousness theory can characterize the experience of youth with relatively more privilege (e.g., white, higher SES, straight, cisgender). Critical consciousness may not be the right term to name this process among more privileged youth, but understanding how these

processes of recognizing and fighting injustice develop among more privileged youth is also important, as they can leverage their relative power in the system to work as allies in disrupting social injustice. The few studies that include both privileged and marginalized groups have found some similarities and some differences in critical consciousness development by group privilege, suggesting that factors such as racial group status may play a role in youth's critical consciousness levels and the effectiveness of certain predictors in facilitating critical consciousness (e.g., Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Additionally, the critical consciousness literature emphasizing the importance of empathy, tolerance, perspective-taking (a precursor of critical curiosity), and critical thinking focuses primarily on samples of Black or African American and/or Latino youth (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Clark & Seider, 2017; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998), raising questions about whether these same skills would also be useful for white youth, and if so, how. Finally, there is some evidence that associations between arts participation and sociopolitical participation and critical thinking may vary by socioeconomic status (Catterall, 2012; Bowen et al., 2014). Thus, the current study examines whether associations between art participation and critical consciousness development differ for more privileged vs. more marginalized youth in order to better understand the role of social positionality in critical consciousness development.

Youth's experiences of marginalization, oppression, and violence are key predictors of critical consciousness (Heberle et al., 2020); thus, it may follow that more privileged youth who lack the concrete experiences of marginalization to trigger their development of critical consciousness may lean even more heavily on socioemotional skills like empathy, tolerance, and perspective-taking. For instance, while youth of color may leverage empathy to further understand issues faced by other racial/ethnic groups, or perspective-taking to trigger their curiosity in learning about issues relevant to other racial/ethnic groups, these skills may be even more important for white youth, who do not hold the lived experience of racial oppression. Because SGM youth hold experiences of structural oppression based on their gender and/or sexuality, socioemotional skills may be more important to non-SGM youth's critical consciousness development. Given that these socioemotional skills can be particularly facilitative of critical reflection, arts participation may contribute more strongly to the critical reflection of more privileged groups. In contrast, arts participation may contribute more strongly to the political efficacy and critical action of more marginalized groups. Peer support is a key predictor of critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2006); thus, having access to an environment that promotes cohesion, togetherness, collaboration, support, and inclusivity could be necessary to marginalized youth's perceived ability to effect change, and to their ability to connect with others in taking action.

Current Study

Although youth participation in general arts programming has been associated with sociopolitical participation and underlying mechanisms for critical consciousness development, research has yet to examine whether arts participation relates to changes over time in each component of critical consciousness, and for whom. The current study first addresses the primary research question, "Does extracurricular arts participation contribute to change in critical consciousness among adolescents?" As youth in the current study were not randomly assigned to participate in arts organizations or not, causal predictions cannot

be made. However, the current study adjusts for youth's critical consciousness at the start of the school year to capture the contribution of arts participation during the school year to critical consciousness development over and above initial critical consciousness; the study also controls for other types of extracurricular participation (e.g. sports) and demographic characteristics. The second, exploratory research question, "Does the relation between arts participation and critical consciousness vary depending on youth's social group status?" is addressed through a set of multigroup analyses. This second question remains exploratory due to the lower sample size of youth who identify as POC or SGM, which limits the precision of estimates in the multigroup models. It is expected that higher arts participation at the beginning of the school year will be associated with increased critical consciousness from the beginning to the end of the school year. Further, it is expected that the relation between arts and critical reflection will be stronger for more privileged social groups, and that the relation between arts and political efficacy, as well as arts and critical action, will be stronger for more marginalized groups.

Methods

Data for this study came from a short-term, longitudinal research project with youth in Massachusetts. The study took place over two consecutive years and two cohorts of students; data collection occurred in the fall and spring of each school year (2015–2016 and 2016–2017). The project examined mental health, critical consciousness, and other constructs among youth involved and not involved in GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Alliances). The sampling frame identified 38 middle and high public, charter and vocational schools that had GSAs. Schools were purposively sampled for diversity in geographic location, school size, and racial and socioeconomic school composition. Students were recruited from four general classrooms within each school, as well as from GSAs. The majority (75%) of students were not involved in their school's GSA, but rather from a general classroom sample, and the remaining 25% of students were involved in their school's GSA.

Participants

Study participants consisted of 2,537 students across the two cohorts. Students (Mean age = 15.68 years; SD = 1.40 years) were nested within 38 schools (37 high schools; 1 middle school). Although the age range was between 10 and 20 years old, 95% of students were between 14 and 18, and the range was accounted for by including age as a covariate in the analyses. The majority of students were in 9^{th}-12^{th} grade (97%; N=2444). The average number of students nested within a school was 67, and the sample per school ranged from nine students to 141 students. Of the initial 2,537 youth who completed the baseline surveys, 76% (1,939 students) also completed surveys at wave two. See Table 1 for group demographics by gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and SES.

Procedures

In order to recruit schools for participation, the study team contacted GSA advisors and principals, and secured permission to assess both GSA-involved youth and youth from the general student population. At the first data collection visit (Fall 2015), the study team distributed and collected baseline surveys at a GSA meeting and at the four randomly

selected classrooms. For youth in GSAs, parent consent was waived to avoid the risk of outing youth to parents, and adult consent from GSA advisors and assent from youth were used instead. For youth from the general classroom sample, parent consent and youth assent were received. The baseline visit took place from mid-September to late October during both years of collection, and all participants received a $10 gift card for completing the 30-minute survey. Following procedures that were identical to the baseline visit, wave two (follow-up) visits took place from late April to late May during both years of collection, and all participants received a $20 gift card for completing the 30-minute survey.

