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**The Voices of Chinese American Parents During COVID-19: Recommendations for
Addressing Anti-Asian Racism and Supporting Adolescents in School**

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing anti-Asian sentiment, discrimination, and hate crimes, which has consequences for Asian American students and families. As school districts prepared to reopen in Fall 2021, discussions and plans largely emphasized preventing infection and disruptions to learning. Asian American families' discrimination experiences and their recommendations for schools to address possible COVID-related racial bullying and discrimination have been overlooked. The current study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted between April and June 2020 with 47 Chinese American parents with adolescents ages 12-17. The role of school and ethnic-racial socialization and intergroup interactions may become more salient for adolescents (Aldana & Byrd, 2015), and parents of adolescents may have different perceptions about the factors contributing to racial discrimination and the ways they talk to teens about racism (Ren et al., 2022), given adolescents' sophisticated knowledge about race and greater ethnic-racial identity exploration (Quintana, 2007). Thematic and content analyses revealed significant parental concerns about adolescents' experiences with bullying and discrimination as well as a widespread fear for family safety. Parents' school recommendations reflected their desire for school administrators and staff to take a firm stance against COVID-19-related anti-Asian discrimination while treading carefully on race topics for fear of singling out Asian American students. This study emphasizes contextual factors that influence adolescents' experiences of racial discrimination during the early stages of the pandemic and advocates for a more holistic approach to addressing students' learning and psychological well-being that elevates the voices of impacted families.

Keywords: Asian American parents, school, COVID-19, bullying, racial discrimination

What is the public significance of this article?

The present study illustrates Chinese American parents' heightened concerns about family safety and adolescent racial discrimination during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the issue of xenophobia and relevant violence during COVID-19 reveal historical and concurrent racism that stay relevant in adolescents' lives and school adjustment beyond the pandemic, our report of parents' recommendations for schools in addressing anti-Asian racism following the COVID-19 lockdown have implications for including the impacted families' perspectives in the implementation of culturally responsive school intervention practices and policies toward equity and social justice.

**The Voices of Chinese American Parents During COVID-19: Recommendations for
Addressing Anti-Asian Racism and Supporting Adolescents in School**

Asian Americans have increasingly been blamed for the COVID-19 pandemic (Ellerbeck, 2020), resulting in increased violence and heightened salience of long-standing racial discrimination. Increased hostility against Asian Americans led to microaggressions, verbal and physical harassment, and vicarious discrimination (Lee & Waters, 2021; Stop AAPI Hate, 2021; Tessler et al., 2020). Between March and May 2020, nearly 51% of Asian American parents and 50% of youth reported that they experienced direct racism (Cheah et al., 2020). In its first four weeks, the Stop AAPI Hate (2021) website received 1,497 reports of discrimination related to COVID-19. By September 30, 2021, the number had increased to 10,370 reports. COVID-19-related racial discrimination has been associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes, such as increased depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Cheah et al., 2020; Lee & Waters, 2021).

Ethnic-racial discrimination refers to unfair treatment attributed to one's race or ethnicity (Benner & Graham, 2013). It is part of a larger, more complex system of racism, prejudice, and oppression that privileges the experiences of people in power while marginalizing the experiences of others (Coll et al., 1996). Structural and systemic inequities become salient in the daily lives of minority individuals through interpersonal interactions and environmental microaggressions, where physical spaces in society are structured in a way that invalidates the racial identities of people of color (Sue et al., 2007; Yip, 2018). Additionally, more research has shed light on a more subtle form of racism: racial microaggressions, which are the "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or

unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Asian American individuals experience multiple forms of microaggressions, including nonverbal rejection responses (e.g., avoiding intentionally to prevent infection) and verbal insults that threaten participants’ psychological wellbeing. Subtle microaggressions that register “under the skin” can also escalate to overt forms of racial discrimination (e.g., physical assaults) and property damage (Yan et al., 2022).

Historical Background and Asian American Stereotypes

Asian Americans have historically endured systemic racism in the form of stereotypes, including those of "model minorities," "perpetual foreigners," and "Yellow Peril" (Juang et al., 2017). In the 19th century, Asian Americans were portrayed as “Yellow Peril”, an existential threat to the West, disease carriers, and "cruel, disloyal and enemy immigrants" (Hurh & Kim, 1989, pp. 515-516). In addition, Asian Americans are often viewed as foreigners, the “other” in America despite their U.S. citizenship. For example, in a recent study, 99.5% of Sikh American adolescents reported being perceived as a foreigner, and 76.4% reported experiencing racial bullying (Atwal & Wang, 2019). Among Asian American students, discrimination is also prevalent (Cooc & Gee, 2014; Greene et al., 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). For example, Asian American students are often perceived as academically capable by peers yet are often teased because of their different facial features, names, or the food they bring to lunch (Chou & Feagin, 2015). They are often mocked as “nerdy” and “robotic overachievers” who lack leadership abilities (Chou & Feagin, 2015, p. 58). Research has shown that the perpetual foreigner stereotype and discrimination significantly predicted a lower sense of belonging to America, lower life satisfaction and hope, and more mental health difficulties among Asian

American adults and adolescents (Atwal & Wang, 2019; Hou et al., 2015; Huynh et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2011).

