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Communicating Non-violence Messages: Effects of Racial Cues and Message Format on Black Parents' Message Credibility Perceptions and Behavioral Change

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Abstract

Objective: Corporal punishment (CP) is a risk factor for child physical abuse. Black parents tend to have higher CP acceptance than other racial groups. Lack of culturally relevant messaging about CP can interfere with Black parents' acceptance of CP alternatives. This study experimentally manipulated racial cues and message format to examine Black parents' perceptions of message credibility, CP risk perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intent.

Method: Participants included 334 Black parents of children under the age of 11 (75% low-income, 67% mothers, M_{age} = 38), recruited from an online panel. The study employed a 2 (racial source cues: Black vs. White) x 3 (message format: narrative vs. narrative + efficacy vs. informational) between-subjects design.

Results: Messages with similar racial source cues were perceived as more credible than those having dissimilar racial source cues. However, these sources were perceived as equally credible for the narrative + efficacy messages. Structural equation modeling revealed that messages containing similar racial source cues predicted credibility, risk perceptions, and attitudinal and behavioral intent changes among participants viewing narrative and informational messages.

Conclusion: CP intervention message design should consider racial source cues and message format. These findings provide direction for future research on the development of culturally relevant CP messaging for Black parents and message effects on CP acceptability, attitudes, behavioral intent, and practices.

Keywords: social identity, racial cues, message format, message credibility, corporal punishment

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Black Parents' Message Credibility Perceptions and Behavioral Change

The World Health Organization (2021) declared corporal punishment (CP) of children a human rights issue because it violates children's rights for physical integrity, human dignity, health, development, and freedom from degrading punishment. CP is defined as the use of physical force to cause pain to correct a child's misbehavior through spanking, slapping, or hitting a child with objects, which can escalate to child physical abuse (Afifi et al., 2017; Straus, 2001). CP is a traditional method of managing children and is prevalent across cultures and racial groups (Lansford et al., 2017). A well-established body of research documents CP to be ineffective in improving children's behavior (Gershoff et al., 2018). Meta-analyses reveal that in addition to increasing child risk for emotional neglect and physical abuse CP is associated with a host of negative child development outcomes (Gershoff et al., 2019; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Although acceptance of CP has declined in the U.S. (Finkelhor et al., 2019), it remains common among many families (Gershoff et al., 2012; Lee & Watson, 2020).

CP has higher approval rates among Black parents compared to other racial groups due to perceived normativeness (i.e., the belief that CP is commonly used by other Black parents, Klevens et al., 2019; Duong et al., 2022) and perceived instrumentality of CP in correcting child misbehavior (Duong et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2011b). Religious fundamentalism also shapes the belief that not using physical punishment may spoil children (Beller et al., 2021). A long history of enduring racism has also contributed to Black parents' perceptions that CP is necessary to protect their children from systemic racism and violence (Payne & Hannay, 2021; Su et al., 2019). Over time, such perceptions can become cultural norms that are part of racial group identity (Fontes, 2005; Straus, 2001). Recent publicity about the evidence of CP harm may exert

social pressure to change child-rearing norms. However, parents from minoritized racial groups, who endorse CP in the face of growing stigma, may experience this stigma as a threat to racial group identity (Duong et al., 2022) which can influence how Black parents respond to CP intervention messages. To date, research has rarely examined the racial group processes in the context of Black parents' reactions to CP intervention messages. The current study investigates Black parents' receptiveness to CP intervention messages as guided by Social Identity Theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1986), message format research (Baesler & Burgoon, 1994), and the message credibility literature (McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

Child Corporal Punishment and Black Parents' Perspectives

Across racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., CP is widely accepted as appropriate and necessary for managing child behavior with estimates of parental approval ranging from 65 to 90 percent (Fleckman et al., 2019). Examination of attitudes by race within a nationally representative survey found that reported use of CP was higher among Black parents (20.9%) than Hispanic (18%) and White parents (16.9%) (Taillieu et al., 2014). A more recent study shows that compared to 47% and 31% of Hispanic and White parents respectively, 69% of Black parents believed spanking is necessary for children aged five and younger (Klevens et al. (2019). While Black parents are more likely to favor the use of CP (69%) compared to White parents (30%) and Hispanic parents (21%) (Su et al., 2019), not all Black parents use harsh punishments and there is wide variability in the endorsement and use of CP within racial groups in general and among Black parents specifically (Taylor et al., 2011a). Moreover, research suggests that many Black parent report using CP as a last resort (Bradley, 1998; Duong et al., 2022; Ispa & Halgunseth, 2004).

