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Parents' Perspectives Regarding Anti-Asian Racism during COVID-19: Supporting Elementary  
Students at School

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### Abstract

A surge of racism and xenophobia towards Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to high levels of stress within this community. We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 40 Chinese American parents (35 mothers,  $M_{age} = 40.86$ ;  $SD = 5.59$ ) with elementary school-aged children ( $M_{age} = 8.76$ ;  $SD = 2.17$ ) to understand parents' perception of their children's experiences with discrimination and how schools can support Asian American students. Interviews were coded using thematic analyses. The majority of parents ( $n = 28$ , 70%) expressed concerns about racial discrimination for their children. However, 28 (70%) parents did not have any specific discussions about racism and discrimination with their children partially because parents felt that the topic of race/racial discrimination was too complex for children to understand. Some parents (22.5%) were also worried that too much discussion about race and discrimination would trigger more discrimination. We identified parents' beliefs about potential risk and protective factors for racial bullying and discrimination. Parents also generated strategies regarding how schools can help prevent racial discrimination for Asian American students. These strategies set the foundation for collaborative efforts and solutions to prevent bullying and mitigate the harm caused by the historically-based marginalization of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 and beyond.

*Keywords:* racial discrimination, bullying, Asian American families, COVID-19

### Impact Statement

This is one of the first qualitative studies to understand Chinese American parents' perception of their children's experiences with racial discrimination during COVID-19. Based on the thematic analysis of 40 interviews, we identified parents' beliefs about potential risk and protective factors for racial discrimination and how schools can help prevent bullying and discrimination for Asian

American elementary students. These parent- generated strategies can set the foundation for collaborative efforts to prevent bullying and mitigate the harm caused by the historically-based marginalization of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

### **Parents' Perspectives Regarding Anti-Asian Racism during COVID-19: Supporting Elementary Students at School**

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2021a). Similar to other racially minoritized groups in the U.S., Asian American youth encounter high levels of racial discrimination (Atwal & Wang, 2019; Li & Li, 2016; Li et al., 2016), which is associated with mental health difficulties (Atwal & Wang, 2019; Noh et al., 2007). Yet, due to the “model minority myth,” which assumes that all Asian American students are high achieving or well-adjusted and have successfully overcome racism, experiences of racial discrimination and their negative consequences among Asian Americans are often dismissed and neglected (Sue et al., 2007; 2016). While the COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting all students in the U.S., Asian American youth and parents additionally must endure racism and xenophobia ranging across name-calling (“Chinese virus”), social exclusion, and physical assault/violence. A recent report from Pew Research Center (2021b) using a national, random sampling of residential addresses found that 81% Asian Americans adults felt violence against them in the U.S. has been increasing during COVID-19, and 32% said they feared “someone might threaten or physically attack them” in April 2021. Similarly, AAPI Data|Momentive poll from March 2022 showed that 38% of AAPI reported being a victim of a hate crime, and 83% of the Asian American participants expressed that they are worried about a future increase in hate crimes against their community, which was a rate higher than Hispanics (74%), Native American/American Indians (65%), and whites (59%), but similar to Blacks (82%) (Rodriguez, 2022). In addition, a Pew Research Center survey in June 2020 showed that similar number of Black (38%) and Asian Americans (39%) said people acted as if they were uncomfortable around them (Rui et al., 2020). One study among Asian American young adults (18-30 years old)



between April 30 and June 11 2020 showed that 68% of the participants reported that either they or their family members had experienced either covert or overt racism (e.g., verbal/physical assault) during the pandemic (Hahm et al., 2021). In addition, racism predicted increased PTSD symptoms after controlling for lifetime discrimination and pre-existing mental health diagnoses (Hahm et al., 2021).

However, we only found one study that examined discrimination among Asian American youth during COVID-19. Cheah and colleagues (2020) found that 31.7% of the Chinese American parents ( $n=543$ ) and 45.7% ( $n=230$ ) of the youth reported experiencing at least one incident of online racial discrimination, and 50.9% of the parents and 50.2% of the youth reported experiencing at least one incident of racial discrimination in person between March and May 2020. Discrimination predicted more depression and anxiety for both parents and youth (Cheah et al., 2020). Relatedly, Park and colleagues (2021) found that 82.7% of Korean American mothers ( $n=339$ ) experienced racial discrimination between May and June 2020, and discrimination predicted more psychological distress for parents, especially mothers.

In summary, many Asian American youth and parents experienced high levels of racism during the COVID-19, which was related to increased internalizing problems and high levels of stress for Asian American families (e.g., Cheah et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020), including fears regarding their children returning to school (Cheah et al., 2021). This qualitative study extends on prior quantitative studies to further explore parents' perspectives of children's experiences with racial discrimination and bullying, parents' socialization around COVID-19 racism, and parents' perception of what schools can do to prevent discrimination and support Chinese American students during these difficult times.

### **Theoretical Framework and Historical Background**

The present study is guided by the recent conceptual model of Navigating Marginalization as Asian Americans (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021) as well as the Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit). The Navigating Marginalization as Asian Americans theory is influenced by self and identity (Erickson, 1968, as cited in Mistry & Kiyama, 2021), person-society integration (Syed & McClean, 2016), and critical race theory perspectives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It suggests that Asian Americans' development is influenced by three core components: salient features of physical and social environments (e.g., social stratification by race/ethnicity), master narratives/culturally shared stories rooted in history (e.g., "model minority", perpetual foreigner), and the developmental process (dynamic interaction between individual and context) to understand and negotiate marginalized identity (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021, p. 585).

As a minoritized group, Asian Americans have experienced racial oppression and marginalization just like other people of color. This oppression resulted in racial hierarchy (with white people on the top and non-whites beneath) and racial stratification that permeate the U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). History can help us understand how racial oppression and stratification impact Asian American/Chinese American children and families. For example, the first recorded Chinese immigration was in 1785, and the first wave of Asian immigrants to the U.S. came in the mid-1880s for better financial prospects (Lee, 2016). While the initial immigrants were welcomed by the farming industry partially due to labor shortage, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-twentieth century, individuals from East Asia have faced systematic racism and oppression. They have been portrayed by American media as an existential danger to the Western world, the "Yellow Peril", "unassimilable heathens" and as "cruel, disloyal and enemy aliens" (Hurh & Kim, 1989, p. 515-516). In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by the U.S. Congress, which prohibited Chinese individuals from migrating to the U.S. Since

then, there have been many acts of exclusion and discrimination against Asian Americans, with one of the most egregious being the internment of Japanese Americans in 1942. Another example is the brutal killing of Vincent Chin in 1982, which led to an outcry for stronger federal hate crime legislation. Similarly, South Asians have experienced racialized violence and discrimination since first arriving in the U.S. in the 1700s. After the 9/11 attacks, many South Asians were targeted by hate and violence (i.e., racial profiling, policing, surveillance, detention, deportation) (Misra et al., 2022). During COVID-19, Chinese Americans are being blamed for the spread of the virus, with former president calling it “Chinese virus” that invoked widespread fear and distrust towards Chinese Americans. However, the racialization of disease is not new in the U.S. “In times of crisis and fear, the instinct throughout history has been to find someone to blame” especially those minoritized groups who are at the lower end of the social hierarchy and have a difficult time defending themselves (Beers et al., 2021, p.2).

