

Chapter 3

Racial Socialization and Multicultural Education of Asian Families in the United States

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dramatic surge in anti-Asian racism in the United States. Asians have been blamed for the pandemic. Multicultural education improves cross-cultural understanding and reduces discrimination. Parental racial socialization is an important facet of multicultural education as parents convey racial and ethnic messages to their children. Yet, little research has documented parental racial socialization in Asian families. To address this gap, the authors interviewed 19 Asians and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter shows that discrimination experiences start at an early age and have a lasting impact. Discrimination of Asians is related to the perpetual foreigner stereotype and the model minority myth. These impede how Asians understand their racial discrimination experiences and how families discuss race and ethnicity. All parents in the study expressed how critical parental racial socialization was during the COVID-19 pandemic and suggest that schools are essential to supporting multicultural education at home.

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INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, Asians and Asian Americans have been wrongly blamed for bringing the COVID-19 pandemic to the United States. One in four Americans, including nearly half of Asian Americans, have seen someone blame an Asian person for the pandemic (Page & Elbeshbishi, 2021). As a result, there has been a dramatic surge in anti-Asian racism in the United States. According to a Pew Research Center survey in March 2021, 70% of Americans reported that there was a lot of or some discrimination against Asian people, and 87% of Asians said that there was a lot of or some discrimination against them in America (Daniller, 2021). This rise in anti-Asian discrimination coincides with a climate of growing xenophobia in the United States. Asians and Asian Americans are treated as foreigners based on the way they look. Asian Americans continue to be treated as perpetual foreigners, regardless of their immigration and generation status. Based on their Asian ethnicity, Americans are told to return to where they came from, thus being treated as a perpetual foreigner. The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council launched an anti-Asian hate reporting website in March 2020. In over a year, 3,795 anti-Asian incidents have been reported. According to the New York City Police Department, anti-Asian hate crimes jumped by 1,900 times in the last year. Recent studies show that anti-Asian racism has adversely impacted Asian families during the pandemic (Cheah et al., 2020; Lee & Waters, 2021). Approximately 77% of Asian parents and children in the United States reported at least one incident of COVID-19 racial discrimination, and perceived racism adversely impacts their mental health (Cheah et al., 2020). Since the pandemic began, nearly 30% of Asians aged 18 to 60 reported an increase in anti-Asian discrimination and over 40% reported an increase in depression and anxiety (Lee & Waters, 2021).

Within the context of anti-Asian racism and contemporary xenophobia, multicultural education has received increasing attention to improve cross-cultural understanding and reduce discrimination. Multicultural education is defined as education that promotes an inclusive environment for all children to have an equal opportunity to learn and thrive, regardless of their different racial, ethnic, and social-class backgrounds (Banks, 2019). Multicultural education communicates to children that unequal treatment based on race, ethnicity, and culture is wrong and differences should be appreciated (Verkuyten et al., 2019). During COVID-19, the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, 2021) stated,

Whether through police brutality, anti-Asian immigrant rhetoric and policies, redlining, cultural appropriation, racist imagery, or daily white supremacist microaggressions, the United States has invested in anti-Asian racism over the past several hundred years...As violent threats continue, the NAME community echoes our commitment to transforming schools and the broader community into beacons of hope that prepare young people to navigate and transform this societal white supremacist racism.

While much has been written about multicultural education in schools, engaging families in the process of multicultural education has not received much attention. Parental racial socialization is an important part of multicultural education (Hughes, Witherspoon, et al., 2006). Parental racial socialization refers to parent-child communication about race and ethnicity. Parents convey important racial and ethnic information to their children, such as instilling cultural values and pride, preparing children to combat racial discrimination, promoting intergroup trust that encourages interactions with other racial and ethnic groups, or encouraging pluralism-egalitarianism that advocates equality across racial and ethnic groups (Hughes, Witherspoon, et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2020). Parental racial socialization is

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