COVID-19 Anti-Asian Racism

During the COVID-19 pandemic, historical racial stratification in the United States and racist master narratives have made it easier for others to treat Chinese and other Asian Americans as the personification of foreignness and sickness (Tessler et al., 2020). COVID-19 fueled anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, resulting in Asian Americans reporting fear of racially motivated harassment and assault. In April 2021, 81% of Asian American adults felt that violence against them in the U.S. had been increasing, with another 32% fearing that “someone might threaten or physically attack them.” (Pew Research Center, 2021a). This pattern persisted into 2022, with another study showing that 38% of AAPI individuals reported being victims of a hate crime, and 83% of participants expressed concern about the future increase in hate crimes against their community (Rodriguez, 2022). Other data sources corroborated these worrying trends. Media analysis of 222,212,841 tweets, 16,808,191 Twitter posts, and 4chan image boards revealed a significant surge in racial slurs that targeted Chinese people online following former President Donald Trump’s labeling of COVID-19 as the Chinese virus in 2020 (Tahmasbi et al., 2020).

China and ethnically Chinese individuals were perceived as a realistic and symbolic threat to the U.S. (Croucher et al., 2020). Amid the alarming rise of Sinophobia, individuals of Chinese ethnicity were perceived by some in the American public as ‘reasonable’ targets for frustration, anger, fear, and aggression (Abrams, 2021). Cheah and her colleagues (2020) reported that between March and May 2020, roughly half of the Chinese American parents and youth in their study reported experiencing at least one instance of racial discrimination in person.

Nearly three-quarters of parents and youth reported witnessing racial discrimination online or in person (Cheah et al., 2020). These findings are problematic as higher levels of racial discrimination are associated with more psychological distress and poorer mental health among parents and youth (Cheah et al., 2020; Huynh et al., 2022; Oh et al., 2022; Park et al., 2021; Zong et al., 2022). However, the quantitative data do not tell us how parents experienced and interpreted their racist incidents, how they discussed racism with their adolescents at home, and what they would prefer schools to do to support Asian American students in the event of COVID-19-related racism.

Parents' Messages About Race and Perspectives on Schools' Responses to Racism

Positive parental racial socialization has the potential to help youth deal with discrimination more effectively (Juang & Kiang, 2019). However, most Asian American parents are foreign born (71%; Pew Research Center, 2021b) and have never experienced the “race talk” with their families of origin and/or have limited awareness of racial discrimination in American society. How Asian American parents talk to their children about discrimination and systemic racial oppression is still relatively unknown, although this topic has attracted increasing attention in the past decade (Juang et al., 2017). Asian-heritage parents are more likely to use cultural socialization (e.g., talking about cultural pride and embracing diversity) and less likely to utilize strategies such as preparation for bias with their youth (Juang et al., 2018). In a recent qualitative study with twelve college students, participants shared that race is not something they discussed at home. Instead, youth taught their parents about race in the U.S. (Young et al., 2021). During the pandemic, researchers discovered that Chinese American parents rarely discussed COVID-19-related racism with their adolescents despite facing high levels of direct and

vicarious racism (Ren et al., in press). Youth spend more awake hours in school than any other activities at home or outside of school (e.g., duties/chores, enriched activities; Hall & Nielsen, 2020). Racial harassment and bullying remain prevalent in the educational system (Rivera & Menestrel, 2016).

However, one recent study did explore forty Chinese American parents' beliefs about what schools should do to address anti-Asian discrimination following school re-openings (Wang et al., 2022). These parents of elementary school children recommended that schools promote scientific understanding about the COVID-19 virus, establish clear guidelines and consequences for handling bullying and discrimination, promote multiculturalism, diversity, and Asian American perspectives in classrooms, and increase collaborations with Asian American families. Parents feared that excessive, explicit discussions about racial discrimination would trigger negative attitudes and more discrimination against Asian American children (Wang et al., 2022). Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to unfair racial discrimination and racial stereotypes given this developmental period's importance in identity development (Erikson, 1968). Compared to parents of elementary school-aged children, parents of adolescents may also have different perceptions about the factors contributing to racial discrimination. Parents may differ in how they talk to teens about racism, especially by increasing the racial socialization messages around the biases their adolescent may experience (Ren et al., 2020) as they show increased knowledge about race and greater ethnic-racial identity exploration (Quintana, 2007). Parents may also have dissimilar recommendations for middle and high schools, as adolescents have unique educational needs. The role of schools in ethnic-racial socialization and intergroup

interactions may increase as youth mature (Aldana & Bryd, 2015). Thus, the current study sought to address this research gap.

The Present Study

The present study investigated 47 Chinese American parents' perspectives of their adolescents' experiences with racial bullying and discrimination. We also explored parental concerns about COVID-19-related discrimination, their strategies for discussing racism at home, and the parents' recommendations for schools to prevent racism and discrimination in the context of the pandemic. We acknowledge that many other Asian ethnic groups have experienced racial hostility during the pandemic. However, to better control for diversity in migration patterns, language, and culture of different Asian American subgroups, we focused exclusively on the experiences of Chinese American families (excluding multiracial or multiethnic families). They are the largest Asian-origin group in the United States (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021) and are most likely to be victims of anti-Asian hate among all Asian American subgroups during the COVID-19 outbreak (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021).