Measures

Arts participation.—At both waves of data collection, students were asked to list four activities they are involved in outside of the school day. For the general classroom sample, the item read, “What clubs/organizations (up to four) are you *currently* a member of at your school and outside of your school (if you are a member of more than four, please list the ones you are most active in)?,” and for the GSA sample, the item specified that clubs should not include the GSA. Open-ended responses were then coded to represent extracurricular participation. Table 1 displays the frequency of participation across these categories. Arts participation included the following categories: in-school choral, in-school instrumental, in-school dance, in-school theater, out-of-school dance lessons, out-of-school other types of arts lessons, out-of-school community arts groups, and creative arts clubs. A categorical indicator was created to represent three levels of participation across creative or performing arts activities: ‘0’ (zero activities), ‘1’ (one activity), and ‘2’ (two or more activities). Arts participation reported at wave one was the main predictor in these analyses.

Critical reflection.—At each wave, students reported on their perceptions of social inequities by responding to the Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality subscale of the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017). This eight-item subscale includes statements about how much racial or ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic inequality influence educational and occupational outcomes. Students rated each item on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with a higher average score indicating a higher level of critical reflection. Example items include, “Women have fewer chances to get good jobs” and “Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead.” Critical reflection at wave one and wave two were included in these analyses (α=.96 at each wave).

Political efficacy.—Political efficacy was measured using the Perceived Behavioral Control subscale of the Social Justice Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012) at each wave. Youth reported on their efficacy to promote social justice using the five-item subscale. Response items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree), with a higher average score indicating higher efficacy to promote social justice. Example items include, ‘‘I am certain that I possess an ability to work with individuals and groups in ways that are empowering’’ and, “If I choose to do, so I am capable of influencing others to promote fairness and equality.” Analyses included political efficacy at waves one and two (α=.90 at each wave).

Critical action.—Critical action was assessed using the coded open response item for current membership in clubs or organizations captured at each wave. Open-ended responses were coded based on categories created by the research coding team. As an assessment of critical action, only social justice-oriented clubs (groups focusing on sociocultural, diversity, and political issues; e.g., Feminist Coalition, the GSA) were included in this variable. A categorical indicator was created to represent three levels of participation across critical action activities: '0' (zero activities), '1' (one activity), and '2' (two or more activities). Critical action at wave one and wave two were included in these analyses.

Covariates.—At wave one, students were asked to report on several demographic characteristics, including racial or ethnic group, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Given the relatively low proportion of students of color in the sample compared to white students in the sample, a binary variable was created to represent race and ethnicity, with white students coded as '0' and students of color coded as '1' (for full list of racial and ethnic groups, see Table 1). To indicate whether students belong to a sexual or gender minority (SGM) group, students who identified as both cisgender and heterosexual were coded as '0,' and students who identified as any other gender identity or sexual orientation were coded as '1' (see Table 1 for all categories). Binary indicators for gender were also included as covariates to capture the range of gender identifications, and a binary indicator of whether students receive free or reduced-price lunch was included as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Finally, active extracurricular participation (e.g., sports), academic extracurricular participation (e.g., debate team), and other participation in any type of extracurricular activity not already accounted for (e.g., cultural, religious, affinity), were included in the analyses to adjust for potential selection biases due to any kind of extracurricular participation. A categorical indicator for each type of extracurricular was created to represent three levels of participation: '0' (zero activities), '1' (one activity), and '2' (two or more activities).

Analytic Plan

To ensure that measures of critical consciousness validly represented the components of this construct, confirmatory factor analyses using maximum likelihood estimation were conducted. First, all items theorized to measure critical reflection were modeled onto one factor, and all items theorized to measure political efficacy were modeled onto another, correlated factor (as critical action consists of a single item, it was not modeled as a latent factor). Modification indices suggested correlating the residuals of two pairs of critical reflection items: "Women have fewer chances to get good jobs" with "Women have fewer chances to get ahead," and "Poor people have fewer chances to get good jobs" with "Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead." Because each pair shared a referent group (women in the first pair; poor people in the second), the residual terms of these items were correlated with one another. The final model with two underlying factors of reflection and efficacy demonstrated adequate model fit at both waves (CFI=.95-.96; TLI=.94-.95; RMSEA=.09-.10; SRMR=.02-.03); standardized item loading estimates ranged from .79 to .94 for reflection, and .74 to .84 for efficacy. Common benchmarks for a well-fitting model suggest a CFI and TLI above 0.90 or 0.95, a RMSEA below 0.08 or 0.05, and a SRMR below 0.08 (Kline, 2011; Brown, 2015). The final CFA model displayed good fit on

all indices except the RMSEA, which ranged from 0.09 to 0.10. The model is considered adequate and interpretable, given that a variation in the RMSEA up to 0.10 is considered acceptable when all other fit indices are adequate (Kline, 2011).