Although history clearly demonstrates how racial oppression and stratification impact Asian Americans, Asian American history is invisible in American textbook and public school curricula as scholars in the AsianCrit Framework, a subbranch of Critical Race Theory, pointed out. Stories of Asian Americans, such as Chinese American’s contribution in building the intercontinental railroad, Filipino farmworker activism, and early Asian American coalition and activists such as Yuri Kochiyama are rarely discussed in American history (An, 2016). This invisibility and purposeful removal of Asian Americans from the U.S. history and dialogues prevent Asian Americans to share common experiences of racism within Asian American communities and with other communities of color, and continue to reinforce racism and racial disparities in the U.S. (An, 2016; Museus, 2013).

In addition, Asian Americans are influenced by two pervasive master narratives: Model minority and perpetual foreigner. “Model minority” is a stereotype assuming that all Asian American students are high achieving or well-adjusted and attributes Asian American’s success to family values (e.g., education), work ethnics, discipline, and delayed gratification (Zhou & Lee, 2017). It was introduced by U.S. News and World Report and The New York Times Magazine in 1966 to create a wedge against other minoritized groups, especially Black Americans in order to simultaneously keep both groups quiet (Sue et al., 2007). While the narrative may sound positive on the surface, it arguably “demotes Asian Americans to second-class citizenship, which hinges on the approval of Whites” (Lee et al., 2017, p.492). It also holds Asian Americans to a higher standards, which may result in a “bamboo ceiling”, an invisible barrier for mobility (Zhou & Lee, 2017). Furthermore, it also ignores the heterogeneity within the Asian community and renders Asian American students who are struggling as “irrelevant and unworthy of attention” (Yip et al., 2020). Influenced by the “model minority” stereotype, educators may also wrongly assume that Asian students are doing fine and overlook students’ academic (Hui-Michael & Garcia, 2009) and mental health struggles (Guo et al., 2014).

In addition, Asian Americans are often perceived as the perpetual foreigners, a radicalized form of nativist xenophobia where Asian Americans are permanently seen as the “other” in American society despite their U.S. citizenship (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). This narrative “illustrates the position of Asian Americans as a racialized minority in the context of the racial hierarchy of U.S. society” (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021, p. 587). For example, research showed that being perceived as a foreigner predicted more peer victimization and mental health difficulties among Sikh American adolescents (Atwal & Wang, 2018). Together, these long-standing narratives and xenophobic sentiments, along with anti-Chinese political rhetoric were

thought to fuel anti-Chinese and anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gover et al., 2020).

AsianCrit theory provides counter-narrative to the “docile and complacent model minority” and highlights that Asian Americans have been a part of the collective struggle toward the social equity in the U.S. (Museus, 2013). Moreover, AsianCrit extends the critical race theory by proposing that anti-Asian racism must be understood in the context of both national and transnational histories and relations, such as the U. S. imperialism and involvement in international wars (e.g., Vietnam war), and global economies (David & Nadal, 2013). AsianCrit scholars suggests that it is important to include Asian American history in the curriculum (An, 2016), promote cross-racial solidarity and advocacy (Kokka & Chao, 2020), as well as to explore how Asian American communities and families engage in active socialization.

Chinese American youth develop an understanding of marginalization and learn to navigate marginalization as ethnic minoritized individuals in the “context of physical and social settings that are interpreted through prevalent meaning-making master narratives” (Mistry & Kiyama, p. 588). Parents are often important socialization agents who can process master narratives (e.g., “model minority”) and counter-narratives (racial reckoning and Asian Americans as contributing members of the U.S. society) with youth. However, immigrants parents who grew up in China, a racially homogenous society may often lack knowledge of Asian American history and may themselves undergo a re-examination of their own ethnic-racial identity in the face of discriminatory encounters (Fries-Britt et al., 2014), such as the COVID-19 public health crisis and racial reckoning. This qualitative study seeks to explore how Asian American parents and youth experience discrimination and how parents help youth to navigate marginalization (e.g., racism) during COVID-19.

**Racial Bullying, Discrimination, and Parents' Racial-Ethnic Socialization**

The Center for Disease Control defined bullying “as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated” (Gladden et al., 2014). Students may experience bullying for different reasons. Specifically, we focus on racial bullying, or bullying and discrimination because of one’s race and/or ethnicity in the current study. Bullying due to one’s race or religion among students is prevalent in the U.S. For example, in a nationally representative sample of 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders, Nansel and colleagues (2001) found that 10.6% of students reported they were “belittled about race or religion” at least once or twice in that term. Some studies established that Asian American adolescents experience higher levels of racial discrimination (Cooc & Gee, 2014; Way et al., 2008) than adolescents of other ethnic backgrounds. Bullying among Asian American youth often overlaps with racial discrimination, as Asian American students were often bullied for reasons related to their race, including their skin color, cultural customs, clothes, language, and immigration generation status (Li & Li, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Qin et al., 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Asian American students reported consistently higher level of distress from discrimination than non-Asian students (Fisher et al., 2000).

Racial-ethnic socialization is defined as parents’ transmission of messages about race to their children, including cultural socialization (i.e., teachings about culture, history, and heritage), preparing for bias, promotion of mistrust (i.e., negative messages about other races), and maybe minimization of race (e.g., avoidance of discussions about race; Atkin et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2008). Research suggests that how parents talk to their children about race can also predict adjustment outcomes when children face racial bullying and discrimination. For example, Atkin and colleagues (2019) found that parents’ cultural socialization messages

buffered the relation between such discrimination and psychological distress among Asian Americans adolescents.

One qualitative study of 34 second-generation Asian American parents with elementary school children found that parents talked about how to deal with discrimination with their children in a variety of different ways depending on contextual factors (e.g., neighborhood diversity). While some parents took a reactive approach, some parents took proactive steps by sharing their own interpersonal experiences and perspectives of racism and systemic racism (Juang et al., 2018). Surprisingly, a recent quantitative study (Ren et al., in press) showed that Chinese American parents infrequently talked to their elementary school-aged children about COVID-19 discrimination between March and May 2020 (mean score < 2 on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). Considering the low rates of discussion of discrimination in the quantitative study, this qualitative study seeks to further explore how Chinese American parents talk to their elementary school-aged children about racial discrimination in the context of heightened anti-Asian sentiment during pandemic.