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a larger study on Chinese American families during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheah et al., 2020). Forty-seven parents (38 mothers and nine fathers, $M_{age} = 48.52$; $SD_{age} = 5.32$; Ranges from 39 to 63 years old) who identified as ethnically Chinese and had an adolescent between 12-18 ($M_{age} = 15.21$; $SD_{age} = 1.82$) were randomly selected using a stratified sampling method and invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Most participants were married ($n = 43$; 2 divorced, one remarried, one

single), and all of their spouses were ethnically Chinese. Most of the participants ($n = 44$; 93.6%) were first-generation immigrants who migrated to the U.S. from China at ages 19 or older and had resided in the U.S. on average for 18 years ($SD = 7.51$ years; range = 1.92 years to 32 years of residence). Three parents were second-generation Chinese Americans. We included these three parents because much of the literature on ethnic-racial socialization has neglected second-generation perspectives (Juang et al., 2018). Parents were provided the option to participate in the interview in English or a Chinese dialect (e.g., Mandarin, Cantonese) before they signed up for the study. Ten parents chose to be interviewed in English (suggesting they are more comfortable with English, a proxy of higher levels of acculturation; Lee et al., 2011), and 37 chose to be interviewed in Mandarin ($n = 37$). Participants were predominantly middle-class (97.8% scoring 30 or above on Hollingshead indices; Hollingshead, 1975) and highly educated (Mothers: 29 out of 38 held graduate degrees, 8 had Bachelor's degrees; Fathers: 7 out of 9 held graduate degrees, 2 held Bachelor's degrees). The majority of participants ($n = 31$) came from the Northeast region of the U.S. six participants came from the West, six from the Midwest, three came from the Southeast, and one participant from the Southern region. Eighty-nine percent of the parents in our sample had experienced vicarious discrimination, and 46.8% had experienced racism directly during COVID-19.

Procedure

Chinese American parents were recruited through phone calls and the distribution of study flyers via email to various cultural, educational, religious, and community groups, and social media (Facebook and WeChat) across the United States. Parents were invited to share their experiences in a 60- to 75-minute semi-structured qualitative interview over the phone with

bilingual graduate research assistants between April 20, 2020, to June 4, 2020. The institutional review board at [Blinded] approved the research protocol. Participants shared demographic information, such as age, gender, marital status, parents' education and work, housing, and years in the United States. Parents received a \$15 e-gift card for participating. All semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim in English or Chinese with identifiers removed. All names presented here are pseudonyms.

Measures

Demographics

Parents provided demographic information, including marital status, immigration generational status, education levels, and occupations. They also shared their adolescent's age and gender. *Household socioeconomic status (SES)* scores were calculated from education level and occupation of the head of the household where the adolescent resides, ranging from 8 to 66, based on *Hollingshead Index* (Hollingshead, 1975).

Semi-Structured Interview

Interviewers asked a series of open-ended questions that focused on parents' concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents' experiences with discrimination/bullying, impact, and school recommendations for supporting Asian American students following the return to in-person learning. Sample questions included, "Were any of your children treated differently or more poorly, called names, because of your race/ethnicity before and/or after the coronavirus outbreak? Can you share what happened? Did you ever have concerns that racial discrimination might happen to your child? Can you share why?" and "School is closed now but will reopen eventually. From your perspective, what are ways that schools can help Chinese American

adolescents with regard to racial discrimination once children return to school?” If parents had multiple children, the conversation focused on the adolescent child.

Data Analysis and Coding. Interviews were transcribed by native English or bilingual English/Mandarin speakers in the original language they were conducted. The qualitative/mixed method cross-platform application, Dedoose (version 8.3.35), was used for coding. The coding team consisted of two Ph.D. level researchers and three graduate psychology or social work students. Four coding team members identified as Chinese American and one as white. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Thematic analysis is a qualitative descriptive approach that examines commonalities, differences, and relationships within data (Gibson & Brown, 2009). This approach allows for flexibility as it is not limited to any particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes (i.e., basic elements of the data), developing, defining, and naming themes (i.e., recurring statements/behaviors), and ultimately, generating a report that captures the complexity of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, the coding team independently reviewed the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data and ensure thorough comprehension. A random subsample of eight transcripts was selected, and each coder conducted a line-by-line analysis and assigned preliminary codes/headings to describe the content. The coding team met bi-weekly to compare and review individual memos and created a shared initial coding framework. This framework captured several main categories: parental concerns, protective and risk factors for bullying/discrimination, and what schools can do for Asian American students following school-reopening. Through discussion and refinement,

coders agreed upon codes for each category. Next, the coders independently coded five non-overlapping transcripts ($n = 20$). The team continued to meet regularly to discuss code applications, disagreements, and areas where code refinement was necessary. This process continued until no new codes emerged and coders reached saturation. Through rigorous discussions, the coding team resolved discrepancies (e.g., labelling or applying the codes). A finalized codebook was created. The codebook consisted of the code name, definition, and example(s). A code-application test was created using a random sample of 20% of the codes to assess inter-rater agreement. The average kappa coefficient was .82, indicating strong inter-rater reliability (McHugh, 2012). In writing the report, we selected quotes representing significant patterns in the data and varied quote selection across participant demographics (e.g., gender, generational status, child gender; Lingard, 2019).