Multiple societal factors reinforce the view that CP is necessary for correcting children's behavior among Black parents. Historical structural and systemic racism perpetuated physical assaults to ensure compliance and submission of enslaved people (Thomas & Dettlaff, 2011). During legal enslavement, narratives were created in attempts to dehumanize Black people, cultivating a shared belief of Black people as "lesser than" other Americans (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). These anti-Black sentiments have endured over time and their effects extend beyond direct decedents of slavery to include Black immigrants (Kendi, 2020). This has led to the representation of Blackness as a deficit in need of correcting (Dumas, 2016). These representations can be internalized within Black communities (Dumas, 2016), leaving behind a legacy of slavery whereby Black parents and teachers sometimes serve as proxies for White power and control via the use harsh CP to instill obedience of Black children (Patton et al., 2021). Systemic racism has also led to implicit bias in which very young Black children, who are engaging in developmentally appropriate behavior, are far more likely, as compared to White children, to be viewed by both Black and White caregivers as misbehaving in ways that warrant harsh punishment including CP and suspension from preschool (Sevon 2022). This pattern of implicit bias is well-documented toward Black youth who are viewed as violent and more likely to engage in criminal behavior, resulting in systematic and often fatal targeting by police (Taylor et al., 2011b; Su et al., 2019). This has led some Black parents to believe that Black children need harsh punishment to survive in a racist society (Patton et al., 2021) and that White parents, who do not share this experience, approach discipline differently and in a way that does not work for Black children. For example, Black parents report that they do not want to follow the "White way" of not disciplining children (Klevens et al., 2019). Instead, they may view CP as a necessity to protect Black children from severe and lethal assaults including police brutality and

incarceration (Payne & Hannay, 2021; Su et al., 2019). Religious fundamentalism contributes to parental use of CP through its interpretation of Biblical passages in which CP is promoted as a means of controlling inherent "badness" of children (Beller et al., 2021).

Early literature on CP reflects inconsistencies in the association between CP and subsequent child externalizing behaviors based on racial groups (e.g., Bradley, 1998; Lansford et al., 2004). However, more recent and rigorous studies provide strong evidence that CP is associated with a host of negative child outcomes including physical and mental health problems (Gershoff et al., 2018; Heilmann et al., 2021). These negative sequelae are not limited to childhood but have durable effects across the life span (Afifi et al., 2017). Although effective alternative approaches to CP exist (Duong et al., 2021a; Waller et al., 2015), there has been little attention to intervention messaging for Black parents. While tailored approaches are beginning to emerge (Stein et al., 2021), very few studies have examined the efficacy of CP intervention messages for increasing Black parents' awareness of CP harms and effective alternatives.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains intergroup relationships and behaviors through a psychological process that involves group norms, stereotypes, and prototypes (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The theory postulates that individuals can be involved in social interactions either as representatives of their social groups or without much orientation to group membership (i.e., prototype, Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When people see themselves as members of a social group, their perceptions and judgments are guided by features defining their social groups. They are motivated to accentuate within-group similarities and between-group differences, leading to the categorization of in-group and out-group stereotypes (i.e., group categorization, Hogg et al., 1995). The SIT further suggests that people tend to view in-group

members favorably to secure a positive self-concept linked to the group's status and prestige (i.e., in-group favoritism, Hogg & Reid, 2006). When people perceive a threat to their social identity due to group stigmatization and unfavorable evaluations, categorization most likely takes place. Contentious issues related to intergroup differences often lead to perceptions of social identity threat and subsequent communication that emphasizes differences between in-group and out-group members (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because parenting attitudes and behaviors are rooted in group norms and beliefs (Fontes, 2005), the use of CP to discipline children can be a contentious topic. Black parents tend to view CP in light of their groups' circumstances in attempts to prevent group stigmatization (e.g., being labeled as child abusers, Duong et al., 2022). As discussed above, Black parents are more likely to endorse CP, tend to view CP as a racial group norm, and many argue against the non-CP position based on their racial group distinctiveness. Thus, CP intervention messages likely bring to the fore motivation to categorize in-group and out-group.

Research shows that Black Americans are sensitive to racial cues in media (Appiah et al., 2013; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005). In this study, we define racial cues as communicative signals in a message that determine whether a source is perceived as having similar or dissimilar racial identity. Black parents often consider racial cues to make inferences about whether CP intervention messages fit with child-rearing in-group norms (Duong et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2011b). Black parents may maintain their existing CP perspectives by arguing that out-group members who discourage CP do not understand their parenting norms and circumstances. Thus, Black parents may reject a CP intervention message when they perceive that it comes from an out-group. This illustrates the importance of racial cues in CP intervention messages.