### **Parents' Conceptualizations of the School's Role in Addressing Racial Discrimination**

Education research has shown the benefits of incorporating parents' voices in educational decision-making. For example, research found that bullying prevention programs were more effective when parents were involved (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). However, there is very limited research focused on examining parents' views of how schools can address discrimination. One recent article (Makori et al., 2020) found that between April and June 2020, 63% of all parents of color were worried that their children would be impacted by racist comments or actions from other students, and 49% were worried about their children being affected by racist comments or actions from the school staff. Parents made several suggestions to improve racial equity in

schools, such as increasing diversity of school staff, introducing culturally inclusive curriculum, requiring cultural awareness and implicit racial bias training for school staff, and providing trauma-informed care. Other recommendations included encouraging more students of color to take advanced placement courses, investing more in historically underperforming schools in communities of color, and replacing suspensions with alternative disciplinary programs.

### **The Current Study**

In this qualitative study, we sought to understand parents' perceptions of Chinese American young children's experiences with racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic and how parents talk to children about discrimination. Our study extended prior studies by eliciting Chinese American parents' voices and suggestions on what schools can do to prevent racial discrimination against Chinese American students during the pandemic.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 40 Chinese American parents (35 mothers and five fathers,  $M_{age} = 40.86$ ;  $SD = 5.59$ ) with a child between the ages of 5-11 years old ( $M_{age} = 8.76$ ;  $SD = 2.17$ ). All participants were married, and their spouses were also ethnically Chinese. Most ( $n = 31$ ) participants migrated to the U. S. from Mainland China as adults at 20 years of age or older except for nine parents – two who came as children (1.5 generation) and seven who were born in the U.S. (2<sup>nd</sup> generation). The first-generation participants had resided in the U.S. for an average of 12.6 years ( $SD = 7.7$  years). Participants were predominantly middle-class and highly educated. Among the mothers, 19 had graduate degrees, nine had Bachelor's degrees, four had some university training, two held high school diplomas, and only one mother had at/below a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. Of the fathers, four held graduate degrees, and one had a Bachelor's degree.



The majority of participants ( $n = 31$ ) came from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S.. Four participants came from the South, three from the Mid-West, and one participant each from the West and Southwest regions.

In this study, we focused on Chinese American parents because the virus was initially identified in Wuhan, China, and Chinese Americans are the largest ethnic group that report experiencing hate during COVID-19. In addition, we have limited funding to recruit a sample of ethnically diverse Asian Americans (non-Chinese Americans). However, other Asian American subgroups have also reported experiencing high levels of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jeung et al., 2021). Future studies should examine the experiences of other Asian groups (e.g., South Asians, South East Asians) separately.

## **Procedures**

The present study is part of a larger study on Chinese American families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative sample comprised families who were selected from a larger quantitative study of 543 Chinese American parents recruited through phone calls and distribution of study flyers via e-mail to communities, religious groups, and via social media (Facebook and WeChat) across the United States. The institutional review board at [Blinded] approved the research protocol. Interested parents were invited to share their experiences in a 60-75-minute semi-structured qualitative interview over the phone with bilingual graduate research assistants between April and May 2020. The current study comprised of elementary school children in the larger qualitative study sample, and focused on two topics: children's experiences with discrimination/bullying, impact, parents' socialization, and school recommendations for supporting Asian American children after school re-openings. Parents had the choice between conducting the interview in English ( $n = 11$ ) or Mandarin Chinese ( $n = 29$ ). All semi-structured

interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim in English and/or Chinese with identifiers removed. All names presented here are pseudonyms.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcripts were coded in the original language of the interview by English speaker and/or bilingual Mandarin and English speakers using the qualitative/mixed method cross-platform application, Dedoose (version 8.3.35). The coding team consisted of two Ph.D. level researchers who have had previous experience conducting qualitative studies with Asian/Chinese Americans and three graduate students in psychology or social work. All five coders have received formal training in qualitative research methods through their graduate coursework. Four of the five coders identified as Chinese Americans and could relate to the language and culture of the participants.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods. Thematic analysis is a flexible analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps of thematic analysis includes 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). Unlike content analysis, the “keyness” of themes is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures in a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, in the current study, if multiple participants shared similar ideas, experiences, and/or understanding we included frequencies of responses as a way to show how prevalent the pattern was. To ensure trustworthiness of our thematic analysis, we integrated recommendations from Nowell and colleagues' (2017) report (described further below).

First, to gain familiarity with the data, the coding team individually reviewed 20% ( $n = 8$ ) of the transcripts to ensure thorough comprehension. At this stage, each of the five coders conducted a line-by-line analysis and assigned preliminary codes/headings to describe the content of these eight transcripts. The team attempted to triangulate via data sources by selecting transcripts that reflected participants from different geographic locations and backgrounds (such as generation status, Shenton, 2004). This number was chosen as previous studies have found that the majority of themes and new ideas are identified within the first five to six interviews (Guest et al., 2020). The coding team met bi-weekly to compare and review individual memos from their review and a shared initial coding framework was created through discussion. When the coders encountered disagreement at these initial coding meetings, for example, in the application of label, the team negotiated toward consensus through meaningful discussions (Zade et al., 2018). The team used both a structural (i.e., emerging from a specific project's goals and questions) and data-driven (i.e., originating from the raw data) approach to developing codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). The overall framework captured several main categories based loosely on the structure of the interview: children's experiences of bullying/discrimination, parental concerns, protective and risk factors for bullying/discrimination, parental strategies in response to bullying/discrimination, and what schools can do to support Asian American children during COVID-19. Through an iterative process of discussion and refinement, a set of codes for each category was agreed upon. For example, under the category "Parental Strategies in Response to Bullying/Discrimination," sample codes included: "Encourage child to tell teacher(s)," "Encourage child to stand up for himself," and "Encourage child to ignore/walk away from bully." The codebook included three components: code name(s), full definition, and exemplars (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

Next, the coders independently coded five additional separate transcripts. The team continued to meet regularly to discuss code applications (e.g., examples and non-examples), disagreements, and areas where code refinement (e.g., merging or splitting codes) is necessary. Trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement with the data, documentation of reflective thoughts, potential codes/themes, and meeting outcomes (Nowell et al., 2017). Discrepancies were resolved through discussions among the coding team. Trustworthiness during the code development stage was achieved through the use of a coding framework, keeping an audit trail of code generation, and researcher triangulation (Nowell et al., 2017). To test inter-rater agreement, a code-application test was created using a random sample of 20% of the codes. The average kappa coefficient was .82 indicating strong agreement (McHugh, 2012). Prior to generating a report, the team defined and named themes (see results). Themes and subthemes were developed through consensus and vetted by coding team members. Additionally, the team tested for referential adequacy by returning to the raw data in Dedoose (Nowell et al., 2017). Quotes were selected to reflect strong patterns in the data; to the extent possible, quote selection varied across participant gender, generational status, child gender, etc. (Lingard, 2019).

## **Results**

We will summarize themes related to children's experience with discrimination, parents' concerns about discrimination, how parents talk to children about discrimination, risk and protective factors for discrimination, and what schools can do to support Asian American students.