Results

We organized our qualitative findings with the following themes: (a) fear for family physical safety; (b) concerns about adolescent racial discrimination and related socialization strategies; (c) reasons for bullying and discrimination; (d) protective factors against bullying and discrimination; and (e) parents' school recommendations.

Fear for Family Physical Safety

Almost three quarters of parents in our sample ($n = 34$) expressed their concerns about racial tensions during COVID-19. Participants discussed the hostile socio-political climate and increased anti-Chinese rhetoric ($n = 26$, 55%). Specifically, xenophobic terms emerged in the media, such as "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus," leading some to believe that prominent political leaders were encouraging racial hatred. These divisive characterizations exacerbated

parents' worry of being suspected of "[carrying] it on our body" and being retaliated against in public.

Some parents ($n = 5$, 11%) contextualized their discussion of a palpable shift in societal attitudes towards Asian Americans to mirror this country's long bitter history of racism. This connection was made mainly by English-speaking, first-generation immigrants (3 out of 5; 60%) and second-generation (1 out of 5; 25%) parents. These individuals referred to incidents such as the Chinese Exclusion Act from 1882 to 1943, the 1950s Red Scare, and the U.S.-Japan trade war in the 1980s. Denise, a second-generation mother of a 13-year-old son, shared in English, "It was almost like a Cold War type of sentiment and so I feel like COVID has brought another version of that." Similarly, Jody, an English-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 16-year-old daughter, lamented that several political leaders scapegoated China/Chinese for COVID-19. They perpetuated public distrust towards Chinese individuals to be dangerous and "you know, the whole [Chinese] society's bad or attacking the U.S." This experience of living through the pandemic has caused her to be "much more aware of being Chinese and how it has affected me; whatever that country [China] does, it doesn't reflect on me directly."

Worries about family's physical safety ($n = 15$, 32%) led to changes in daily behavior, such as purchases of pepper sprays and home surveillance or forbidding younger siblings from playing outside without adult supervision. Others avoided public spaces or engaged in behaviors that would lessen public attention (e.g., avoiding eye contact with others when walking).

Concerns about Adolescent Racial Discrimination and Related Socialization Strategies

Over half of the parents interviewed ($n = 24$) expressed concern about their adolescent being subjected to racial bullying and discrimination. These parents feared their child would be

targeted randomly while “waiting for a shuttle bus or something like that.” Some parents also detailed instances of their teen having to respond to verbal comments such as, “My dad says [coronavirus] is all your fault” or having a peer “pull their eyes out sideways, and be like, ‘Look at me, I’m Chinese.’” Others worried that racial attacks or microaggressions would lead to feelings of inferiority. Lana is a first-generation immigrant and the mother of a 16-year-old son. She took part in the interview in Mandarin and shared worries that her teen would internalize negative stereotypes about his racial group:

I am especially afraid that it will affect the psychological health of my children, making my children feel inferior or ashamed for being Chinese. I do not want this to cast a shadow on my child or let my child think all American society or the whole society/world discriminates against us. They think we are lower class [than whites], so we are looked down upon by others.

Other Mandarin-speaking, first-generation immigrant parents recognized that “[racism] is bound to happen. It’s inevitable.” They believed a more realistic way to deal with bullies is to help youth develop inner resources like emotional control, coping skills, and the ability to stand up for themselves or seek help from adults. Jolene, a Mandarin-speaking first-generation immigrant mother of a 13-year-old girl expressed that, “We taught her from an early age that... You will always be Chinese. You can’t lie [about your background], you can’t bleach [your skin], you can’t change... you teach her how to face this thing correctly.” Relatedly, a few parents reflected on how they would respond to potential racist incidents, sharing that they would monitor or check in with their adolescents with questions like, “Did this happen to you?” or allow space for the adolescent to speak openly about any incident. Molly, an English-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 16-year-old daughter, stated, “...that’s why I keep on, sort

of, pre-warn them, in a way. So, I would just let them come to me if they have anything. Because I don't, I don't want to assume that they are all okay.”

Half of the participants ($n = 24$) admitted to having no discussion about race or discrimination with their teenagers at home for various reasons. Some parents ($n = 5$, 21%) did not see racial discrimination as a pressing issue in their household due to protective factors in the neighborhood and at school. In contrast, other parents ($n = 4$, 17%) expressed the desire to shield their adolescents from the topic of racism because they felt that their adolescents were too cognitively immature to understand these complex issues. Several parents ($n = 10$, 42%) also decided to take a reactive approach, explaining that these topics are uncomfortable to share without a precipitating event because “it doesn't come naturally, the conversation.” Additionally, some parents ($n = 6$, 25%) felt that their adolescents received this information from their schools or were even more knowledgeable and aware than their parents. Thus, these parents did not think they could contribute anything meaningful to these conversations.