We tested associations among arts participation and critical reflection, arts participation and political efficacy, and arts participation and critical action in two structural equation models. Due to the categorical nature of one main outcome, critical action, we utilized weighted least squares means and variances adjusted (WLSMV) to estimate each model (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). WLSMV uses all available information through a pairwise present approach to estimate missing data; only cases with missing data on one or more observed exogenous covariates (N=123) are dropped (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). In both structural models, critical consciousness components (critical reflection, political efficacy, critical action) were correlated with each other. The standard errors were adjusted for student nesting within schools using the “type=complex” function and grouping by school (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). Prior to testing for moderation, tests of measurement invariance were conducted to ensure that the critical consciousness constructs carry the same meaning across each pair of subgroups: POC vs. white, and SGM vs. non-SGM (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). First, configural invariance was established across POC and white groups, as well as across SGM and non-SGM groups, confirming that the indicators patterned into similar factors for both groups. Next, full metric invariance was established across POC and white groups, confirming that item loadings onto each factor were invariant across groups. Partial metric invariance was achieved across SGM and non-SGM groups by allowing two critical reflection items (“Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead” and “Women have fewer chances to get ahead”) to correlate. Further analyses did not demonstrate strong or strict invariance across subgroups (see Burson et al., manuscript in preparation, for an exploration of critical consciousness factor structure across subgroup populations). Given the establishment of full and partial metric invariance, variances and covariances can be quantitatively compared across groups, and multigroup analyses were conducted to test for moderation by race and SGM status. Focusing on pathways from arts to reflection, arts to efficacy, and arts to action, the chi-square difference statistic was examined with these pathways constrained and unconstrained across groups to determine if these associations differed by youth’s SGM status or racial minority status. Moderation based on SES was not examined due to inconsistencies in the variable used to assess SES (SES was measured using a single item asking students to self-report qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch; however, many students did not understand the question, and at least one school included in the study provided free lunch to all students, regardless of SES).

Results

In this section, the full results from all analyses conducted in the current study are presented. At the start of the year, 17% of students reported participating in one performing or creative arts club, and 6% reported involvement in two or more. Descriptive results suggest that students had medium levels of critical reflection (scored on a one-to-six scale), corresponding roughly to a neutral level of agreement. Average critical reflection scores increased slightly from the beginning of the year (M=3.10; SD=1.50) to the end of the year (M=3.22; SD=1.55). Political efficacy levels (scored on a one-to-eight scale) corresponded

to a neutral response, and decreased slightly from the beginning (M=5.44; SD=1.23) to the end of the year (M=5.38; SD=1.23). Twenty-seven percent of students participated in at least one critical action club at the start of the year, decreasing slightly to 22% in the spring. As anticipated, critical reflection and critical action variables were positively correlated at both waves. However, political efficacy was negatively correlated with critical reflection and uncorrelated with critical action at wave one; political efficacy was also uncorrelated with reflection and action at wave two (see Table 2 for full correlational results).

To examine the unique contribution of arts participation to change in critical consciousness over time, two structural equation models were examined. Fit statistics for both structural models are shown in Table 3. Although the CFI and TLI are lower than 0.95, they are still at or above the more recent benchmark of 0.90 (Brown, 2015), and all other indices are above adequate, indicating that the results from these models can be interpreted. In model one, which adjusted only for initial levels of critical consciousness to examine how arts participation associates with change in critical consciousness across the school year, arts participation was associated with a significant increase in critical reflection ($b = 0.61$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$) and critical action ($b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$) over the course of the year. In model two, which adjusted for baseline critical consciousness and covariates (extracurricular activities and demographic characteristics), arts participation remained associated with both growth in critical reflection ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$) and critical action ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.07$, $p < .05$). The standardized coefficients for significant pathways in model two are displayed in Figure 1. Arts participation did not predict changes in political efficacy in either of the models.

Using the full structural model (model two), the exploratory question of whether the link between arts participation and critical consciousness differs based on social group status was examined. To examine whether these associations differed by SGM status, two models were compared: a fully constrained model, and an unconstrained model in which the three pathways of interest (arts predicting critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action) were free to vary across SGM and non-SGM youth. The results of a chi-square difference test showed that the difference in model fit between the two models was not significant ($X^2(3)=4.56$, $p=.21$), suggesting that the associations from arts to critical consciousness components did not differ significantly between SGM youth and cisgender, heterosexual youth. Second, the constrained and unconstrained models for white youth and students of color were compared. Results of the chi-square difference test showed a significant difference in model fit between the constrained and unconstrained models ($X^2(3)=7.83$, $p<.05$), suggesting that at least one of these pathways (arts to reflection, arts to efficacy, or arts to action) differed by racial group. Thus, three additional models were tested, each with one pathway of interest unconstrained. The results showed a significant difference in model fit between the constrained model and the model with the path from arts to critical action unconstrained ($X^2(1)=8.91$, $p<.01$), such that the link from arts participation to critical action was stronger for students of color ($b = 0.50$; $SE = 0.14$, $\beta = 0.21$, $p < .01$), than for white students ($b = 0.00$; $SE = 0.10$, $\beta = 0.00$, $p = .10$). Additionally, the results showed a marginally significant difference between the constrained model and the model with the path to critical reflection unconstrained ($X^2(1)=3.47$, $p=.06$), such that the link from arts participation to critical reflection seemed to be slightly stronger for white students ($b =$

0.48, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.19$, $p < .001$) than for students of color ($b = 0.20$; $SE = .13$, $\beta = 0.07$, $p = .11$). There was no significant difference in model fit between the constrained model and the model with the path from arts to political efficacy unconstrained ($X^2(1)=0.08$, $p=0.77$), suggesting no difference in the association from arts to efficacy between white youth and youth of color. The inability to detect differences in relations between arts and critical consciousness between SGM and non-SGM youth could potentially be attributed to larger standard error estimates for SGM youth than non-SGM youth due to the subgroup sample sizes; similarly, the standard error estimates were larger for youth of color than for white youth. As the current study is the first to examine the interaction of social group status and arts participation relating to critical consciousness development, these findings are interpreted in an exploratory manner to guide future research on these relations.