### **COVID-19 Race-Related Bullying/Discrimination in Young Chinese American Children**

Twelve out of 40 participants revealed that their children experienced racial bullying directly as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, with verbal taunts being the most pervasive, such

as, “Hey, you’re Chinese, so you’re the Chinese virus” or “they laugh at my daughter and Chinese people for eating anything.... bats, crabs,” prior to the school closures in February and early March 2020. Additionally, Chinese American elementary school students were subject to microaggressions related to their recent travels. Although physical bullying was less common, three interviewees did recount such events, such as being tripped by a peer after verbal bullying.

Over half of participants ( $n = 22$ ) said that their children had never experienced any instance of race-related bullying or discrimination during COVID-19. These participants noted that social distancing measures and quarantine protected their children from racism and discrimination during the coronavirus outbreak. Sunny, a first-generation immigrant mother of a seven-year-old girl explained one protective benefit of online learning, “it’s uh the classroom, and everything is recorded so nobody dares to say anything.”

For families whose children did experience race-related bullying or discrimination, parents were asked to describe what strategies they used to support the children. For those who did not, parents were asked to share the strategies they would hypothetically use if the bullying and discrimination arose. Parents taught or would hypothetically teach children multiple strategies to address possible instances of COVID-19 race-related bullying and discrimination (Table 1a). Some encouraged their children to speak up and educate their peers about China’s role in the outbreak. For example, Yifan, a first-generation immigrant mother, told her eight-year-old daughter, “So you need to tell them that this virus was first discovered in China. But it is not a Chinese virus.” Yet other parents taught their child to ignore hurtful remarks (“Chinese people eating anything.... bats, crabs,”) or laugh along (“It’s just a joke”). Other strategies that parents divulged included encouraging the child to reach out to trusted school staff ( $n = 16$ ) or parents directly contacting school staff or administration ( $n = 13$ ). For example, Bi Yin, a first-

generation immigrant mother, reassured her ten-year-old daughter that the school and parents would work together to solve any issues. This mother carefully explained to her child the steps for filing a report and how the school principal must notify families of the results of a bullying investigation within three days. Parents felt knowing that an established process existed would be reassuring for the child.

At home, parents also saw their role as significant for preventing and responding to possible COVID-19 race-related bullying/discrimination. In addition to encouraging their children to report any relevant incidents to parents ( $n = 13$ ), a quarter of the participants also expressed closely monitoring their children for changes in behaviors and having regular discussions with their children. Additionally, parents discussed teaching their children specific skills to respond to bullying, including ignoring or walking away from the aggressor ( $n = 11$ ) and being assertive and standing up for themselves ( $n = 15$ ). These types of responses were believed to be empowering and helpful, such that the bully would not get the satisfaction of provoking a response because they did not expect a victim to behave bravely and confidently. Some parents taught their children coping or emotional regulation strategies ( $n = 12$ ) to better manage any negative feelings associated with racial discrimination. One example came from Kevin, a second-generation Chinese American father of a five-year-old boy, who also discussed the use of a proactive preparation for bias strategy:

I'm just trying to prepare him for when these [hurtful] things are said so he's mentally aware as these things happen and it's all about how you, how you react to it. You can try to teach him to like, "Don't let it fester in you, don't let it, uh, distract you from what you're doing." ... I tell him that it's basically a lesson in life, that not everyone will like you. But keep continuing to do what you do and you'll be appreciated for it.

Lastly, a quarter of participants ( $n = 8$ ) mentioned using bullying/discrimination experiences to discuss ethnic-racial-cultural identity and instill ethnic pride. For example, Lisa, a

first-generation immigrant mother of a five-year-old boy, said, “I will also tell him, indeed you are Chinese and you are Chinese American. I will remind him of his identity and to be sure of himself.”

### **Heightened Parental Concerns about Bullying and Discrimination During COVID-19**

Most parents ( $n = 28$ ) expressed worrying about their children being victims of racial bullying and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These concerns were inextricably tied to larger societal concerns, particularly surrounding media coverage and politics under former President Donald Trump’s administration. A subset of parents ( $n = 8$ ) communicated concerns about racial divisions and anti-Chinese sentiment in American society. In one illustrative example, Shutong, a first-generation Chinese immigrant mother of a six-year-old boy, told the interviewer that she was concerned not only about her child being targeted specifically but also about the larger implications for Asian Americans in the U.S.:

Because of this pandemic, there has been anti-Chinese sentiment in our society and [child discrimination] may happen in the future. If this is the case, what I worry about is not only discrimination against my child, but something greater [at the societal level]. If these anti-Chinese sentiment gives rise to the rejection of all Chinese people, then he will definitely be affected more or less. If our entire society holds these attitudes, then it is a spark that will cause an explosion [of Anti-Chinese racist incidents].

Another mother, Xiaoli, a first-generation Chinese immigrant parent of a seven-year-old boy, recounted a recent report of a local Chinese man being attacked. This event heightened her concerns over her children’s safety and well-being:

We are concerned. We are definitely concerned about them [children]. We worry about them. We remind them since the newspaper, website, they talk about somewhere ... people for no reason [they] bully Chinese students. So as parents, we definitely remind them to be careful [when] going outside and be alert. Not going where too many people gather.

Several parents disclosed that in China and other Asian countries, wearing a mask to prevent the spread of disease (e.g., to avoid catching the virus (i.e., cold) from others) is a

courteous and common gesture. However, in the political climate during the early stages of COVID-19 (February to April, 2020), wearing a mask in public may make Asian American families easy targets for racial discrimination.

The pandemic has also forced some families to confront racism in communities that have been traditionally welcoming. Cindy, a second-generation Chinese American mother disclosed that she feared that her seven-year-old daughter would experience racism once schools re-opened because she experienced it personally:

I'm absolutely concerned because you know, I was surprised and sort of dumbfounded when people ran away from me, to be honest. And I think most people in, where we live, are very accepting, um, it's, it's very diverse. You know, economically, socially, racially... of course, religiously. But, I think it only takes one or two people who might think that, that could act a certain way, that's all.

### **Parental Messages about Race, Discrimination, and COVID-19**

While 28 (70%) parents were concerned about racial bullying/discrimination during the time of our interviews, most participants ( $n = 28$ , 70%) made some references about not having any discussions about racism and discrimination with their children. These parents also reported not yet preparing their child for possible racial discrimination that they might encounter in the context of the pandemic. Indeed, some parents were even concerned about over-emphasizing racial discrimination (see What Schools Can Do section below for a fuller discussion about this issue). Among these 28 parents, 10 parents specifically said that they chose not to have such discussions because they believed that their children were too young. For some parents, race is “too complicated for her to understand” (Yinuo, first-generation immigrant mother of a six-year-old son), they believe that this conversation would only make their child(ren) upset, worried, or feel inferior and helpless. Others avoided initiating race talks because they felt that it is not yet relevant or is potentially harmful. For example, a first-generation immigrant mother of an



eleven-year-old daughter is unsure about whether silence about race is the developmentally appropriate practice but also noted that,

You know, as a mother... you don't want to attribute every disappointment she has in life to racism... In general, I, I still want her to feel like she is living in a world that, where the system is fair, and where there is justice. I haven't figured out . . . what is the right way to help her navigate through that.