Reasons for Bullying and Discrimination

About one-third of participants attributed racial discrimination to negative media coverage (e.g., portrayal of Asians as disease carriers) and a hostile political climate (See Table 1). Others ($n = 8$) also recognized that racial stereotypes (e.g., model minority, perpetual foreigner) are contributing factors. Personal characteristics especially perceived phenotypic traits (e.g., small stature, facial features) and linguistic or cultural differences (e.g., ethnic customs, accents, food), were also cited as reasons bullies may target Chinese American adolescents.

Transitioning to middle or high school was perceived as a vulnerable developmental milestone as racial differences and prejudice were reportedly more salient among “older” youth.

For example, Qin, a Mandarin-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 14-year-old daughter, explained that elementary school students “play with children of all races,” but in middle and high schools, “youth of different races are divided into [cliques].” She elaborated,

Some people are called “yellow people.” Slowly, “yellow people” gather together. African Americans are slowly gathering together, and people from other countries are slowly gathering together. At this time, I think, especially if they have their own consciousness [racial awareness], this kind of discrimination will definitely happen.

Qin also believed that older adolescents are more likely to bully each other in part due to adolescents’ cognitive limitations. They cannot control their emotions “unlike adults” during this stage, making them more susceptible to peer conflict.

Protective Factors Against Bullying and Discrimination

Two-thirds of parents mentioned a diverse student body, specifically, a sizeable population of other Asian Americans at school, and a positive school climate as major protective factors against racial bullying and discrimination, underscoring the critical role schools can play in adolescents' resilience and positive development. This number included a subset of ten parents (all first-generation immigrant parents, mostly Mandarin-speaking) who neither expressed race-related concerns nor worried that their adolescent would be racially targeted. Nineteen parents maintained that their teenagers are "well protected" and "unlikely" to face direct discrimination, especially in the context of stay-at-home orders and social distancing mandates. Multiple participants spoke of the country's history of being "a very inclusive society," or "very open world, accepting environment" replete with "freedom of speech, freedom of belief, all your freedoms." They discussed their privilege of living in diverse, relatively affluent communities surrounded by "good schools and all that, with parents probably having [a high level of]

education." A third of parents discussed the protective role of supportive friendships and networks. Christina, a Mandarin-speaking first-generation immigrant mother of a 12-year-old girl recalled the experience of her daughter transferring to a new middle school:

She said that the classmates in the new school are very nice. When she went to class on the first day, I still remember she came back to us and said that many students took the initiative [to get to know her]. They ran up to her, introduced themselves and wanted to be friends or something. It's just that she integrated quickly. Maybe we were lucky, but we didn't feel discriminated against.

Finally, several parents ($n = 11$, 23%) spoke about their schools having a clearly defined process for reporting and handling potential bullying incidents, which helped increase parents' confidence in the school's ability to handle this issue.

Parent Recommendations for Schools

Participants' school recommendations showed that they wanted school leaders and staff to take action to stop racial bullying and victimization of Asian American students and increase awareness of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia in society. Specifically, parents discussed five major themes: advancing scientific knowledge ($n = 11$; 23%); strengthening anti-bullying messaging ($n = 11$; 23%); keeping families informed ($n = 11$; 23%); promoting positive school climate ($n = 10$; 21%); and avoiding excessive discussion about race ($n = 8$; 17%).

Advancing Scientific Knowledge

At the time of these interviews (April to June 2020), misinformation about the source of COVID-19 abounded when influential politicians and multiple mass media sources used politically charged terms, such as the "Wuhan virus," "China virus," or "Chinese virus" (Lin & Pham, 2020). Several parents in the study hoped that schools would develop classroom

initiatives to debunk the circulating myths about the coronavirus. In this vein, Yan, a Mandarin-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother with a 13-year-old son, said:

It is political propaganda to label the source of the virus, but from a scientific point of view, the origin of the virus is a natural phenomenon and has nothing to do with politics. So I think it is necessary to educate everyone. For students, it is still necessary to teach this scientific concept to these students so that they can look at the problem scientifically. No matter where it first broke out, the virus will definitely appear in the progress of human history. Mutation from its original host to humans, this is a matter that occurs every once in a while, and it is a natural phenomenon.

Scientifically discussing COVID-19 was seen as a way to combat bigotry while reducing infection rates through education "of how it spreads, versus just, like... where it came from initially." Several participants believed that shifting discussions away from the origin of the virus outbreak could curtail stigma and scapegoating. This approach may have some merit. In 2015, the World Health Organization (2015) issued recommendations for the naming of new human infectious diseases, with specific guidelines to avoid labelling geographic locations, cultural, population references, and other terms that "incite undue fear" to minimize adverse effects on countries, economies, and people.