Perceived Message Credibility and Persuasion Outcomes

In persuasion research, message credibility pertains to the believability of message source and message content. Source credibility is a crucial aspect determining how a message is processed, which affects the persuasion outcomes of the message. Source credibility comprises three dimensions: expertise (i.e., a communicator's qualifications and ability to possess insights related to the topic), goodwill (i.e., a communicator's intent toward message recipients), and trustworthiness (i.e., perceptions of the communicator's true motivation, McCroskey & Teven, 1999). People pay more attention to whether a source is an in-group or out-group member when they think that a message has aspects concerning their social group. Research shows that when a source carries racial characteristics similar to those of recipients, the source is more likely to be viewed as credible (Lee et al., 2021). Black parents' reactions to CP intervention messages are likely affected by source considerations about expertise, goodwill, and trustworthiness of the message. Specifically, they may question whether a message source has similar child-rearing experiences or understands their socioeconomic and cultural circumstances, such as knowing how to raise a Black child in a racist society (Duong, 2020; Duong et al., 2022). Thus, to Black parents, the presence or absence of racial cues indicating source similarity is crucial to increase perceptions of source credibility. Thus, we predict:

H1: Participants viewing messages depicting similar racial cues will report significantly higher source credibility compared to those who view messages depicting dissimilar racial source cues.

Content credibility refers to evaluations of aspects of a message, such as the quality and convincingness of the arguments presented in the message (Hu & Sundar, 2010). Perceived content credibility is associated with perceived source credibility (Jones et al., 2003). For example, a message delivered by a credible source is more likely to increase message elaboration

and favorable thoughts of the message's position than the same message delivered by a non-credible source (Flanagin et al., 2020). Several studies have shown that people are more likely to rate a message as convincing when they perceive that the message source is credible (e.g., De Meulenaer et al., 2017; Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2021). Thus, we predict:

H2: Perceived source credibility will be positively associated with perceived content credibility.

Research shows that source and content credibility predict attitudinal change. For example, source and content credibility are positively associated with attitudinal changes following participants' exposure to messages related to HIV/AIDS (Major & Coleman, 2012), physical exercise (Jones et al., 2003), tobacco products (Lee & Stevens, 2022), and climate change (Bolsen et al., 2019). Similarly, a risk may be perceived as more legitimate if disseminated by a credible source (Trumbo & McComas, 2003). Thus, increased source credibility and content credibility are associated with increased risk perceptions (Mccullock & Perrault, 2020). For instance, Black women report higher message credibility and intentions to perform breast self-examination when they view health promotional videos on breast self-examination featuring a Black model compared to when they view a White model (Anderson & McMillion, 1995). Black participants report higher message credibility and risk perceptions for messages using racial in-group members compared to messages depicting out-group members (e.g., Kreuter et al., 2008; Spence et al., 2013). Influential behavioral change theories have established that attitudes and risk perceptions are reliable predictors of behavior (e.g., the Integrative Model, Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). Thus, we propose:

H3a: Perceived content credibility will be negatively associated with attitudes toward CP.

H3b: Perceived content credibility will be positively associated with risk perceptions related to the use of CP.

H4a: Attitudes will be positively associated with intentions to use CP.

H4b: Risk perceptions will be negatively associated with intentions to use CP.

These hypotheses formulate a serial mediation model that delineates the hypothesized causal relationships among these variables. The model postulates that, if racial cues are compatible with group identity preferences in response to a message posing a threat to group identity, then similar racial source cues should be associated with more perceived source credibility. Second, perceived source credibility will then result in perceived content credibility, which should reduce positive attitudes toward CP while increasing risk perceptions. Finally, attitudes and risk perceptions should in turn motivate lower behavioral intentions through two separate paths: Lower positive attitudes reduce intentions while higher risk perceptions reduce intentions. This model suggests two indirect pathways of interest: similar source racial cues lead to less behavioral intentions via perceived source and content credibility and attitudes, and via perceived source and content credibility and risk perceptions.

H5: Participants viewing intervention messages depicting similar racial cues (*vs.* dissimilar racial cues) will report significantly less intentions to use corporal punishment with their children. This association will be mediated through two pathways: a) perceived source credibility, perceived content credibility, and attitudes, and b) perceived source credibility, perceived content credibility, and risk perceptions.