Relatedly, when talking about reasons for bullying before COVID-19, some parents did not recognize bullying as race related, but instead, attributed these experiences to other non-race related factors, such as the child's physical stature (e.g., body build or height;  $n = 8$ ) or school characteristics (e.g. few Asian American students at school;  $n = 12$ ). Not considering race as a reason for bullying may explain why parents did not feel the need to discuss race when the topic of bullying/discrimination came up.

Nonetheless, in light of increase discrimination during COVID-19, some parents began to contemplate whether preparation for bias messages might be necessary and helpful. One second-generation Chinese American parent, Amy, shared that during their family dinner, her eleven-year-old son nonchalantly mentioned that he was subject to an "Eww corona!" comment. Although her husband was less emotionally affected by the retelling of this incident, this verbal attack was eye opening to the mother. In response, she had a conversation with her son, in which she said,

I did tell him, like, we're going to get more scrutiny because we're Chinese. We're gonna be looked at more and, um, and he wasn't sure, like, my, my eight year old was like-was then starting to realize, "Oh, is that why people are, are, are asking if I'm Chinese or not?" And, and, so he's-he was saying that, too, and I was like "What?! They're asking you?" and so I was kind of like "Okay, what's going on?" and I think at the time, that was when the virus being called the Chinese Coronavirus or the Chinese virus, and, um, and that's when I was like "Okay, maybe we should talk to them about how to respond."

Sadly, several parents also viewed racial discrimination/bullying as an inevitable symptom of the extensive history of bigotry against Asian Americans. Seven participants

discussed historical reasons, such as systemic classism and racism in America as contributors to contemporary racial discrimination against Asian American youth. For example, Queena, a second-generation mother described the parallels between the poor treatment of Chinese Americans during the COVID-19 with anti-Japanese sentiment in the past. She explained,

With the context of COVID, it's almost like we're having another back in the eighties, when the U.S. was having this, like, economic trade war with, uh, Japan, right? Um, there was a lot of anti-Japanese sentiment. It was almost like a Cold War... I feel like COVID has brought another version of that. Um, because there was a lot of, you know, don't buy Japanese, the Japanese are causing us to lose all of our jobs.

Peter, a second-generation father with a nine-year-old daughter lamented about his own experiences of passed promotions due to his race or ethnicity. He described this unfair reality,

As Asian Americans you have to work extra hard to achieve some certain status. Uh where other folks just take it for granted, uh, even in the career environment, a lot of promotion might go to somebody else because, you know, because your color or because of race. So you do feel that, you know, you are part of a society, but sometimes you feel like you are not part of it because a lot of the times you will be excluded. I have experienced this in my career, you know, I missed a lot of promotions and I truly feel like because, it's because I'm Chinese. If they have a higher social status than you [or if they have familial connections] then, uh, it's hard to compete. Even though you work harder to get to where you are, but, um, I think social status, uh, it's hard to come by.

Finally, Haoyu, a first-generation Chinese American mother of a ten-year-old boy explained, "This kind of discrimination or estrangement will always exist. It always exists; it has always been there [in the U.S. history]. In fact, this kind of prejudice is always there."

### **Risk and Protective Factors for Racial Bullying and Discrimination**

Table 1b shows a parent-generated list of risk and protective factors for/against Asian American racial bullying/discrimination. Multiple participants discussed the media's coverage of the pandemic ( $n = 12$ ) and the anti-China political climate ( $n = 9$ ) as reasons for the increased targeting of Asian American children during COVID-19. Xiaowei, a first-generation Chinese immigrant mother of an 11-year-old boy said,

I think now, especially after Trump's Chinese virus comments, I am more worried that he will encounter discrimination. After the news [about anti-Asian racial incidents] came out, we felt we needed to prepare him based on these events. There was no [COVID-19] pandemic before, and when there was no pandemic, you would feel as if everything was fine. But now we encounter a more aggressive time and I feel that I need to discuss with him and understand his thoughts because his ideas [about race] are actually different from ours.

Ten parents discussed the role of family racial-ethnic socialization in perpetuating bigoted and hostile beliefs against Asian Americans. Previous research has found that children's intergroup perceptions, including racial prejudice, are at least partially attributable to family socialization through parents' implicit and explicit racial attitudes (Castelli et al., 2009). We found this perspective echoed in some of our participants' answers as in the case of Huiying, a first-generation immigrant mother with an eight-year-old son:

I think that if another child acts offensively or speaks in an offensive way [to my child], there must be something wrong within the family. So you can just talk to that child and say, "You can't, you can't do this." But I think that if you want to treat the root cause rather than symptoms, you have to talk to their parents.

Among the personal characteristics believed to predispose a child to bullying/discrimination, ethnic, racial, and cultural differences (Asian features, thoughts, behaviors, and hobbies) were most commonly mentioned ( $n = 13$ ). Participants indicated that certain school characteristics buffer children against the bullying and discrimination of Asian American children. Fourteen parents believed that high-quality school districts and competent teachers sheltered children from bullying and discrimination while eight participants highlighted the value of a positive school climate that promotes inclusion and diversity (e.g., inviting students to share about their unique cultures, celebrate diversity, and emphasize "everyone must be treated the equally and fairly.")

Thirteen parents specified that Asian American children are less susceptible to racial victimization when they attend schools with a diverse student population (e.g., with many Asian

Americans). Other protective factors for racial bullying/discrimination included having peers who will provide support and protection ( $n = 9$ ) and diversity in the neighborhood (e.g., diverse neighborhood, more Asian students in the neighborhood,  $n = 15$ ). Finally, eight parents cited developmental reasons (e.g., young age, naiveté) as protective factors. These parents did not foresee their children experiencing race-related discrimination until middle school or even high school because “kids in elementary school are still relatively nice.”

### **What Schools Can Do**

Participants were specifically asked to share what they believed that schools could do to help Asian American children with regard to racial bullying/racial discrimination (see Table 2). Seven interconnected themes emerged, and thus some of them were presented together below.

#### ***Taking a Proactive Approach Against COVID-19 Race-Related Discrimination and Establishing Clear Rules and Consequences for Bullying and Discrimination***

Fourteen parents wanted schools to take a preventative or proactive approach to combatting COVID-19 related anti-Asian racism and discrimination within the school community. This effort could be accomplished in multiple ways. As Tina, a second-generation Chinese immigrant mother of an eleven-year-old boy said,

My hope is that, um, schools will prepare ahead of time and know that this [racial discrimination] is going happen, and that they will have some curriculum, or intervention system to talk about any kind of bigotry in general.