Strengthening Anti-Bullying Messaging

Roughly one-quarter of the participants hoped schools would develop a transparent plan to handle racial discrimination or bullying and be consistent and firm in enforcing disciplinary actions on perpetrators. Parents felt school leaders needed to send a strong message to the community by proactively "telling everyone that you can't make such racially discriminatory remarks" (Ning, a Mandarin-speaking, first-generation mother of a 12-year-old boy). In another illustrative example, Yuzhen, a Mandarin-speaking, first-generation mother with a 13-year-old son acknowledged the difficult nature of preventing these incidents entirely at school but "the

attitude of the teachers is very important.” She suggested that staff need to be more vigilant and be explicit in saying that, “such behaviors are not helpful to our current situation, has no positive meaning, and it highlights your ignorance and low self-esteem.” She added,

I think maybe the principal has to give a speech or something first, and then the teachers communicate any follow-up. Have such things happened? In fact, [the school's] communication can accurately reflect the status quo.

This parent's suggestion reflects her belief that school leadership ultimately sets the tone for the school's culture, and that staff buy-in is essential.

Keeping Families Informed

Eleven parents expressed a desire for schools to maintain or improve communication with families about school initiatives and new policies. Darren, an English-speaking, first-generation immigrant father with a 15-year-old daughter, remarked that his child's school was already working proactively and "has some mitigation planned" in handling racial discrimination. School officials sent email correspondences and hosted a webinar for families.

Another English-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother, Tina, shared that her 17-year-old son's role as a student representative allowed him to meet regularly with school leadership. As an active parent, she kept abreast of current school events and shared her concerns with the principal:

So the principal has promised, and also the teacher has promised to keep educating people, reporting things or saying, "That's wrong," and they will promise to act on that very quickly. So I feel like I'm really lucky, too, to live in this community, so I'm sure my son will be okay if, by any chance, anything happens to him.

Promoting Positive School Climate

As schools returned to in-person learning, many parents expressed their hope for physically, socially, and emotionally safe educational environments for Asian American students. Liqin, an English-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 17-year-old boy, expressed gratitude for her local school's efforts to "fill up the community with love and with acceptance" by hosting events that celebrate ethnic and cultural foods and dress and encouraging dialogue about current events such as the Minneapolis George Floyd situation. Meizhen, an English-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 16-year-old girl, also expressed her belief in teaching students about the country's history of discrimination against minorities. She shared that her daughter's school has a sizeable Chinese American student population, and cross-racial interactions are inevitable. She added,

If you're friends with them, you won't do as poorly [in offending others] as you do if you see them as a [distant] symbol - if you're not friends with them. Also, I think bullying, individual bullying, no matter what it is, is a personal attack that needs to be stopped. And I see the school, you know, I volunteer there all the time; I see them doing a good job on that.

Schools have the infrastructure and authority to humanize the Asian American experience through education. They can provide opportunities for cross-racial friendships and create safe environments where students value each other's differences.

Avoiding Excessive Discussion about Race

Some first-generation immigrant parents, almost all of whom spoke Mandarin ($n = 7$), did not want schools to link discrimination during COVID-19 with the issue of race. These parents did not believe schools should "do something deliberately," discuss discrimination proactively, or single out Chinese students "so they [Chinese American students] can just be like other students." They worried that a proactive approach to opening discourse about racism would

direct students' attention to ethnic-racial differences and increase the likelihood of negative peer interactions. Additionally, it would heighten their adolescents' sensitivity to perceived discrimination. This perspective is reflected in Qing's response, who is a Mandarin-speaking, first-generation immigrant mother of a 16-year-old girl:

I think sometimes you don't have to mention it specifically. If everyone is good and no one feels any discrimination, I don't think there is any need for the school to emphasize it. If you do, on the contrary, it will make everyone aware of this problem. This kind of thing will happen. I think if there is no problem, don't give it special consideration.

Five parents felt a sense of security from being in a community with a high proportion of Asian and/or other ethnic-racial minorities. Their recommendations are to "solve the problem when it comes up and try not to interfere with the race [discussion] if it doesn't happen." Children and youth are "more innocent" and "may not think so deeply as to see it as racial discrimination." They may perceive any slight as merely the reflection of ignorant individuals. Drawing attention to racial hostility and discrimination may be incongruent with parents' personally held beliefs that the United States is a country built on tolerance and equal opportunity for all, regardless of skin color or cultural background. The parents who suggested taking a more reactive or color-evasive approach were also parents ($n = 3$) who were not concerned about their teenager being targeted and avoided discussions of race at home. According to these parents, schools should investigate each bullying case on its merits without assuming underlying racial animus.

Discussion

As social environments expand and permeate youth's lives, ethnic-racial minority adolescents must navigate the racial landscape and confront racial stereotypes and other forms of

oppression (Coll et al., 1996). In addition to families, schools play a significant role in addressing bias-based bullying and mitigating the adverse effects of discrimination through interventions (Mulvey et al., 2018). Our qualitative study with Chinese American parents of adolescents extends findings from prior quantitative studies (e.g., Cheah et al., 2020) and national reports (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021) indicating that Chinese American individuals encountered high levels of racial discrimination and distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. We sought to center the voices of impacted Chinese American families during this unprecedented time. Our semi-structured interviews explored parents' perspectives about their adolescents' racial discrimination experiences during the early stages of COVID-19, parents' socialization strategies, and recommendations for schools to create safe environments for Asian American students.

