



# A Qualitative Analysis of Parents' Civic Socialization and Chinese American Adolescents' Civic Engagement during COVID-19



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## Introduction

Parents' civic socialization facilitates adolescents' civic engagement and political participation (Diemer, 2012; White & Mistry, 2016). Recent studies have revealed that parents' messages about culture, race, and ethnicity go hand in hand with sociopolitical socialization among communities of color (Martinez et al., 2022; Pinetta et al., 2020) because their lived experiences are often intertwined with everyday stressors of racism. During COVID-19, learning about racial discrimination experiences or viewing anti-Asian incidents through national media coverage have heightened fear and perceptions of racism among Asian American communities (Cheah et al., 2020), which could evoke more family sociopolitical discussions (Wang et al., 2022). However, less is understood regarding how these civic socialization messages and strategies occur during everyday activities in Asian American families and what propels parent-adolescent conversations or sociopolitical behaviors in the context of heightened sociopolitical hostility.

## Method

### Participants

47 Chinese American parents (*Mage* = 47.50 years, *SD* = 5.42, 83% mothers) with adolescents ages 12-17 (*Mage* = 14.30 years, *SD* = 2.13, 57% girls)

- 43 first-generation immigrants (92%), 4 second-generation (8%)
- Predominantly middle-to-upper class and highly educated
- 33 from Mid-Atlantic states (e.g., MD, NY; 70%), 6 from the Midwest (e.g., MI), 4 from the West (e.g., CA), 2 from the South (e.g., TX), and 2 from the Southeast (e.g., FL) regions.

### Procedure and Coding

- 60-to-75 minutes semi-structured interviews between April – May 2021
- The transcribed interviews were coded in *Nvivo* (v. 20) by following the 5-step process for thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017)
- Coding of the interview questions explored modes of participation, civic socialization strategies, socialization goals, and factors impacting a sense of caring and community responsibility (average  $\kappa = .81$ )

### Child-led socialization

“Actually, I didn't take the initiative to discuss with him, but he did. At dinner time, because they discussed with them at school, so he said that he would share what he heard at school at the dining table with us. The point of view is really pretty good. **Because I'm not that familiar with the United States, I think it's a good opportunity through the children because they are an entry point for us to contact the real American society here** because we are not at work, I just joked with my friends, I said I seem to live in Chinese People's world. Yes, I don't really have contact with so many ethnic groups. For example, I don't have as many real American friends as they do, so **they will bring this information back from school to share with me.**”

- Sijia, mother of a 14-year-old boy

## Results

Contributions to the community largely take the form of voluntarism and donations (65% parents, 73% adolescents – both reported by parents), followed by parents' political participation (47%) and adolescents' civic learning activities in school (20%). When political engagement occurs, participants' **collective identity, experiences of discrimination, and geographic proximity** (e.g., protests happening in their neighborhood) led to engagement in civic discussion and community action.

Table 1. Factors Impacting Sense of Care and Community Action (*N* = 47)

Themes	Frequencies (%)
Proximity	
Collective identity (e.g., Asian American, a societal member)	34 (72%)
Seeing a bigger coverage (e.g., national news coverage)	26 (55%)
One's own experiences (e.g., "It happened to me.")	12 (26%)
Geographical community (e.g., localized engagement)	10 (22%)
Close one's experiences (e.g., a friend experiencing discrimination)	5 (11%)
Sense of Contribution (e.g., taking part; supporting Asian representation)	18 (38%)
Emotional Response (e.g., guilt, fear)	9 (19%)

Note. Frequencies indicate the number of parents who mentioned the theme in their responses.

### Parents engaged in conversation about current sociopolitical issues and varied in their expectations for their child.

Table 2. Parents' Civic Socialization Strategies and Goals (*N* = 47)

Themes	Frequencies (%)
<b>Parents' Civic Socialization Strategies</b>	
Conversation with the child	45 (98%)
Suggestions (e.g., encouraging participation)	36 (78%)
Role modeling engagement	23 (50%)
Adolescent's participation or observation	20 (43%)
Storytelling	14 (30%)
<b>Parent's Socialization Goals</b>	
Fostering autonomy or agency	21 (46%)
Raising awareness	20 (43%)
Fostering social responsibility	15 (33%)
Promoting character development	14 (30%)
Respecting differences	7 (15%)

Note. Frequencies indicate the number of parents who mentioned the theme in their responses. Frequencies below 15% are not displayed.

**About 66% (n = 33) of the socialization strategies were situated within everyday activities or routines.**

“During the election, there's a lot. When we **have dinner together** – we have a lot of people... – we would **talk about the news** for the day. So, during the election, because there were lots of news everyday, someone or myself would talk about it.”

- Chi-Hua, father of a 14-year-old boy

“...we will discuss, there was an old lady, because there was a white man in New York who attacked her. She wanted to fight back. We discussed this matter at **the dining table**. I said, I admire the old lady... I said that you should also have this courage. **When you are treated unfairly or violently by others, you should have the courage to fight back...**We will discuss when we encounter an incident, **not deliberately, but rather naturally.**”

- Yuan, mother of a 11-year-old girl

For example, the Atlanta shooting. Obviously, we are going to march and protest. This is definitely something to be done. If it's a simple incident I saw in the newspaper, I think it's a bit far away. **If it happened in my community**, I would definitely be more active and do a little more. But an isolated incident that happened out-of-state, I think it's more because I don't know what I can do.”

- Xiwei, mother of a 16-year-old girl

“We are not talking about convincing one another you know? It's just who makes their point and there is **disagreement** because I don't need Eleen to totally agree with me...It's good to talk about these topics...Just to familiarize with these things, because after all, it does exist in this society now.” - Feng, mother of a 14-year-old girl

## Discussion and Implications

Extending the support for the role of the sociopolitical environment (e.g., xenophobic rhetoric) on familial communication about race, ethnicity, and racism as well as on adolescents' civic engagement (e.g., Wray-Lake et al., 2018), our findings demonstrate that the anti-Asian racism and relevant civil unrest across the communities (e.g., BLM, Capitol Riots) have facilitated familial communication about sociopolitical issues among Chinese American families. Situating a family's civic socialization in everyday activities allows us to identify various socialization strategies and revealed that Chinese American parents navigate disagreements with acknowledgment of their child's agency and positionality of growing up in the United States. Findings also have implications for localizing efforts in promoting community action and call for further investigations that center the impacted family's perspectives in their socialization practices.

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References can also be provided upon request

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