Another parent, Yinuo, a first-generation Chinese immigrant mother of a six-year-old boy added, “I think if bullying or discrimination happens once or twice, whether it’s discrimination against Chinese or discrimination against other races, I think their school should take those individual cases and summarize [take-home lessons and school’s bullying policies for

the school community]; that they should take corresponding measures to prevent this kind of thing from happening again.”

Additionally, twelve participants reiterated the importance of establishing clear behavioral expectations against racial bullying and discrimination and implementing firm consequences for behaviors. Schools can take the initiative to host a meeting and/or send out a school statement to the community repeating their stance against all forms of prejudice, discrimination, and bullying. Schools must also follow through with consequences when there is a breach of these rules. To this point, Haoyu, a first-generation Chinese American mother of a ten-year-old boy stressed the necessity of demonstrating seriousness through language and action:

You need to show your concern about [bullying/discrimination] in your actions. In terms of language, you say it [repeatedly] in the meeting. Think of normal school meetings. When teachers hold meetings, what do teachers say in the classroom? Can you follow through completely? You forget it. [You can remember] only through repeated emphasis, from some specific cases. Let all students see how you deal with this issue. Look, this case is [discrimination], you can't do this [at school]. It only works if you emphasize it over and over... If one case [of discrimination] happens, it may be a good opportunity [to educate all the students]. If a new case happens, the principal could send a letter to all parents to say “Look, this is how we deal with it. We hope people would treat others equally.” This may be a better way to let parents understand the circumstances.

### ***Promoting Scientific Understanding about COVID-19 in Schools***

Misinformation about the COVID-19 virus has contributed to the discrimination against Asian Americans (Gover et al., 2020). Eleven participants shared that school personnel can mitigate the spread of racism and xenophobia by educating students with scientific facts. For example, during the beginning of the pandemic, wearing a mask in public as an Asian American may draw unwanted attention and attacks because the general public in the U.S. were not advised to wear a mask to prevent the spread of the virus. Xiumei, a first-generation immigrant mother of an eight-year-old girl, said that, “Teachers can tell everyone what the nature of the virus is, and

they can also tell them about the cultural differences between countries including the differences in wearing masks; let's explain this clearly to children." While some media sources and politicians have named COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus," many participants felt that schools should directly combat false information and reject the blaming of Chinese Americans for COVID-19. Jennifer, a first-generation immigrant mother of an 11-year-old girl thought that schools should not reinforce political propaganda but instead focus on scientifically supported information regarding the COVID-19 virus, for example, "How, what is this virus like? How are people infected and how are they treated [medically]?" In the classroom, teachers need to avoid inflammatory language regarding COVID (e.g., "Chinese plague," "Wuhan virus") and stop rumors that blame Chinese people for the virus (e.g., "COVID was developed in a lab in China"). Teachers can be upfront about where the virus was discovered while at the same time fostering empathy. Peter, a second-generation Chinese American father of a nine-year-old girl, suggested:

I think the school can do a lot. Education is the key. Let everyone know . . . no human wants to cause this. It just happens. We have to deal with it together.

Relatedly, Sunny, a first-generation immigrant mother of a seven-year-old daughter, shared of a potential lesson plan that appeals to a common humanity and shared experience as human beings:

I think schools can make a chart, or make a timeline for all the outbreaks in China, outbreaks in U.S., how the different governments [are] treating it differently... How Chinese people in China deal with this pandemic, how Americans deal with this, so try to find the similarities, and this might be an activity I can do as a teacher.

### ***Increasing Outreach to Asian American Families***

Eleven participants shared the hope that schools would reach out to Asian American families and keep them in the loop of any new school developments (e.g., new policies or

initiatives directed towards combatting racial discrimination) and resources for parents during COVID-19. School personnel can express their support for the Asian American community as Feihong, a first-generation Chinese immigrant mother of a seven-year-old girl explained,

I think the school should still have some positive supports [for families], like some documents sent to parents, because I know that in Canada, a school principal sent letters to all children and parents of Chinese descent. Just say that this is an epidemic. It has nothing to do with the Chinese. This is just a virus and has nothing to do with [Chinese] people. I hope the school still has a clear stance because children will believe what they hear from the teacher.

Since parenting influences children's beliefs, schools can also encourage parents to be positive role models in the home:

Parents should be mindful of, of what they say at home. Parents should also be educated too, I guess. Some parents never really had diverse, uh, background [experiences], so they don't know, they don't know the, um, the strengths and values of diversity, so they [schools] should also, um encourage parents to model behavior that shows inclusion. – Kevin, a second-generation Chinese American father of a five-year-old boy

### ***Promoting School Climate that Fosters Diversity and Integrating Asian American History, Perspectives into School Curriculums***

Eight participants reported the need to integrate diversity in schools and a positive school climate that fosters multiculturalism and perspective taking as exemplified in this quote:

I think the biggest, the biggest enemy to prejudice is um inclusion especially in an activity or an experience where you have, um, diverse members, and you learn from one another towards a common goal. Um I think if schools can somehow find a school based project that promotes teamwork and collaboration amongst different, uh, and diverse students, it helps build that trust, that um helps build that camaraderie amongst [students] so I would hope that schools don't drop the ball on that. –Kevin, second-generation Chinese American father of a five-year-old boy

Additionally, six individuals highlighted the need to incorporate Asian American perspectives including Asian American history, culture, and language into their curriculum from an early age. Feihong, a first-generation immigrant mother of a seven-year-old girl hoped that schools would adopt Mandarin as a second language much as they do with Spanish:

I know that almost all schools are learning Spanish now, and many schools are unable to get a Chinese learning program in the school. I think it is especially [true] in our community. Since there are many Chinese children [in our community in New York], I think this is very necessary. This not only allows children to learn Chinese, but also allows other children to come into contact with some Chinese culture, letting them know that Chinese culture is not as weird as some people are saying. After all, if you want to eliminate this barrier/misunderstanding, you still have to understand your respective cultures.

Linxiao, a first-generation immigrant mother with a seven-year-old son explained that Asian American perspectives are often neglected when it comes to discussions about diversity. She believed that this omission was not conducive to fostering positive intergroup relations and communication or wellbeing among Asian American children and youth:

There are kids talking about how they don't know anything about Asian American history. So that's something that really, I mean that is part of the identity that I feel they are really lacking. And so in American history a lot of times Asian Americans are not actually being included. They are just not mentioned except for building railroads and also the Chinese Exclusion Act. So they feel like okay so that's also part of the reason they feel like Asian Americans are really outsiders and also that sends a message to other students as well. So if there is a way for them to learn more about Asian Americans and embed it in the American history... um and that's taught not just to Asian American kids but to all the kids so high school history teachers definitely need to be, hopefully they're more knowledgeable about it and actually have curriculum in place talking about the roles of Asian Americans.... And sometimes the curriculum would say, "Okay [let's] talk about diversity. But then a lot of times when it's talking about diversity, Asian Americans are not included so that doesn't really help.

