


Black-Asian solidarity through collective racial socialization

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Abstract

In the past few years, incidents of anti-Black and anti-Asian discrimination have proliferated. Some of these incidents have involved perpetrators from other racially minoritized groups. Historically, this has led to increased tensions between racially minoritized groups and inhibited progress towards racial equity for all groups. To foster coalitions between Black and Asian communities instead of repeating historical tensions, the present article suggests that parents might lay the foundation for racial solidarity by engaging in collective racial socialization. Collective racial socialization is a new direction for racial-ethnic socialization that focuses on similarities across groups that are the result of White supremacy. Although there are hurdles to collective racial socialization, it may nonetheless be one way minoritized parents can help create awareness of structural racial inequality.

KEYWORDS

intra-minority intergroup relations, race, racial socialization

Although racially minoritized parents can and do routinely have conversations with their children about what race and racism mean for their lives—a process known as racial socialization (e.g., Galán et al., 2022; Hughes et al., 2006)—periods of heightened racial discrimination towards minoritized groups can be moments that spur minoritized parents to have these conversations. For example, the 2020 protests against racial injustice, sparked by the police murder of George Floyd, increased the number of conversations Black parents had with their children about race and racism (Galán et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021). Similarly, more Asian families have had conversations with their children about anti-Asian bias during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Cheah et al., 2021). These discussions help children understand how they are racialized in American society and have implications for how minoritized children develop their sense of self and beliefs about the world (e.g., Bañales et al., 2021; Pinetta et al., 2020).

Oftentimes, these racialization conversations have an implicit or explicit premise of a White perpetrator acting in discriminatory ways. However, sometimes the perpetrator is another racially minoritized person. For example, an Asian American officer named Tou Thao was at the scene of George Floyd's murder doing crowd control. As another example, a Black man was recently recorded hitting an Asian woman in the head over 100 times (Shanahan, 2022). These examples complicate the idea that racial discrimination is always perpetrated by White people and create a new challenge for racially minoritized parents—how to address these incidents without exacerbating intraminority intergroup tensions.

We suggest that to avoid repeating a history of Black-Asian intergroup conflict and move closer to justice, parents might approach these conversations by focusing on how an ideology of White supremacy creates racialized systems and structures that shape people's thoughts and beliefs about race and lead to racist behaviours (e.g., Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Heberle et al., 2020). One example of a belief that ultimately serves to reinforce White supremacy is the Model Minority Myth, which pits Asian people (as an ostensible 'model minority') against Black people, who are cast as an 'unsuccessful' group, to maintain racial hierarchy (e.g., Kim, 1999; Yi & Todd, 2021). By focusing on similarities in experiences across groups as well as how structures and systems of inequality lead to these similarities, parents may engage in a process we call *collective racial socialization*. Below, we characterize collective racial socialization, as well as the benefits and barriers of engaging in this process. In doing so, parents can also move away from essentialized notions of racial groups that exclude those with complex identities (e.g., multiracial individuals) or 'non-prototypical' identities (e.g., South Asians, Black immigrants) and move towards an understanding of race as a socially constructed phenomenon that serves to uphold White supremacy.

1 | COLLECTIVE RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

We conceive of collective racial socialization as a new dimension of ethnic-racial socialization (ERS)—how racially minoritized parents discuss issues of race and racism with their children. In previous work, researchers have documented four main ways that parents engage in ERS: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (for a review, see Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014). Cultural socialization includes modelling positive feelings towards one's racial group through routine (e.g., speaking a native language) or occasional acts, such as celebrating a cultural holiday (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019; Osborne et al., 2021). Preparation for bias involves making children aware that discrimination against their racial, ethnic, or cultural group happens and suggesting how they might respond to or deal with said discrimination (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2019; Osborne et al., 2021). Promotion of mistrust is similar to preparation for bias in setting expectations of wariness for interracial encounters but differs slightly because it may not offer children coping strategies (Hughes et al., 2006). Finally, egalitarianism often represents a 'colourblind' form of socialization by de-emphasizing race as a salient category and emphasizing other qualities (Doucet et al., 2018; see Juang et al., 2016 for how colourblindness can also manifest as promotion of equality).