The Moderating Role of Message Format

Message format influences a persuasive message's outcomes (Jain et al., 2017; Major & Coleman, 2012). Two formats often used in the presentation of health messages are

informational and narrative evidence. Messages using an informational format aim to persuade by delivering numerical evidence (Greene et al., 2010), while narrative messages often present personal stories (Baesler & Burgoon, 1994). Overall, messages using narrative format are more likely to influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intent in various behavioral contexts (e.g., getting a mammogram, Kreuter et al., 2010; testing for STIs, O'Donnell et al., 1998; not using tanning beds, Greene et al., 2010; adopting behaviors to prevent skin cancer, Lemal & Van Den Bulck, 2010; and getting vaccinated, De Wit et al., 2008). Scholars explain that this is because narrative messages tend to arouse emotions, attract attention, and stimulate message processing due to their vividness and relatable storylines compared to objective but relatively dull informational evidence (Slater & Rouner, 2002).

Research has rarely examined the effect of different message formats in the context of CP intervention messages although some prior research has explored the efficacy of intervention messages. For instance, Reich et al. (2012) revealed that exposure to information about nonphysical discipline strategies embedded in baby books reduces mothers' support for CP. Scholer et al. (2010) reported that caregivers of 1- to 5-year-olds viewing nonphysical discipline messages in the *Play Nicely* educational program report less intent to spank their children compared to the no-exposure group. Holden et al. (2014) found that compared to participants who passively read CP informational message (i.e., message reporting research findings showing the association between spanking and child problematic behavioral patterns), those who actively read the message report less favorable attitudes toward CP. Duong's (2020) work revealed that CP intervention messages showing understanding, empathy, care, and a logical story plotline were perceived as relatable and effective by Black parents. These studies did not consider the literature related to theoretical mechanisms underpinning the persuasiveness of narrative

messages. They also did not directly test the relative effect of narrative message versus informational message. The current study addresses these notable gaps.

Furthermore, research has shown that Black parents have identified the need to incorporate information that demonstrates how parents can effectively manage a child's behavior without using physical force (Duong et al., 2021a; Klevens et al., 2019). To prevent an unhealthy behavior, the target population needs to believe in their ability to conduct the behavior (i.e., self-efficacy, Bandura, 1977). Parents are generally knowledgeable about several alternative discipline strategies (e.g., parental monitoring, withdrawal of privilege, etc., Socolar, 1997). However, they tend to view these strategies as less effectively than CP (Duong et al., 2021a). The perception of whether an alternative healthy behavior will bring about desirable outcomes is referred to as response efficacy (Bandura, 2004). This is consistent with the child development literature that conceptualizes parenting efficacy based on parents' knowledge of appropriate responses to a child's behavior, their confidence in their ability to carry out the responses, and their beliefs that their children will respond as expected (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). Thus, when parents observe that a CP intervention message provides them with effective alternative disciplinary information (i.e., efficacy information), they might perceive that the message source has expertise, goodwill, and understanding of their child-rearing challenges. The present study focuses on narrative message, informational message, and efficacy information to tests the effects of three message formats: narrative message, narrative message incorporating efficacy information of nonphysical discipline strategies, and informational message. As research has not experimentally tested how these message formats might work in the presence of message source racial cues in the CP context, we ask:

RQ1: Will racial cues and message format interact to influence perceived source credibility?

RQ2: Will the mediation hypothesized in *H5* hold for participants across the three message formats?

Methods

Participants

G*Power was used to calculate power for the design. For a two-way ANCOVA with 6 cells, estimated power of .80, and a small effect size of .25, a sample size of 225 was needed to test the interaction of racial cues and message format (Faul et al., 2009). The sample was over-recruited to account for potential dropouts and failures to satisfy the screening criteria. Data were collected by Toluna through its online survey panels (www.toluna-group.com), which included a network of partners with exclusive and traditional access panels, co-branded panels, or opt-in databases of individuals throughout the U.S. who agreed to complete research projects and undertake non-market research activities for payment. Toluna sent a survey link that hosted a questionnaire to potential participants over the course of seven weeks during June and July 2022. Inclusion criteria were Black legal parents in the U.S. who were living with at least one child younger than 11 years of age. The criterion of child's age was determined based on research demonstrating that children in this age range were more likely to be physically punished (Zolotor et al., 2008). All participants provided informed consent.

Procedure

This study was approved by an Institutional Review Board. Participants responded to pre-test items (e.g., number of children, childhood experiences) before being randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Participants in the treatment conditions viewed a CP

intervention message and responded to a questionnaire that included scales measuring message credibility perceptions, risk perceptions, attitudes and behavioral intent, while those in the control condition completed the questionnaire without viewing any messages and did not receive questions about message evaluations. Each participant was paid approximately $4 for their time. No personal identifiers of participants were collected. The sample included 334 Black parents whose age ranged between 18 and 78 years ($M = 38$; $SD = 11.7$, in six intervention conditions). The majority reported low annual household income (75.9% earned below $60,000). Participants on average reported having two children whose average age was 6 years old. More participants reported having only boys (42.4%) compared to those who reported having only girls (32.2%), and those who had both boys and girls (25.4%).