In addition to the main findings of the path analysis, demonstrating relations between arts participation and critical consciousness, there were several other significant relations demonstrated in the results from the same structural model. First, adjusting for covariates, higher participation in academic extracurriculars was associated with significant gains in critical reflection and political efficacy. Similarly, higher participation in active extracurriculars was associated with increased critical reflection and political efficacy; yet, it was also associated with decreased critical action over the course of the school year. Participation in other extracurriculars (i.e., cultural, affinity, school media, school leadership) was associated with significant gains in critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. SGM status was associated with a significant increase in critical action over the school year, and a decrease in political efficacy. Age was associated with significant gains in critical reflection, such that older students increased more in critical reflection over the school year. Identifying as female was significantly associated with increased critical reflection and decreased political efficacy. The unstandardized coefficients and standard errors for all pathways across the three models are displayed in Table 4.

Sensitivity Analyses and Alternate Model Analyses

In addition to the main results presented above, several additional tests were conducted to check the robustness of these results. First, additional structural and multigroup models were estimated using a maximum likelihood with robust standard errors (MLR) approach. Although WLSMV is more commonly used to estimate models with categorical outcomes (i.e., critical action), MLR is a robust method of estimation that can account for the nonnormality of such variables and handles missing data using a different approach (Muthén & Kaplan, 1992). Across the two estimation approaches, there were no differences in the relations between arts participation and the critical consciousness components. Next, given the moderate attrition rate for the current study (24%; 598 cases attritted), an attrition analysis was conducted. T-tests and chi-square tests were used to examine any differences in key baseline variables (critical consciousness and arts participation) between those who remained in the study for wave two, and those who were only present for wave one. The results showed that there was no difference in arts participation between youth who remained in the study and youth who left, nor was there a difference in baseline political efficacy levels. However, youth who left the study after wave one actually had significantly

higher levels of critical reflection and critical action than those who remained in the study for wave two (see Appendix for full results from attrition analyses).

Discussion

Critical consciousness can lead to positive developmental outcomes for youth (El-Amin et al., 2017); yet, more work is needed to identify contexts that may promote critical consciousness development and to build more nuanced developmental theory on its predictors and processes. In addition, few studies examine all three critical consciousness components as outcomes of a potential facilitator. Further, complex questions have emerged in the critical consciousness literature around whether and how critical consciousness can be conceptualized to function among more privileged social groups (Heberle et al., 2020). These gaps and complexities were addressed by first examining a novel context – general performing and creative arts programming – as it relates to all three components of critical consciousness, and additionally, exploring how these relations differ by youth's gender-sexuality and racial-ethnic group membership. The results provide evidence that arts participation can facilitate critical reflection and critical action, and that these relations may differ based on youth's level of racial privilege. These findings can be leveraged to advance theory and practice around critical consciousness development to understand more about how it unfolds for youth facing various kinds of privilege and marginalization.

The current study explores general arts programming as a context that, although likely familiar to most youth, is novel to the literature on critical consciousness development among adolescents. This context is examined in relation to all three theorized components of critical consciousness to better understand each component's unique predictors and processes. The existing literature linking art to critical consciousness centers social justice art pedagogy, or arts programming specifically developed to target youth's critical consciousness development (Dewhurst, 2014), rather than general cocurricular and extracurricular arts participation. The current findings demonstrate, for the first time, a robust quantitative association between general arts participation and growth in critical reflection and critical action over the school year, adjusting for baseline critical reflection and action, other extracurriculars, and demographic characteristics. These findings are an important contribution to the growing body of research on the empirical predictors of critical consciousness, as they highlight general arts programming an additional site for critical consciousness development among youth.

Why might arts programs function as an important setting for critical consciousness development, particularly critical reflection and action? For critical reflection, literature suggests that providing youth with a safe space to participate in collaborative inquiry, self-expression, and dialogue is important for facilitating critical consciousness (Goessling, 2020). Arts programs are inherently contexts that facilitate self-expression and collaboration (Schellenberg et al., 2015). Moreover, arts programming has been associated with gains in socioemotional skills such as empathy (Bowen & Kisida, 2019) and cognitive skills such as critical thinking (Bowen et al., 2014); as a result, youth may be better prepared to understand oppression in new or deeper ways. Even if topics around inequities do not arise in the context of artmaking, the instrumental skills of empathy, tolerance, perspective-

taking, and critical thinking can serve youth in conversations around these issues when they do arise. For instance, a student who is acting in a theater production might practice taking the perspective of that character and develop empathy for their castmates as they work together on the production. Indeed, these kinds of skills are theorized to better position individuals to understand and reject social inequities (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). Thus, the association from arts participation to critical reflection suggests that theory around consciousness-building might be enhanced by examining underlying skills that can contribute to meaningful dialogue necessary for critical reflection to occur. For critical action, the arts education literature suggests that art promotes skills like tolerance, empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking through increased social interaction, collaboration, and togetherness across students of different backgrounds (Schellenberg et al., 2015). The collaborative and supportive nature of most arts programs may position these programs as opportunity structures, or settings that promote youth's critical analysis and societal engagement (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Indeed, recent research on GSA engagement and critical consciousness suggests that youth's membership in school-based extracurricular groups can promote their engagement in advocacy and their critical consciousness development (Poteat et al., 2020). If youth feel connected to and supported by their peers, they may be more likely to join their peers in attending social justice clubs, or even to initiate action projects within those clubs.