These four ERS practices are primarily geared towards helping children understand who they are as racialized beings and differ in the extent to which they assume discrimination will come from White people. In contrast, collective racial socialization is about explicitly considering one's racialized experiences relative to those of *other* racially minoritized groups. In doing so, collective racial socialization integrates insights from the racial socialization literature with social psychological work on intraminority intergroup relations—specifically how minoritized groups may come to see each other as coalitional partners or adversaries in the social hierarchy (Craig & Richeson, 2016; Richeson & Craig, 2011). Specifically, we conceive of collective racial socialization as conversations parents can have with their children that involve discussing how discriminatory experiences that *other* racially minoritized groups face are similar to ones they may face, how these similarities in experiences are the consequence of systemic racism (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021), and how focusing on similarities can build multiracial coalitions (e.g., Cortland et al., 2017).

A focus on how systemic inequality produces commonalities in discriminatory experiences across the minoritized group is particularly key to bridging Black-Asian divides, given that Black and Asian people are racialized differently in the United States (Kim, 1999; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Without this focus on structural racism, a White supremacist system maintains the status quo by valorizing Asian people to subordinate Black people and also ostracizing Asian people to exclude them from civic engagement (Kim, 1999). Thus, to the extent that ERS practices focus on the self-as-a-racialized-being, such strategies may not be sufficient to bridge intraminority tensions that hinder racial equity. Take, for example, a situation where Black students harass Asian students and are punished for it. One possible outcome is that both the Black and Asian students see each other as the root cause of their discriminatory experience, with Asian students blaming Black students for the harassment and Black students resenting Asian students for perceived favoritism (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). However, if instead, parents were to focus on how teachers established norms and perpetuated stereotypical beliefs about both groups, then this would shift the focus from the other group as the perpetrator and orient both groups towards addressing how the teacher—as a part of the educational system—created these outcomes.

2 | BARRIERS TO COLLECTIVE RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

Of course, there are both historical and psychological challenges to engaging in collective racial socialization. Historically, the United States fosters intraminority intergroup competition to maintain the existing racial hierarchy. This has resulted in the perpetuation of longstanding and ongoing tensions between the Black and Asian communities. Psychologically, even if the desire to engage in collective racial socialization is there, parents may lack racial awareness and competency in discussing other racially minoritized groups' experiences of discrimination. These barriers are related, as historic intraminority intergroup tensions can contribute to a lack of awareness and engagement with other minoritized groups.

Part of the reason for historical tensions between Black and Asian communities is that responses to discrimination typically reinforce group boundaries and highlight how one's own group is positive (e.g., Spencer et al., 2016). This strategy makes sense—after all, having a strong group identity can be protective against discrimination (e.g., Sellers et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2009). To the extent that ERS practices focus on developing this positive group identity, they can positively predict adaptive outcomes for minoritized individuals over development (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2022). But bolstering group identity in response to threats may also reinforce group boundaries and exacerbate intraminority intergroup tensions. For example, making a so-called majority-minority demographic shift salient (i.e., a competitive intergroup context) led Black participants to support more conservative policies that preserve the status quo—including ones such as making English the official language of the United States that made domestic-foreign distinctions clear (Craig & Richeson, 2018).

Highlighting intraminority intergroup tensions hampers multiracial coalitions and allows White supremacy to remain the dominant social structure. Consider, for example, racial conflicts in 1990s Los Angeles. These conflicts were sparked by not only a case of police brutality against Rodney King but also the murder of Latasha Harlins—a young Black girl—by an Asian American store owner. Recollections of journalists who covered this period and accounts from residents of the area both note how the media's framing of the conflicts highlighted Black-Asian tensions and downplayed the broader systems and forces that uphold a racial hierarchy of White supremacy (Lie & Abelmann, 1999; Shyong, 2022). Indeed, coverage of Black-Asian relations in the United States tends to focus on individual or interpersonal factors rather than structural and historical factors (Thornton & Shah, 1996).

Elevating coverage of intraminority tensions in this way provides cover for White supremacy by having Black and Asian people do the dirty work of reinforcing a racial hierarchy, maintaining the divides that separate racially minoritized groups from White people and each other (Kim, 1999; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Asian people are tasked with highlighting negative low-status stereotypes of Black people to reaffirm status differentials between Black people and White people and in return are valorized as the Model Minority—an ideological myth where Asian people are

held as an example of a minoritized group who has been successful (Kim, 1999; Yi & Todd, 2021). Black people are tasked with highlighting the foreignness of Asian people, reflecting the xenophobic attitudes of White nationalism that excludes Asian people from civic engagement (Yakushko, 2009; Yeo et al., 2019).