Design

This study employed a 2 (racial source cues: similar vs. dissimilar) x 3 (message format: narrative vs. narrative + efficacy vs. informational) + 1 (control) randomized between-subject design. The design resulted in seven conditions: 1) Narrative message containing *similar* racial source cues ($n = 59$); 2) Narrative message containing *dissimilar* racial source cues ($n = 63$); 3) Narrative message containing *similar* racial source cues + efficacy information related to nonphysical discipline measures ($n = 55$); 4) Narrative messages containing *dissimilar* racial source cues + efficacy information ($n = 55$); 5) Informational message containing *similar* racial source cues ($n = 49$); 6) Informational message containing *dissimilar* racial source cues ($n = 53$), and 7) control condition (no message, $n = 60$). The control condition served to explore the absolute effect of the messages and was excluded in this study because the current analysis focused on examining the central role of perceptions of intervention messages.

Stimulus Materials

CP intervention messages were created based on a real media story published in a prominent newspaper's parenting column. The media story included a conversation between a parent and an expert about options to discipline a child. To manipulate racial cues, we created names of the expert and the child using typical Black or White names (e.g., Stephanie White for the White expert source, Ayesha Harris for the Black expert source). The photos of the experts were also manipulated to illustrate either a Black or White character. Next, we edited the response part of the news story to create three message formats. In the narrative message the expert shared her personal story related to being physically punished when she was a child. In the narrative + efficacy message the same story was told with the addition of efficacy information (i.e., the expert suggested specific alternative strategies to discipline a child). For the informational message, the expert responded with an advice about not using CP.

Measures

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1-*strongly disagree*; 5-*strongly agree*) except for perceived source credibility and attitudes, which were measured on 7-point semantic scales. The measures were adapted from prior studies cited below, which showed adequate reliability and validity. Internal consistencies of measures for current sample are reported below. Factor analysis results are reported in the supplementary materials.

Dependent Variables

Perceived Source Credibility. Four items measured perceived source credibility tapping into three components of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill. Participants were asked, "*Think about the person providing the advice on how to discipline the child, how do you think about her?*" and they then rated whether the person was an expert, trustworthy,

objective, and caring about Black parents (ranged from −3 to +3, McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Cronbach's α = .85).

Perceived Content Credibility. Perceived content credibility was measured with five items (e.g., "*The message is believable*" and "*The message is convincing,*" Dillard et al., 2007; α = .89)

Risk Perceptions. Four items were used to measure risk perceptions (e.g., "*Children are susceptible to physical injuries if they are slapped/spanked/popped,*" Duong et al., 2021b; α = .93).

Attitudes toward CP. Five 7-point semantic differential scale items were used to assess attitudes toward CP, such as *bad/good, foolish/wise, ineffective/effective* (all items ranged from −3 to +3, Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011; α = .95).

Intentions to use CP. Four items were used to assess CP intentions (e.g., "*I will spank, slap, or pop my child when he/she misbehaves in the next three months,*" Duong & Sirohi, 2023; α = .95).

Covariates. Research has established influential factors affecting attitudes toward CP, including parent's childhood experiences of CP (Berlin et al., 2011), psychological stress (Holden et al., 2014; Straus, 2001), parent's impulsivity (Lorber et al., 2011), and religiosity (Wolf & Kepple, 2019). The measures of these covariates are reported in *Table 1* of the supplementary file. Additionally, parents' gender, age, race, education, religious affiliation, parenting situation, household income, child aggressive behavior, child's gender, child's age, and number of children currently living with parents were also found to affect parents' use of CP (Baniamin, 2022; Gagné et al., 2007; Gershoff et al., 2017; Mehlhausen-Hassoen, 2021).