Interestingly, arts participation did not seem to promote changes in political efficacy. This finding is consistent with qualitative literature on youth programs that leverage arts-based activities for critical consciousness development, which typically aim to facilitate youth's critical reflection and critical action more explicitly than political efficacy (e.g., Ngo, 2017). In the current study, not only was political efficacy the only component unassociated with arts participation, but it was uncorrelated with the other two critical consciousness components. This finding highlights the continued need to understand the role of political efficacy in critical consciousness. For instance, although recent scholars have conceived political efficacy to interact reciprocally with critical reflection and action (Watts et al., 2011) and certain empirical examinations support this interplay (Poteat et al., 2020), other examinations suggest that critical reflection does not predict perceived capacity to effect social or political change (Diemer & Rapa, 2016). It could be that the growth in critical reflection among arts-participating youth may feel discouraging, and may not reinforce a growth in political efficacy, even if youth are actively engaged in justice-oriented activities. It could also be that political efficacy is a separate developmental competency from critical consciousness that interacts in more complex ways with reflection and action. What this finding clearly highlights is the need to better understand both the role of political efficacy in critical consciousness development, and its implications for youth well-being.

The current findings reveal important associations between arts participation and each component of critical consciousness, and also point to potentially interesting differences in these associations based on racial-ethnic group status (but not gender-sexuality) in the exploratory, multigroup analyses. Critical consciousness was conceptualized as a tool for marginalized individuals to break down barriers of structural oppression (Freire, 1970); thus, it has been examined mostly among youth of color and low-SES youth, with additional attention only recently given to LGBTQ youth (Chan & Mak, 2019). The current study

builds on a small body of work that also considers how critical consciousness development might differ by social group status and intersectional experiences with marginalization and privilege (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). The exploratory, multigroup models indicated that arts participation promoted significantly greater critical action in youth of color compared to their white counterparts, but marginally significantly greater critical reflection in white youth compared to youth of color. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, they suggest potentially important differences in the underlying processes of critical consciousness development across groups facing different kinds and levels of privilege and marginalization.

Why might arts participation promote greater critical reflection in white youth, but greater critical action in youth of color? One potential reason is that the cognitive and socioemotional skills arts programs facilitate (i.e., empathy, perspective-taking) might be especially important to white youth in expanding their reflection on inequity. Because white youth are not subject to the racial discrimination faced daily by many youth of color, they may need to rely more heavily on perspective-taking and empathy skills developed through arts participation to understand the reality of racial discrimination and other forms of structural marginalization. In his original text, Freire (1970) noted that critical consciousness aims to humanize both the oppressor and the oppressed. For white youth, who belong to a more privileged racial group that holds the power to perpetuate oppressive structures, critical consciousness might function as a humanizing tool, activating skills like empathy and tolerance for those who are more oppressed (Heberle et al., 2020). For youth of color, arts programs may play a different role, potentially serving as opportunity structures, or contexts that provide a safer space where students of color feel supported enough to become involved in action-oriented activities (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Indeed, recent qualitative research corroborates that this kind of opportunity structure is needed for youth of color to take action, demonstrating that Black students were well aware of the systemic racism present in their schools, but lacked the institutional support to take action towards a more positive racial climate (Hope et al., 2015).

In contrast to racial and ethnic minority group status, associations between arts participation and critical consciousness do not seem to differ by sexual or gender minority group identification. One study has tested for moderation in critical consciousness development based on youth's sexual orientation or gender identity, showing that the association between initial GSA engagement and later political efficacy was stronger for SGM youth than for straight or cisgender youth (Poteat et al., 2020). In contrast to the GSA, which addresses SGM-specific issues and advocacy, youth's identities as either SGM or straight and cisgender may be less salient throughout their process of critical consciousness building in the context of general arts programs. It is possible that youth's racial and ethnic identities may be more salient throughout their participation in arts programs, as underlying racial themes may be more common across artwork youth engage in. However, as the current study is the first to examine the association between arts participation and critical consciousness as moderated by sexuality and gender, future research should continue to examine nuances in its development for youth facing different constellations of marginalization and privilege.

Finally, it is worth noting that other kinds of extracurricular activities (e.g. academics, sports, school leadership) were also associated with gains in critical consciousness. The goal of the current study is not to demonstrate that arts participation is the only activity that matters for critical consciousness development, but rather, that arts participation does indeed matter over and above potential selection effects and other types of extracurricular activities. Adjusting for baseline critical consciousness, demographics, and all types of extracurriculars, arts participation was the only activity linked to both growth in critical reflection and critical action, apart from other (i.e., cultural, affinity, school media, school leadership) types of participation, and was more strongly linked to critical reflection than these other types. This suggests that, although arts-based settings may not be the only contexts that facilitate critical consciousness; they may be some of the more robustly linked settings to both critical reflection and critical action. This is likely due to the unique characteristics and underlying skills that artistic activities promote (i.e., creative imagination, collaboration, empathy, critical thinking). Further, these relations are not merely a story of selection, as they remain robust adjusting for potential selection factors and other types of extracurricular activities. Future research should continue to explore how arts programming and other common youth settings can serve as sites of intervention for distinct domains of critical consciousness.