Overcoming these tendencies to preserve one's own group position in the hierarchy is likely to be quite challenging. More specific to collective racial socialization, navigating the discussion about how to hold a member of one's ingroup accountable as a perpetrator of racial discrimination while also shifting focus to structural forces can be socially costly for parents and children alike. Bucking group norms and highlighting how a member of one's ingroup is at fault can result in ostracism by other ingroup members (Abrams et al., 2014; Marques et al., 1988). Such ostracism from a group can threaten a person's well-being by undermining their sense of belonging (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009).

The propensity to enhance positive views of one's ingroup may also result in lower awareness of other groups' experiences with racial discrimination and efficacy to engage in collective racial socialization. With respect to awareness, for Black parents, there may be the perception that Asian people do not really experience discrimination because of their perceived higher social status (Kim, 1999; Zou & Cheryan, 2017) and are in fact perpetrators of anti-Black discrimination (Ho, 2021). If Black parents do not see the discrimination that Asian Americans face as being connected to their own, then they are likely to neglect to discuss anti-Asian bias. For Asian parents, there is often reticence to acknowledge racial discrimination against their own group, let alone against other groups (Atkin & Ahn, 2022). This reticence may reflect either a cultural difference in not wanting to upset the status quo or a belief in meritocracy that holds that any obstacle—including racial discrimination—can be surmounted with enough hard work (Yoo et al., 2010). As a result, Asian parents may not be willing to discuss anti-Blackness with their children, instead leaving them to develop their own racial attitudes.

Finally, even if racially minoritized parents have the awareness and desire to engage in collective racial socialization, they may vary in their ability to do so. Related research on parent's racial socialization competency indicates that there is variation even in these conversations about own-group experiences (Anderson et al., 2020; Anderson et al., 2021). Thus, although no work exists examining parents' collective racial socialization, we hypothesize that minoritized parents are likely to vary even more widely in their ability to have conversations about other groups' experiences of racial discrimination.

3 | POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF CRS

Despite these barriers, we see collective racial socialization as being beneficial to minoritized youth in both their well-being and sense of efficacy. That is, a wealth of research has now established that racial socialization has numerous positive effects on academic and well-being outcomes for minoritized youth (e.g., Wang et al., 2020a; Wang et al., 2020b). Because collective racial socialization explicitly notes racial groups and how they are similar, we expect that it would yield the same benefits. Similarly, critical consciousness—the ability of marginalized groups to critically analyse and address systemic inequality (e.g., Diemer et al., 2021)—has been linked to a host of positive outcomes, from socioemotional well-being to career development, voting behaviour, and community engagement (Heberle et al., 2020). However, although race-conscious parent socialization significantly predicts greater critical reflection and critical motivation among children and adolescents, the evidence linking racial socialization with critical action is more mixed (Heberle et al., 2020). We suggest that CRS may be one way to strengthen this connection. That is, by emphasizing similarities across the racially minoritized group, youth may be more likely to engage in coalition-building because they recognize shared experiences of oppression.

In fact, CRS may be one way to answer the call for more experimental interventions to raise critical consciousness (Heberle et al., 2020). Highlighting shared similarity of experiences across minoritized groups could help lead to more meaningful discussions about the structural factors of racial discrimination between parents and children (e.g., Bañales et al., 2021; Cortland et al., 2017). Even more concretely, asking 'why' questions may be especially

helpful in getting children to think more broadly (e.g., Luguri et al., 2012). For example, a parent might direct their child to consider why someone might make fun of a Black or Asian kid and receive the answer, “they don't like them.” From there, the parent might ask why they do not like them and get a response like: “they don't have very many Black or Asian friends.” Continuing the scaffolding to consider more distal causes, a parent might then ask their child to wonder why someone might not have very many Black or Asian friends, which might prompt their child to consider other parents' prejudices. This sort of parental input has proven effective in scaffolding children's development of a critical understanding of social structures that perpetuate racial hierarchies and inequity (Bañales et al., 2021; Quintana, 2008). Even this level of structural thinking, which may be more appropriate for children in the middle childhood period, may be influential in setting the foundation for more coalitional tendencies in racially minoritized children.