Data Analysis Plan

Participants who failed two attention check items were removed from the sample. Normality checks and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance were conducted with the dependent variables and the assumptions were met. Construct validity was established for the variables with high correlations (*Tables 2-3* in the supplementary file). Manipulation checks were conducted with three items (*Table 4* in the supplementary file). Outcomes by conditions were reported in *Table 5* in the supplementary file. To test *H1 – H4* and *RQ1*, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted with racial cues and message format as fixed factors and perceived source credibility as the dependent variable. To test the moderated-mediation model (*H5* and *RQ2*) structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted in Stata 16.1. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was examined to verify the measurement model. Next, the structural model analyses (SEM) were conducted to test the model. Attitudes and risk perceptions were allowed to covary. Continuous covariates that had significant correlations with the dependent variables were included. Because nonsignificant chi-square test results are rare, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess model fit (Kline, 2015). A model was considered to have a good fit when the CFI and TLI values $\geq .95$ or above, and the SRMR and RMSEA values were $\leq.08$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Results

H1 predicted that participants viewing the CP intervention messages depicting similar racial cues would report significantly higher perceived source credibility compared to those who viewed the messages depicting dissimilar racial cues. *RQ1* asked if the effect of racial cues on perceived source credibility would differ across the three message formats. Two-way ANCOVA was performed controlling for age and income. Results revealed a significant main effect of

racial cues on perceived source credibility ($F(1,326) = 26.920$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$).

Specifically, messages containing similar racial cues led to higher perceived source credibility ($M = 5.38$; $SD = 1.45$) than messages containing dissimilar racial cues ($M = 4.55$; $SD = 1.40$). The main effect of message format on perceived source credibility was nonsignificant ($F(1,326) = .140$, $p = .87$). However, data revealed a significant interaction between racial cues and message format on perceived source credibility ($F(2,326) = 3.392$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$). Simple main effect analyses showed that for narrative messages, similar racial cues produced significantly higher perceived source credibility than dissimilar racial cues ($M = 5.29$; $SE = .18$ vs. $M = 4.58$; $SE = .18$, $p < .001$). For informational messages, similar racial cues produced significantly higher perceived source credibility than dissimilar racial cues ($M = 5.55$; $SE = .20$ vs. $M = 4.27$; $SE = .19$, $p < .001$). No significant difference was observed for perceived source credibility between similar and dissimilar racial cues for narrative + efficacy messages, ($M = 4.87$; $SE = .19$ vs. $M = 5.15$; $SE = .19$, $p = .29$). *Figure* 1 illustrates the interaction.

H2-H4 predicted the associations between perceived source credibility and perceived content credibility (*H2*), between perceived content credibility and attitudes (*H3a*), between perceived content credibility and risk perceptions (*H3b*), between CP attitudes and CP intent (*H4a*), and between risk perceptions and CP intent (*H4b*). *H5* predicted a parallel mediation process in which the association between exposure to messages source racial cues and CP intent would be mediated by perceived source credibility, perceived content credibility, and attitudes (*H5a*), and by perceived source credibility, perceived content credibility, and risk perceptions (*H5b*). The CFA test showed a good fit of the measurement model, $\chi^2(199) = 366.324$; $p < .001$, CFI = .98; TLI = .98; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .03, with all item loadings were above .74 (except for one item loading of .65). Results of the structural model test with age, income, childhood

experiences of CP, psychological stress, impulsivity, and religiosity serving as covariates indicated a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(318) = 498.356$; $p < .001$, CFI = .97; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .05. All direct effects were statistically significant, showing support for *H2-H4* (*Figure* 2). The indirect associations between racial cues and CP intent were statistically significant as mediated by the variables proposed in *H5*. *RQ2* asked whether the mediation pathways hypothesized in *H5* would be moderated by message format. SEM multigroup analyses revealed that *H5a* and *H5b* were supported for narrative messages and informational messages, but not for the narrative + efficacy messages (*Table 2*).

Discussion

This study integrated the social identity theory, the message format and credibility perception literature, and prior child corporal punishment research to test responses to CP intervention messages among a sample of Black parents. Results showed that racial cues and message format interacted to shape perceived source credibility, perceived content credibility, risk perceptions, attitudes, and CP intent. Two broad findings from this study stood out.

First, participants reported that an in-group message source was viewed as more credible than an out-group source. This finding confirmed that perception of racial group identity similarities between the source and the recipient is an important factor affecting judgments of source credibility (Kreuter et al., 2008). When the qualities possessed by a story's source and message recipients are relevant to the story's content (e.g., an expert who was also a Black parent sharing her experiences about child discipline), similarities can increase message credibility. The CP literature also suggested that in the eyes of Black parents, parenting practices are based on different cultural worldviews and racial group circumstances (Daniel & Daniel, 1999; Mitchell, 2008). Some Black parents also viewed a non-CP approach as "the White way"

of raising children (Klevens et al., 2019), and that their parenting practice was distinct to the extent that it reflected their cultural and racial background (Duong et al., 2022). Thus, a CP intervention message communicated by out-group members likely brought to the fore a threat to their racial group identity as well as group-related self-concepts.