Results indicated that Chinese American parents feared for their family's physical safety and adopted reactive strategies, consistent with a recent finding that Asian Americans increasingly purchased pepper sprays, tasers, and firearms during the pandemic (Chia, 2021). Over half of our participants also worried about their teens being bullied or mistreated due to their race. Heightened and negative media coverage, a hostile socio-political climate, phenotypical features, and racial stereotypes were cited as reasons Asian American youth may be targeted. The consequences of a continued state of fear and vigilance are likely to impact the mental health of Asian American families negatively.

Additionally, we explored if and how parents talked to youth about COVID-19 racism and discrimination. Some parents were not concerned about their children being targeted. They failed to see the benefit of discussing racial discrimination with their adolescents, pointing out

various protective factors in their environment, such as diverse neighbourhood composition, a positive school climate, and strong peer networks. Studies show that the adverse effects of discrimination on a person's health may be buffered if the person feels supported by their social environment (Lee & Waters, 2021; Woo & Jun, 2021). Living in ethnoburbs or communities with a sizable Chinese population may be protective (Goto et al., 2002). Residing in neighbourhoods with a high concentration of others of the same ethnicity might enhance one's ethnic-cultural identity (Zhou & Kim, 2006), which is protective against the harmful effects of ethnic-racial discrimination (Umaña-Taylor, 2016).

About half of the parents hesitated to prepare their adolescents for racial bias, fearing it could be unproductive or detrimental. Parents' hesitation in engaging in racial discussions may reflect their underestimation of the likelihood of children and adolescents encountering racism. Some may assume that these topics are too complex for youth to comprehend. However, studies reveal that racial differences (e.g., skin color) are perceived by children from a very young age, with children showing a preference for a face that matches the race of their caregivers as early as three months old (Kelly et al., 2005). As early as two years old, toddlers start to reason people's behaviors based on race (Hirschfeld, 2008). Additionally, several parents in our study recognized their children as being more knowledgeable about racial dynamics in U.S. society than they were. Our findings echo Young and colleagues (2021)'s notion of "bottom-up racial socialization," where second-generation U.S.-born children may help foreign-born parents be more aware of racial dynamics in the U.S. For example, they may accomplish this by conveying messages learned from school and challenging racial stereotypes.

We must note that study participants were predominantly first-generation immigrants who did not attend K–12 schools in America. Therefore, these findings may reflect parents' lack of experience with participating in relevant race talks with their family of origin while growing up in a racially homogenous society like China. The efficacy of preparation for bias socialization messages likely depends on the content of the messages and how they were conveyed and whether adolescents feel empowered with tools that can equip them to cope with racial injustices perpetrated against them. Moreover, a recent study suggests that the recency of racial discrimination may impact individuals' proactive intervention, such that the racial discrimination experienced during COVID-19 may hinder victimized individuals' proactive bystander responses, but in a long-term, the past discrimination experiences may facilitate empathy and commitment to intervene as a proactive bystander (Lui et al., 2022).

Parents' suggestions for schools also exposed their complex attitudes toward discussions about race. Upon confirmation of racial bullying and discrimination, parents hoped schools would take a firm stance against perpetrators and prioritize positive school climate and diversity initiatives. However, attitudes were more mixed about schools taking a proactive approach to opening racial dialogue without an instigating incident at school. This is consistent with parents' own hesitation to prepare their adolescents for racial bias at home. Some parents, mostly first-generation Mandarin-speaking parents, were concerned such proactive discussions at school would draw attention to Asian American students, making them more vulnerable to victimization or retaliation. Parents feared these conversations would "prime" their adolescents to feel victimized and helpless, increase feelings of alienation, or draw peers' attention to ethnic-racial differences. These fears are not unfounded or irrational. A prior study with Chinese American

families showed that parents' discussions about potential bias might make adolescents "feel more stigmatized and less like they belong in U.S. culture" (Benner & Kim, 2009, p. 874). Similarly, in a quantitative study conducted in the spring of 2020, Chinese American parents infrequently talked to their children about COVID-19 discrimination (Ren et al., 2022). A different group of Chinese American parents with elementary school-aged children also worried that putting too much emphasis on race, racism, and discrimination could lead to the poorer treatment of Asian American children (Wang et al., 2022). Although race talk is difficult for many ethnic minority parents, there is empirical evidence that colorblindness, the approach of minimizing or denying intergroup differences, is counterproductive and perpetuates racial inequality by diminishing children's ability to identify overt instances of discrimination and call upon help from adults (Apfelbaum et al., 2010).

Limitations and Research Recommendations

There are several limitations in this study that should be noted. These findings are demographically limited given that most participants were middle-class immigrant Chinese American parents. While the study focused on Chinese American families, other Asian American and multiracial, multi-ethnic families have also experienced racism during COVID-19 (Jeung et al., 2021). Our findings do not reflect multifaceted experiences, and future studies must also examine the experiences of Asian American subgroups, including multiracial, multi-ethnic families as well as consider the intersectionality in these experiences. Additionally, findings may not generalize to non-first generation Chinese American parents. For example, second-generation Asian American parents reveal contrasting caregiving approach from immigrant parents in regards to initiating more open conversation about racism and placing efforts toward their child's

understanding of racial inequity and social justice in response to varying ecological demands (e.g., neighborhood, perceived safety; Juang et al., 2018). Future research should extend data collection to these other groups and further disentangle nuances in Chinese American parents' ethnic-racial socialization messages and perceptions of racial discrimination. Additional insights are also needed as to how adolescents' interpersonal and broader contextual factors (e.g., neighborhood, school) function to mitigate or exacerbate the negative impact of racial discrimination. Contextual factors such as poverty, socioeconomic status, social position, and neighborhood racial composition reflect macrosystem forces (e.g., historical legacies, current structures of oppression) that trickle down to the exosystem level, creating potential adverse environments for minoritized members (Xu et al., 2020). Finally, parents may be unaware of the extent of discrimination that their adolescents experience. Future studies should consider conducting interviews with adolescents and exploring potential discrepancies between parent and child viewpoints.