While novel and informative, the current study is not without limitations. First, the design is not experimental; thus, these results cannot be used to infer causality about the impact of arts participation on critical consciousness. An argument can be made for the reverse direction of the hypothesis, that is, critical consciousness contributing to arts participation. However, based on the literature on arts participation, which points to practices youth engage in (e.g. perspective-taking, empathy, tolerance) through the arts that are conducive to critical consciousness, arts programming can position youth well for critical consciousness development. Further, the methodology employed to 1) adjust for baseline indicators of critical consciousness and 2) include a strong set of covariates, helps to account for stable sources of selection bias. Second, the timeframe of one school year may not be sufficient to capture growth and development in critical consciousness. However, even a year-long window into critical consciousness development during the adolescent stage can be telling, given the significant cognitive growth adolescents experience (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Further, as the bulk of the literature relating critical consciousness to other constructs is cross-sectional (Heberle et al., 2020), this short-term, longitudinal study contributes to developmental research on critical consciousness. Third, our assessment of arts participation does not capture the quality or intensity of such clubs. Further, while unlikely, it is possible that some arts activities youth report participating in do include components that are social justice-oriented, leading to an overlap of arts participation and critical action. For instance, it can be assumed that most students who wrote “drama club” in response to the club participation question were participating in a traditional school drama club; yet, it is possible that the drama club facilitator had decided to engage youth in a socially-driven art piece that engaged youth more directly with social justice issues. Future research should more deeply examine how the type and quality of performing and creative arts clubs might be conducive to critical consciousness development. Similarly, the critical action indicator does not capture other behaviors that

might indicate action, such as attending protests, posting on social media, or engaging in anti-racist actions (e.g., calling out someone for using a racial slur) (Aldana et al., 2019). Future research should incorporate these and other forms of action that youth take to upend injustice. Additionally, it is impossible to determine the extent to which students who attend critical action clubs are engaging in critical action. However, given that most assessments of critical action reveal low levels of participation across items (i.e., most youth do not frequently write letters to political representatives or attend protests), the current measure of critical action is commensurate with others. Finally, the inclusion of both privileged and marginalized youth is a strength of the current study. However, given the relatively small proportion of youth in the current study who identify as SGM or as a racial or ethnic minority, binary indicators of SGM and race were used to test for differences in critical consciousness growth. The small sample of SGM youth (compared to straight, cisgender youth) and racial and ethnic minority youth (compared to white youth) limits the power to detect differences in multigroup analyses, as evidenced by the larger standard error estimates for SGM youth and youth of color than for non-SGM and white youth. A crucial next step is examining differences in critical consciousness development for specific racial, ethnic, gender or sexuality groups, as different subgroups clearly face unique and intersectional forms of marginalization that may shape their critical consciousness in nuanced ways.

Although previous research has examined the potential contribution of general arts participation to related youth outcomes, the current study is the first to link general arts participation to critical consciousness. With more complex cognitive abilities at hand, adolescents are well-positioned to actively reflect on their personal beliefs and develop a structural awareness of fairness in relation to the social systems they are a part of (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). It is vital to understand how arts activities - which are often embedded in youth's familial, community, and institutional contexts - might facilitate the developmental tasks of reflecting on and establishing one's role in society. The current findings identify general arts programming as a potential site for consciousness-raising intervention to occur, adding to the sparse body of knowledge on predictors of critical consciousness, and building theory around underlying skills that can be leveraged for critical consciousness development.

Although necessary and effective, previously established interventions that target critical consciousness are not widely available for youth. General arts programs, however, are often accessible via in-school or after-school programming and local community organizations. This capacity to reach youth should be leveraged accordingly. The current findings, which highlight arts participation as a tool for growth in reflection and potentially action, should be leveraged to support funding for such programming in schools and communities. Facilitators of existing arts programs can more intentionally foster critical consciousness by encouraging open dialogue with and between youth, perhaps by beginning a meeting with a check-in about current events. Additionally, facilitators should remain cognizant of the role social group identification may play, such that more privileged youth may particularly benefit from perspective-taking processes to encourage reflection around inequity. Facilitators should also leverage these potential opportunity structures to ensure that youth of color feel safe and supported enough to move toward critical action, and to speak and reflect in these spaces. These findings suggest that it is crucial to extend opportunities for arts involvement

to all students, and to expand the ways in which arts involvement can promote critical consciousness for youth of varying dimensions of oppression and privilege.

Conclusion

Critical consciousness is an important developmental competency, as it engages youth in challenging systems of oppression, and has been linked to an array of positive developmental outcomes particularly for marginalized youth. The current study addressed critical gaps in the literature by examining the extent to which general arts participation is associated with critical consciousness and exploring differences by youth's levels of privilege and marginalization. This research provides novel evidence that arts programming can be a context that is conducive to youth's critical reflection and critical action development. Arts programming may provide adolescents with strong opportunities to build developmentally appropriate skills and supportive relationships necessary for critical consciousness; further, these opportunities may be particularly conducive to facilitating critical action among youth with less racial privilege, and particularly conducive to facilitating critical reflection among youth with more racial privilege. At this critical stage of development, adolescents are actively expanding their social connections by independently engaging in spaces outside of the home and classroom; thus, it is crucial that research continues to understand how extracurricular arts programs can serve as social settings that can support youth's critical consciousness development.

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Appendix

Table 5

Attrition Analysis: Critical Reflection and Political Efficacy

	Present for Wave 1 Only		Present for Both Waves			
Outcome	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	***t***	**df**
Critical Reflection	3.26	1.52	3.05	1.49	−2.98**	2528
Political Efficacy	5.39	1.31	5.46	1.2	1.18	2532

Note. Independent samples t-tests were used to identify differences in Wave 1 critical reflection and political efficacy (continuous variables) between youth who left the study after Wave 1 and youth who remained in the study.