Second, in the absence of efficacy information, racial cues were particularly important; but when the narrative message contained efficacy information, the role of racial cues diminished. This finding was consistent with the communication literature showing the potential of narrative messages containing efficacy information to reduce unintended persuasion outcomes with audience members scrutinizing and derogating message sources and counterarguing against a persuasive message's position (Greene et al., 2010; Kreuter et al., 2010; De Wit et al., 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002). As such, narrative messages might have helped participants to engage more in the story plotline and focus less on scrutinizing racial source distinction. Additionally, when a message source provided efficacy information about various non-physical tactics to discipline children and that those tactics could work effectively, participants perceived that the source cared about their situation (i.e., goodwill). They could also perceive that the source possessed expertise, or knowledge of how to effectively manage a child in difficult situations resonating with their own experiences, which increased participants' perceptions of the source possessing expertise and trustworthiness.

Limitations

Findings may not be generalized to the target population. Moreover, data on biological or adoptive status was not collected and the role of parents' gender has not been examined. Finally, findings were based on cross-sectional data and therefore, the persistence of attitudinal and behavioral changes is unclear over time.

Future Research Directions

Future research should consider the above limitations along with recruiting parents from different minority groups and test other minoritized groups as sources of messages to provide more insights to understand reactions to CP intervention messages. Future studies should also examine possible alternative mechanisms of source credibility perceptions. Source credibility might be perceived to be higher when the speaker's position goes against their in-group norms or against their self-interest. Past studies found that politicians who speak or act contrary to their self-interest are perceived as more trustworthy (Combs & Keller, 2010). Thus, there might be a possibility that source credibility was perceived higher for a Black source because the source communicated an anti-CP message that was not in line with participants' perceptions of racial norms for using CP as a child-rearing practice. Additionally, an individual's sense of belonging to an in-group is determined by the level of identification between self and group (Ellemers et al., 2002). As such, when in-group identification is low, people may want to be distinct from the group and be viewed as separate. When in-group identification is high, group membership identity becomes influential. Hence, examining these possible underlying scenarios in future research would further contribute to the findings of this study.

Clinical Implications

These findings hold relevance for practitioners in the field of applied child development regarding universal informational messaging about CP harm, messaging about effective alternative parenting strategies to CP, and embedding CP messaging within interventions targeting alternative parenting practices (Klevens & Whitaker, 2007). There is a need to begin with the professional understanding that when intervention messages run counter to parental group norms and expectations, messages delivered by out-group members may trigger

heightened group threat assessment that leads to defensive message processing. This may be especially the case for parents who have been historically harmed by medical and psychological institutions (Meek et al., 2020), experienced implicit or explicit bias (Fitzgerald et al., 2017), and engaged in a racially discordant practitioner-parent relationships (Dovido et al., 2012). Other strategies should be considered to mitigate negative reactions to CP intervention messages, such as minimizing the salience of out-group comparison by using an in-group source. Additionally, providing information on effective ways to disciple children that do not involve CP might be important to increase message credibility when in-group sources are not employed. Overall, results suggest that racial cues and information about perceived efficacy are crucial considerations for enhancing the credibility of campaign messages for Black parents about the evidence of CP harms and alternative effective discipline strategies.

Conclusion

Findings of this study showed that Black parents attend to racial cues in CP intervention messages. Racial identity was a salient feature used to make in-group and out-group categorizations in processing CP intervention messages. As such, message source's racial group membership predicted perceived source credibility, which influenced perceived content credibility and key persuasion outcomes (i.e., risk perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions). Message format did not affect these persuasion outcomes, but its interaction with racial cues suggested the potential of including efficacy information to increase perceived credibility of an out-group source. CP intervention messages aimed at Black parents might consider using similar racial sources.

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Table 1.

Bivariate Correlations, Descriptive Statistics, and Internal Consistency

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	-											
2. Income	.00	-										
3. Childhood CP frequency	-.07	-.05	-									
4. Child aggressive behavior	-.22**	.13*	.41**	-								
5. Psychological stress	-.27**	-.03	.38**	.53**	-							
6. Impulsivity	-.21**	.05	.40**	.47**	.41**	-						
7. Religious belief	.09	.19**	.13**	.19**	-.06	.05	-					
8. Perceived source credibility	-.11*	.11*	-.01	.08	.02	.01	.08	-				
9. Perceived content credibility	-.18**	.07	.03	.13**	.12*	.04	-.04	.67**	-			
10. Attitudes	.06	.11*	.17**	.18**	.08	.16**	.21**	-.19**	-.31**	-		
11. Risk perceptions	-.14**	.03	.01	.08	.08	.01	.01	.43**	.56**	-.52**	-	
12. Behavioral intent	.05	-.02	.27**	.22**	.17**	.23**	.16**	-.26**	-.35**	.65**	-.56**	-
Mean	38.94	46,034	2.40	1.94	2.52	2.40	2.86	4.86	3.71	3.81	3.65	2.64
SD	11.69	2,361	1.06	.88	1.06	1.09	1.09	1.52	.93	1.93	1.08	1.28

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, M and SD for income were in USD*

Table 2.