Psychologically, one mechanism by which CRS may increase critical consciousness is through the development of a common minoritized ingroup identity. That is, minoritized youth may think of themselves as a collective group (e.g., people of colour). Although this may be challenging given that there is no agreed-upon linguistic label to help facilitate superordinate categorization (Deo, 2021; Horton & Markman, 1980), having both a common minoritized ingroup identity and racial identity can help facilitate more positive intergroup contact (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011). One caveat to this claim, however, is that children would need to be able to engage in sufficiently abstract thinking, which may not occur until middle childhood (e.g., Rizzo et al., 2020).

4 | AIDING PARENTS WHO WANT TO ENGAGE IN CRS

Of course, parents may be interested in promoting racial equity for all minoritized groups but feel uncertain about how. The first step is to understand that having discussions about race at all is important (e.g., Perry et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Racially minoritized parents have a strong starting point because they can speak on their own experiences and use that as a bridge to highlight similarities in experiences across racial groups. Young children are paying attention to what their parents do and will often infer norms and develop their own attitudes on the basis of this information (Rizzo et al., 2021). Thus, modelling that it is important to talk about race in the first place may be quite impactful. For example, Asian adolescents who had a female parent that engaged in race-conscious discussions showed less anti-Black attitudes relative to Asian adolescents whose parents were silent on the subject (Atkin & Ahn, 2022).

Additionally, providing historical context can be important for identifying discrimination as such (Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013). Disambiguating and clearly identifying incidents of racism may help children identify the pattern and thus the root cause of discriminatory experiences that happen across racial groups (Carter & Murphy, 2015). To this end, explicitly highlighting the similarity between experiences can lead to greater identification with other minoritized groups (Cortland et al., 2017; Craig & Richeson, 2016). For example, a parent might start by anchoring the conversation on bias towards one's own experiences, and then draw the explicit comparison to how other racially minoritized children might be treated. Another tactic for parents to accomplish the same goal may be to encourage children to engage in perspective-taking (i.e., asking the child to put themselves in the other child's shoes) (e.g., Quintana, 2008; Todd et al., 2011; Todd et al., Todd & Galinsky, 2014). For both strategies, parents would also be well-served to connect similarities across group experiences with historical and contemporary examples of positive cross-racial solidarity, from individual friendships (e.g., between Malcolm X and Yuri Kochiyama) as well as group-based coalitions such as Black and Asian American solidarity in the wake of recent instances of police brutality and hate crimes (Hope, 2019). These examples may be especially effective if parents focus on the causes behind these friendships and coalitions—that is, why did these people come together? For example, East Asians owned grocery stores in the American Deep South that primarily served Black residents, because both groups were barred from White communities (Yu, 2021).

Indeed, some level of CRS is already occurring, though typically among adolescents and young adults. For example, to the extent that Asian American adolescents whose parents have talked about anti-Asian bias show greater awareness of discrimination towards other groups, these adolescents are more engaged in civic activism

(Kiang et al., 2022). Relatedly, Asian American students (Matriano et al., 2021) and adolescents (Nguyen & Quinn, 2018) who engage in critical reflection of how social systems maintain White supremacy were more engaged in civic activism and had less anti-Black attitudes. We extend this work to suggest that these conversations can and should happen earlier in development.

5 | CONCLUSION

These strategies are by no means exhaustive and we encourage more researchers to consider how racially minoritized parents and families can build solidarity across group boundaries. We hope that this approach helps to bridge the ERS and collective consciousness literatures to better understand how talking about race and racism may help to create equity-minded children. Additionally, our focus on collective racial socialization joins with calls from other researchers (e.g., Galliher et al., 2017; Rogers, 2018) in thinking about how children negotiate their identity on multiple levels, spanning the individual to the structural. Nonetheless, we also acknowledge that fostering this greater sense of critical consciousness to provide a foundation for racial solidarity can be difficult and may require consistent effort and connection across differences (Heberle et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, however, we suggest that collective racial socialization by parents may be an under-considered but important way to build intraminority racial solidarity and coalitions, advocate for system change, and strive for racial equity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ryan Lei: Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Zoe Frazer-Klotz:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Elizabeth Szanton:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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