† $p \leq 0.10$;

* $p \leq 0.05$;

** $p \leq 0.01$

Table 6

Attrition Analysis: Arts and Critical Action Club Participation

	Present for Wave 1 Only	Present for Both Waves	$X^2(2)$
0 Arts Clubs	443	1502	
1 Arts Club	112	323	3.10
2 or More Arts Club	43	114	
	Present for Wave 1 Only	Present for Both Waves	$X^2(2)$
0 Critical Action Clubs	333	1457	
1 Critical Action Club	244	439	83.56**
2 Critical Action Clubs	21	43	

Note. Pearson chi-square tests were used to identify differences in Wave 1 arts participation and critical action participation (ordinal variables) between youth who left the study after Wave 1 and youth who remained in the study.

† $p \leq 0.10$;

* $p \leq 0.05$;

** $p \leq 0.01$

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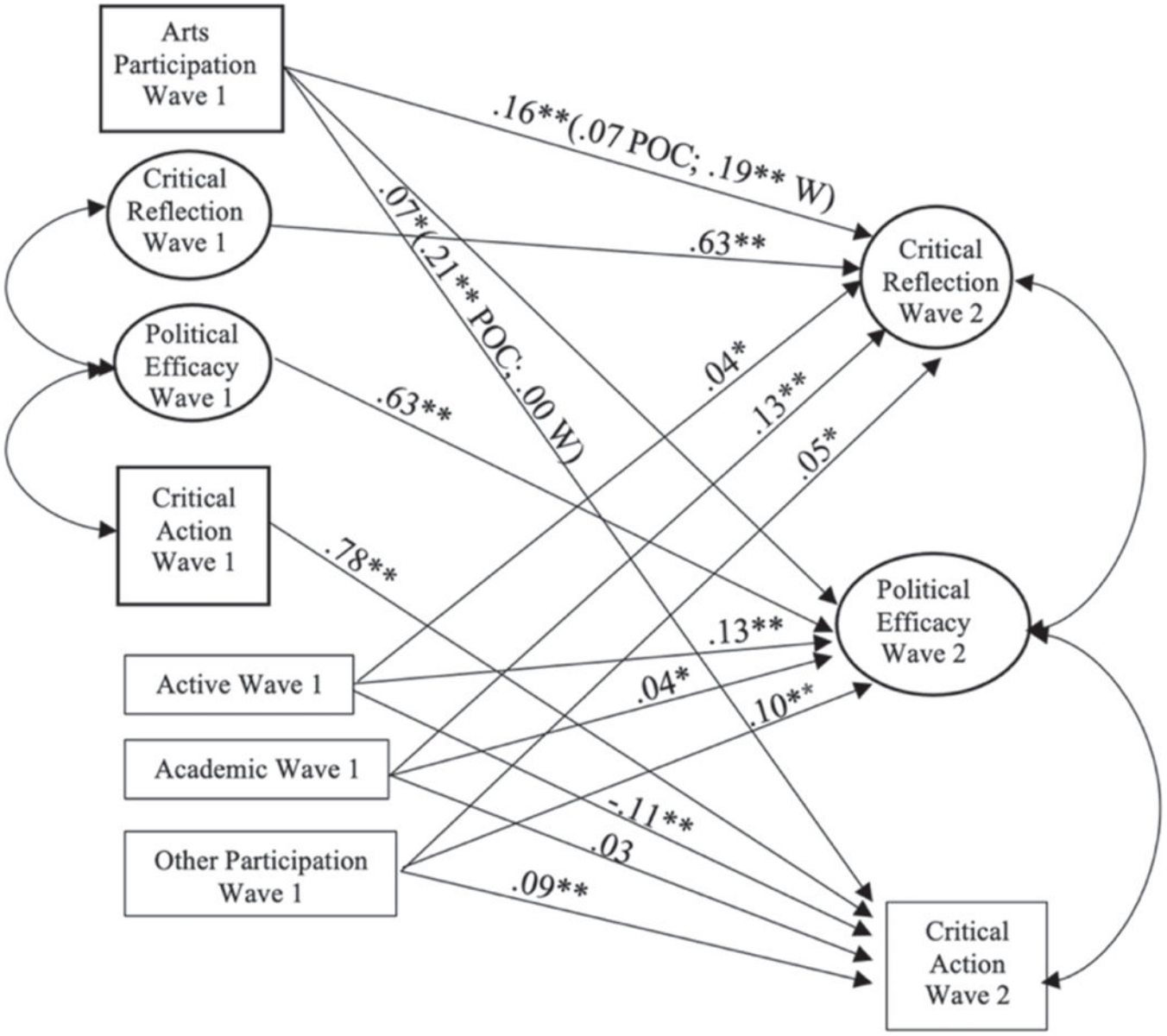

Fig. 1.

Results from Structural Model 2: Arts Participation Adjusting for Other Extracurriculars

Note. This figure represents the full structural model, with arts participation predicting critical consciousness, adjusting for baseline critical consciousness, extracurriculars, and demographic characteristics overall and for the significant multigroup differences. For simplicity, demographic coefficients are not included in the figure, but are shown in Table 4. The standardized coefficients for statistically significant pathways are presented. †$p \leq 0.10$; *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Gender	N	%
Female	1340	53
Male	994	39
Transgender	49	2
Genderqueer	20	1
Other	112	5
Sexual Orientation	**N**	**%**
Straight	1822	73
Gay or Lesbian	130	5
Bisexual	200	8
Questioning	90	4
Other	253	10
Race	**N**	**%**
White	1813	72
Black	101	4
Asian	130	5
Latinx	239	10
Biracial or Multiracial	178	7
Middle Eastern	24	1
Native American	9	0
SES: Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	**N**	**%**
"No" or "I don't know"	1664	67
"Yes, I receive free or reduced-price lunch"	836	33

Baseline Extracurricular Participation				
	Arts	Active	Academic	Other
0 Clubs	1945 (77%)	1551 (61%)	2035 (80%)	1802 (71%)
1 Club	435 (17%)	564 (22%)	421 (17%)	568 (22%)
2+ Clubs	157 (6%)	422 (17%)	81 (3%)	167 (7%)

Note. This table represents the full distribution of gender identities, sexual orientations, and racial or ethnic identities in the sample. Free or reduced-price lunch is also included as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Participation levels for extracurriculars are displayed.