Implications

Educators and mental health professionals who work in school settings should be aware of the racial discrimination and stress many Asian American students and their families suffered during COVID-19 and provide mental health services for those negatively impacted. School staff should self-reflect on their biases and stereotypes towards Asian American students and seek opportunities to better understand these youths' educational experiences and support the development of positive ethnic-racial identities. For example, teachers must be prepared to go beyond superficial celebrations of diversity with multicultural lesson plans that meaningfully promote equity. Schools need to strengthen anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies and

practices and reiterate that xenophobia and racial discrimination are against schools' values (Sawchuk & Gewertz, 2021). Such steps will foster a positive school climate and reduce racial bullying and discrimination rates.

School staff should also actively engage in micro-interventions and have the difficult conversations needed to dismantle racism and bias (Sue et al., 2021). Sadly, many educational systems are unprepared to center the voice of students of color and implement culturally-responsive pedagogy and intervention. Collaborating with families and incorporating parents' voices in educational decision-making can be mutually beneficial. School-family-community partnerships are associated with positive child development and learning (e.g., Makori et al., 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). When having racial dialogues or discussions about racism, it is also essential to contextualize any given event in light of systemic and historical factors and couple the discussion with empowering messages for youth. Additionally, integrating activities that foster youth agency, proactive coping, and activism can bring immediate and positive changes in schools and communities impacted (Suyemoto et al., 2015). When working with parents who are hesitant about racial dialogues at school, teachers and school administrations must first earn parents' trust and demonstrate that such discussions in school settings are safe and beneficial for Asian American youth and the community. Lastly, while the present data were collected at the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of xenophobia and racism stay relevant in adolescents' lives and school adjustment beyond the pandemic. Therefore, the implications and practical recommendations for schools in addressing anti-Asian racism and other forms of oppression may continue to inform ways to promote culturally responsive school intervention practices and policies toward equity and social justice.

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Table 1.*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Variable	Frequency (%) or <i>M (SD)</i>
Age	
Mother (<i>n</i> = 38)	47.41 (4.41) [age range: 39-59]
Father (<i>n</i> = 9)	53.11 (6.49) [age range: 42-63]
Immigrant Generational Status	
First Generation	44 (94%)
Second Generation	3 (6%)
U.S. Residence (first-generation only)	18 years (7.51) [range: 1.92 – 32 years]
Marital Status	
Married or Remarried	44 (94%)
Divorced	2 (4%)
Single	1 (2%)
Educational Background	
Some College / Specialized Training	Mother: 1 (2%)
Bachelor's Degree	Mothers: 8 (17%) Fathers: 2 (4%)
Graduate Degree	Mothers: 29 (62%) Fathers: 7 (15%)
Socioeconomic Status	
Unreported	1 (2%)
Low SES	1 (2%)
Middle to Upper-Middle SES	4 (9%)
High SES	41 (87%)

Residential State

Northeast (e.g., NY)	31 (66%)
West (e.g., CA)	6 (13%)
Midwest (e.g., MI)	6 (13%)
Southeast (e.g., FL)	3 (6%)
South (e.g., TX)	1 (2%)

Table 2.*Parents' Concerns and Reasons for Prevalence of Race-Related Bullying and Discrimination*

Coding Themes and Subthemes	Total Frequency (%)
Parents' Concerns and Messages Around Child's Race-Related Bullying and Discrimination	
Concerned for child being targeted	24 (51%)
Not concerned for child's race-related bullying and discrimination	27 (57%)
Not recognizing bullying and discrimination as race-related	4 (9%)
Perceived Reasons for Race-Related Bullying and Discrimination	
Media coverage	14 (30%)
Political climate	14 (30%)
Personal characteristics	18 (38%)
Stereotypes towards Asian students (e.g., model minority, bamboo ceiling, perpetual foreigner)	8 (17%)
Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences (e.g., food and cultural customs)	10 (21%)
School characteristics (e.g., few Asians in school)	4 (9%)
Protective Factors for Race-Related Bullying and Discrimination	
School characteristics	31 (66%)
Social distancing and lack of contact with other	19 (40%)
Peer friendships	15 (32%)
Neighborhood characteristics (e.g., high diversity)	11 (23%)

Note. Frequencies were out of 47 parents. Responses were only included if 15% or more of participants mentioned a particular theme. School characteristics included high Asian student population, school climate promoting inclusion and diversity, and quality of school district/teachers.