### ***Concerns about Over-Emphasizing Topics of Race or Discrimination during COVID-19***

One unexpected finding was that nine parents commented on wanting teachers and school administration to de-emphasize discussions regarding race or racial discrimination in relation to COVID-19 within school settings. These parents believed that such discourse may accentuate differences between Chinese American students and their peers, contribute to these youths' feelings of inferiority, or give classmates an excuse to exclude or discriminate against students with Chinese backgrounds. When asked about what schools can do to help Chinese



American students who face discrimination, Lucy, a first-generation immigrant mother of a seven-year-old girl explained,

I think these racial problems [related to COVID-19] should not be magnified. I think if you are deliberately magnifying these problems, I think it will evoke people's thoughts even more. If we talk about anti-discrimination or how to cope with discrimination before people start to discriminate against us, this may reinforce the problem, or increase the likelihood of other people discriminating against you.

Relatedly, as the COVID-19 response in the U.S. became politicized, three parents wanted schools to take an apolitical position when discussing topics related to COVID-19 (e.g., “I think the school’s first responsibility is that education should follow science, not political propaganda.” Jennifer, first-generation immigrant mother of a 11-year-old girl). These parents worried that highlighting certain discussions for example, where the virus was first identified (or speaking up against others calling it “China virus”) may increase Asian American students’ risk for discrimination. Parents’ desire for schools to remain politically neutral stemmed from their experiences of seeing anti-Chinese rhetoric flourish during the pandemic and COVID-19 preventive measures (e.g., wearing face covering) becoming politicized.

### **Discussion**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exert profound effects on children and families in the U.S. as new variant surges (e.g., Omicron) in 2022. Asian American families have experienced high levels of stress due to increased racism and violence targeting them. Many Asian Americans feared a physical attack or threat from others (Pew Research Center, 2021). Related to this fear, many Asian American parents kept their children at home even as many schools reopened in the U.S. in 2021 (Lonas, 2021). However, very few research focused on Asian American parents’ or youth’s experiences racism during COVID-19. This qualitative study expands prior quantitative reports to shed light on the struggles that Chinese American parents

and their elementary school children faced in the early stage of the pandemic, how parents supported children, and parents' suggestions and ideas for how schools could address anti-Asian racial discrimination.

Our data unpack the stories of Chinese American parents and children becoming aware of their marginalization through direct experience of racism, witness of racism towards other Asian Americans, and pervasive master narratives in the media (e.g., Asian Americans as carriers of virus and as foreigners). The majority (70%) of Chinese American parents voiced fears that their children would be the victims of racism and racially-based bullying. We found that 17.5% of the parents discussed that systemic racism in the U.S. as root causes of increased racism towards Asian Americans during COVID-19, while some considered negative media coverage and anti-China political climate as a risk factor for racism. This is consistent with the conceptual model of Navigating Marginalization as Asian Americans (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021), which suggests Asian Americans are influenced by the physical and social environment (e.g., social stratification of race) and master narratives (e.g., media coverage of "Chinese virus"). Parents in our sample viewed positive school climate as a protective factor for discrimination and wanted schools to integrate Asian American history and perspectives into school curriculums in order to address racism. As stated by AsianCrit theory, Asian American histories and Asian Americans' contributions are rarely discussed in American classrooms, further allowing the discriminative narratives of Asian American (such as perpetual foreigners and yellow peril) to dominate the conversations in the media and classrooms/schools (An, 2016). As a result, it is important for educators to acknowledge that systematic racism and prevalent, negative master narratives of Asian Americans had contributed to Asian American students' current experience with racism (both inside and outside of school) and parents' intense fear for their children's safety (e.g., 70%

parents mentioned this theme). It is important to teach Asian American history at school because Asian American history is a part of the American history. Currently, only three states (California, Illinois, New Jersey) require public schools to teach Asian American history. Such requirements are important because education is the first steps towards reducing racism.

Outside of classrooms, parents play an important role in countering the master narrative and develop counter-narratives for their Asian American children (e.g., racial reckoning and Asian Americans as contributing members of the diverse American). However, discussing issues around race, racial discrimination, and racism is a challenging task for many Chinese American parents (Young et al., 2020). Ren and colleagues (in press) also found that Chinese American parents talked to their children about awareness of COVID-19 discrimination infrequently in 2020. Our qualitative study helps to shed some light on why Chinese American parents do not talk to children about discrimination. Although most parents were concerned about racism (70%), the majority (70%) of Chinese American parents did not discuss racial discrimination or prepare children for discrimination even with the surge of racism. The reasons are complex. First of all, 10 out of 28 parents (35.7%) stated that they did not talk about racial discrimination with their child because they believed that their children were too young to understand it. However, research suggested that young children are aware of racial differences at a very young age (as early as nine months), but many adults underestimate children's ability to understand race (Sullivan et al., 2020).

Secondly, some parents ( $n=9$ ) were worried that emphasizing race or racial discrimination would highlight the difference between their child and the peers, contribute to feelings of inferiority and worry, and lead to more discrimination by non-Asian peers, all of which will result in more harm for their children. The hesitation is echoed by the inconsistent

findings in the literature about preparation of bias. A meta-analysis showed that parental preparation of bias was related to better interpersonal relationships, but also related to more youth internalizing symptoms (Wang et al., 2020). The mixed finding may be because preparation for bias has a curvilinear relationship with adjustment. For example, Seol and colleagues (2016) found that a moderate level of preparation for bias predicted positive school engagement among a Korean American adolescent whereas low level and high level of preparation for bias predicted negative school engagement. When parents do not discuss racism with their minoritized children, children are left unprepared for the racism they may encounter; however, too much discussion may leave children feeling overwhelmed or isolated (Soel et al., 2016). We suggest that when parents talk to children about racism and prepare them for bias, it is important to pair the discussion with empowerment for children and skills to combat racism (e.g., WITS strategies: **W**alk Away, **I**gnore, **T**alk It Out, **S**eek Help, American Psychological Association, Division 45, 2020) as well as to include hopeful messages (e.g., we will work together to prevent racism and bullying). Considering the master narratives of Asian Americans (e.g., perpetual foreigners), parents and teachers should discuss racism with Asian American students, and use such discussions as valuable opportunities to co-create positive counter-narratives with students (e.g., Asian Americans are integral part of American).

## **Implications**

Parents want schools to promote school climate that fosters diversity/multiculturalism. School psychologists can play a vital role in addressing racial discrimination and bullying and creating a positive school climate for Asian American students. It is important to educate students with accurate information about the virus, so that Asian students and families are not unfairly targeted or blamed for the virus (NASP, 2020). School psychologists can leverage their

position by collaborating with other educators and mental health professionals to incorporate social justice initiatives at school and implement evidence-based programs to reduce discrimination and promote positive school climate. School psychologists can also train school staff to appropriately respond to discrimination heightened by the COVID-19 (e.g., classmates saying to an Asian American student, “You have the China virus”) and support students through group counseling or support groups who witness violence towards Asian Americans.