Table 2

Correlations between Predictor, Outcomes, and Covariates

	Arts W1	CR W2	PE W2	CA W2	Active W1	Acad. W1	Other W1	SGM	POC	Lunch	Age	Female	CR W1	PE W1
Arts W1														
CR W2	0.22**													
PE W2	−.01	−.03												
CA W2	0.23**	0.31**	−.02											
Active W1	−.20**	−.09**	0.12**	−.24**										
Acad. W1	0.04	0.17**	0.05*	0.05*	−.05**									
Other W1	0.03	0.10**	0.08**	0.10**	−.05**	0.10**								
SGM	0.25**	0.29**	−.10**	0.58**	−.29**	0.01	−.01							
POC	−.05*	−.01	0.02	0.01	−.13**	−.04	−.05**	0.05*						
Lunch	0.08**	0.05*	0.00	0.23**	−.20**	−.03	−.06**	0.23**	0.22**					
Age	−.03	0.13**	0.00	0.00	−.01	0.16**	0.07**	−.05**	−.04*	−.01				
Female	0.13**	0.13**	0.03	0.09**	−.05*	0.06**	0.12**	0.00	0.05*	0.03	−.02			
CR W1	0.20**	0.70**	−.02	0.28**	−.09**	0.17**	0.07**	0.30**	−.01	0.08**	0.11**	0.07**		
PE W1	−.01	−.04	0.59**	−.01	0.13**	0.08**	0.09**	−.11**	0.01	−.05**	0.051*	0.07**	−.05*	
CA W1	0.22**	0.31**	−.01	0.81**	−.27**	0.03	0.05*	0.55**	0.03	0.23**	0.01	0.11**	0.30**	−.01

Note. CR represents critical reflection, PE represents political efficacy, and CA represents critical action. W1 represents wave one of data collection, and W2 represents wave two. Acad. represents academic clubs. Bivariate correlational analysis was conducted in SPSS.

† $p \leq 0.10$;

* $p \leq 0.05$;

** $p \leq 0.01$

Table 3

Fit statistics for Structural Equation Models

	Model 1	Model 2
CFI	0.907	0.923
TLI	0.897	0.912
RMSEA	0.024	0.020
SRMR	0.048	0.053

Note. The CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR were derived from WLSMV estimation of each model. Arts participation is predicting critical consciousness in each model; model 1 adjusts for baseline critical consciousness, and model 2 adjusts for baseline critical consciousness, extracurriculars, and demographic characteristics.

Table 4

Unstandardized Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Path Analysis and Multigroup Analysis (N=2414)

Parameter Estimate	*Path Analysis*	*Multigroup Analysis*	
		POC (N=681)	***White (N=1733)***
W1 Arts -> W2 CR	0.41 (0.07) **	0.20(0.13)	0.48(0.08) **
W1 Arts -> W2 PE	0.08 (0.07)	0.07(0.09)	0.10(0.08)
W1 Arts -> W2 CA	0.16 (0.08) *	0.50(0.14) **	0.00(0.10)
W1 Active -> CR	0.07 (0.04) *	-	-
W1 Active -> PE	0.21 (0.04) **	-	-
W1 Active -> CA	−.18 (0.06) **	-	-
W1 Academic -> CR	0.41 (0.09) **	-	-
W1 Academic -> PE	0.11 (0.05) *	-	-
W1 Academic -> CA	0.07(0.08)	-	-
W1 Other -> CR	0.13 (0.05) *	-	-
W1 Other -> PE	0.20 (0.06) **	-	-
W1 Other -> CA	0.20 (0.06) **	-	-
W1 Nonwhite -> CR	0.03 (0.06)	-	-
W1 Nonwhite -> PE	0.06 (0.05)	-	-
W1 Nonwhite -> CA	−.03 (0.07)	-	-
W1 SGM -> CR	0.11 (0.09)	-	-
W1 SGM -> PE	−.30 (0.10) **	-	-
W1 SGM -> CA	0.36 (0.09) **	-	-
W1 Age -> CR	0.06 (0.02) **	-	-
W1 Age -> PE	−.03 (0.02)	-	-
W1 Age -> CA	−.01 (0.03)	-	-
W1 Lunch -> CR	−.14 (0.07) †	-	-
W1 Lunch -> PE	0.09 (0.06)	-	-
W1 Lunch -> CA	0.07 (0.07)	-	-
W1 Female -> CR	0.14 (0.06) *	-	-
W1 Female -> PE	−.11 (0.04) *	-	-
W1 Female -> CA	−.03 (0.08)	-	-
W1 CR-> W2 CR	0.69 (0.03) **	-	-
W1 PE -> W2 PE	0.66 (0.03) **	-	-
W1 CA -> W2 CA	0.84 (0.01) **	-	-

Note. The table above displays unstandardized coefficients and standard errors for the path analysis and the multigroup analysis. Coefficients of unconstrained pathways from the multigroup analyses by race are also presented. Bolded pathways represent those testing the main hypothesis of a link from arts participation to critical consciousness.

† $p \leq 0.10$;

*$p \leq 0.05$;

**$p \leq 0.01$