As suggested by the parents, school leaders should take a proactive approach and send a clear statement to all families to remind the community about school’s values and behavioral expectations and conduct (e.g., respectful, responsible, safe), and to reiterate that xenophobia and racial discrimination (e.g., blaming Asian American peers for COVID) are against the schools’ values (Sawchuk & Gewerth, 2021). They should also reach out to Asian American students and families (e.g., after the Atlanta shooting) to listen to their concerns. When school leadership fail to address discrimination, they send a message that discrimination towards Asian Americans is acceptable, or at least tolerable. As a result, Asian American students may feel invisible and lose their trust in the school staff and system to keep them safe. Such feelings may prevent these students from seeking help at school, which can further contribute to their mental health difficulties. This also reinforces the belief some Chinese American parents in our study shared that racism is inevitable in the U.S.

School leaders and educators should also check their own biases and stereotypes towards Asian Americans and how they may unintentionally reinforce the master narratives about Asian Americans (e.g., “model minority” myth). Instead, educators should be aware of the negative impact of racial discrimination and microaggressions against Asian American students and how

the “model minority” myth can mask the challenges that the diverse Asian American community may be experiencing (Sue et al., 2021).

Some Chinese American parents expressed concern that too much emphasize on race and discrimination may backfire. Parents may be worried about their children would be treated negatively by peers and school staff if parents are perceived as being too sensitive or complaining too much. During data collection, there was relentless negative media coverage blaming Chinese for the spread of the virus, and increased attacks against Chinese/ Chinese American individuals. Parents in our sample may not want to draw attention to their children due to fear. They may have believed that if schools did not discuss racial discrimination, their children would be less likely to be exposed to negative master narratives and social stereotypes and less likely to stand out (as someone who is different) in the peer group. However, the truth is that many Asian American students do experience racism (Cheah et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important for schools to make specific efforts to reach out to Asian American families to invite their feedback and to co-construct a safe school climate. Schools should ensure that there are systems and structures in place for parents and students to report racial bullying or discrimination, and that there are clear consequences for engaging in racial bullying and discrimination (in addition to other forms of bullying) at school. By engaging parents in this process, schools can attempt to earn parents’ trust by letting them know that their voices matter.

Scholars have long argued that it is important to imbed discussions about bullying prevention in all subject areas in the classroom (language arts, social studies, art, music; Wang & Goldberg, 2017). Similar ideas need to be implemented for race-based bullying or discrimination. For example, as part of the language/literacy class, teachers can read children’s books featuring stories and themes regarding racial discrimination, appropriate for their

development level, followed by discussion about the book (e.g., different feelings of book characters, why blaming Asian American peers for COVID-19 is not acceptable, how to be a positive bystander/upstander when witnessing bullying/discrimination). Teachers should also incorporate common core standard for reading into such discussion by describing characters' feelings, recounting stories, determining the central message or morals. During music and art classes, teachers can incorporate music and art work from different cultures to celebrate diversity, or share songs created by Asian American adolescents about COVID-19. Lastly, as suggested by parents in our study, school psychologists should also advocate to include Asian American history in the curriculum, and observe Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month, which is celebrated each May. This recommendation has been heavily championed by educational researchers informed by Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), a branch of critical race theory, which touts the benefit of AsianCrit as a theoretical and methodological tool to read and disrupt racism embedded in the curriculum scripting of U.S. history (An, 2016).

### **Limitations**

Despite the significant contributions of the current study's findings, several limitations need to be noted. Most of the participants were mothers and highly educated. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to Chinese American father and/or families from lower educational backgrounds. We focused on Chinese Americans in this study because the virus was initially identified in Wuhan, China, and Chinese Americans are the largest ethnic group that report experiencing hate during COVID-19; however, other Asian American subgroups have also reported experiencing high levels of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jeung et al., 2021). Thus, the experiences of these groups need to be examined separately. Another limitation is that we only interviewed parents due to the younger age of the children.

Future studies should illicit children's ideas about their own experiences with racial discrimination.

Despite these limitations, the current study contributed significantly to our understanding of Chinese American parents' conceptualizations of their children's experiences with race-based bullying and discrimination, and parents' proactive and reactive socialization strategies in response to these experiences. We also identified parents' beliefs about potential risk and protective factors that might increase or decrease their children's risk for being targeted by anti-Asian hate during this pandemic. Finally, strategies for how schools can help prevent these negative experiences generated by Chinese American families themselves can set the foundation for collaborative efforts and solutions to mitigate the harm caused by the historically-based marginalization of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.



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Table 1a.

*Parental Response to Child Race-Related Bullying and Discrimination*

	Participants (%)
No discussion about race-related discrimination	28 (70%)
Encourage child to tell teacher(s)	16 (40%)
Encourage child to stand up for themselves	15 (38%)
Encourage child to tell parent(s)	13 (32.5%)
Parent directly contacts school	13 (32.5%)
Teach coping strategies	12 (30%)
Encourage child to ignore and walk away from bully	11 (27.5%)
Discussions about ethnic/racial identity and/or pride	10 (25%)
Parental monitoring	10 (25%)

Table 1b.

*Risk and Protective Factors For/Against Asian American Bullying/Discrimination*

	Participants (%)
<b>Risk Factors</b>	
Ethnic, racial, and cultural differences	13 (32.5%)
Media coverage	12 (30%)
School characteristics (e.g., lack of diversity in student body)	12 (30%)
Family socialization	10 (25%)
Political climate	9 (22.5%)
Physical stature (e.g., body build, height)	8 (20%)
Ethnic, racial, and cultural differences	13 (32.5%)
<b>Protective Factors</b>	
Social distancing as a protective factor	22 (55%)
Neighborhood characteristics	15 (37.5%)
Peer friendships and support	9 (22.5%)
Developmental factors	8 (20%)
<b>School characteristics</b>	
High quality teachers/school district	14 (35%)
High diverse student population	13 (32.5%)
School climate that promotes inclusion and diversity	8 (20%)

*Note.* Responses were only included if 20% or more of participants mentioned the theme. Total  $N = 40$ .

Table 2

*What Schools Can Do to Prevent Racial Discrimination*

	n (%)
Take proactive approach against COVID-19 race-related discrimination	14 (35%)
Establish clear rules and consequences for bullying/discrimination	12 (30%)
Promote scientific understanding about COVID-19 virus	11 (27.5%)
Increasing Outreach to Asian American Families	11 (27.5%)
Concerns about over-emphasizing topics of race/discrimination/COVID-19	9 (22.5%)
Promote school climate that fosters diversity/multiculturalism	8 (20%)
Integrate Asian American history, perspectives into school curriculums	6 (15%)

*Note.* Responses were only included if 15% or more of participants mentioned a particular theme. Total  $N = 40$ .