Multigroup Results

	Narrative message (n = 122)			Narrative + efficacy message (n = 110)			Informational message (n = 102)		
	ES	SE	95% CI	ES	SE	95% CI	ES	SE	95% CI
Source racial cue → Perceived source credibility	.28	.08	[.127, .433]	.16	.08	[-.003, .325]	.42	.07	[.283, .552]
Perceived source credibility → Perceived content credibility	.80	.04	[.715, .889]	.78	.05	[.676, .879]	.72	.05	[.626, .828]
Perceived content credibility → Attitudes	-.32	.09	[-.483, -.147]	-.27	.09	[-.455, -.091]	-.36	.09	[-.542, -.174]
Perceived content credibility → Risk perceptions	.73	.05	[.629, .835]	.43	.09	[.263, .604]	.59	.08	[.437, .735]
Attitudes → Behavioral intent	.38	.09	[.199, .560]	.55	.07	[.409, .699]	.34	.09	[.178, .511]
Risk perceptions → Behavioral intent	-.30	.09	[-.482, -.123]	-.27	.07	[-.425, -.112]	-.49	.08	[-.651, -.337]
Source racial cue → Perceived source credibility → Perceived content credibility → Attitudes → Behavioral intentions	-.07	.03	[-.128, -.004]	-.05	.03	[-.108, .013]	-.09	.04	[-.175, -.017]
Source racial cue → Perceived source credibility → Perceived content credibility → Risk perceptions → Behavioral intentions	-.12	.05	[-.227, -.017]	-.04	.02	[-.083, .010]	-.22	.07	[-.358, -.087]

Note: ES = Effect size; SE = standard error; CI = confidence intervals of 95% was used to assess effects (Hair et al., 2010).

Figure 1.

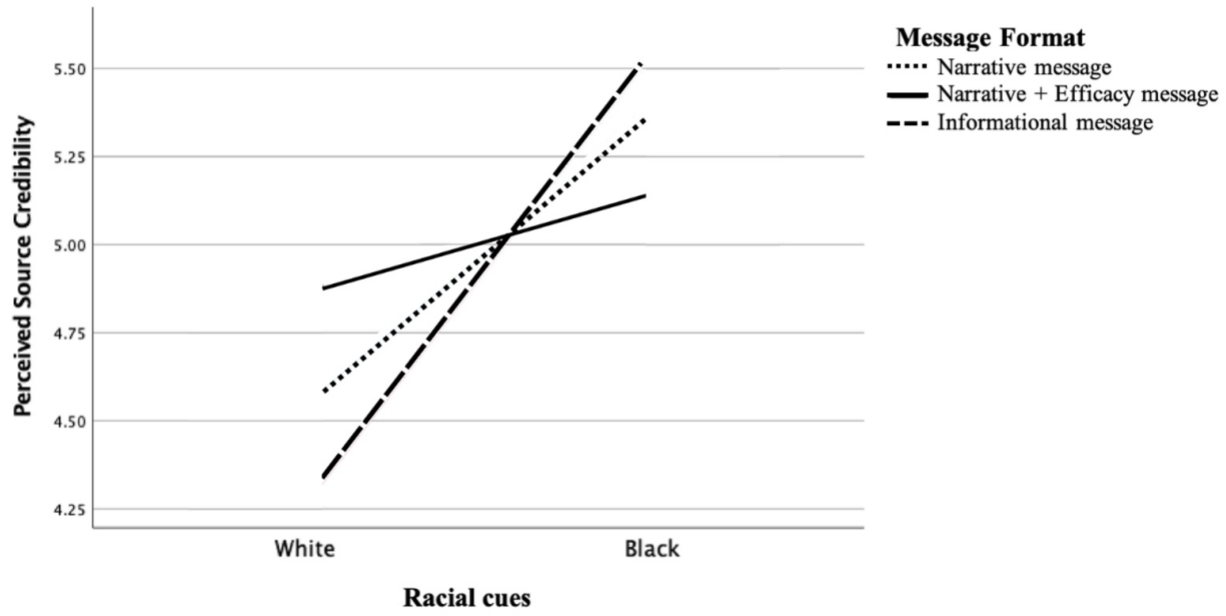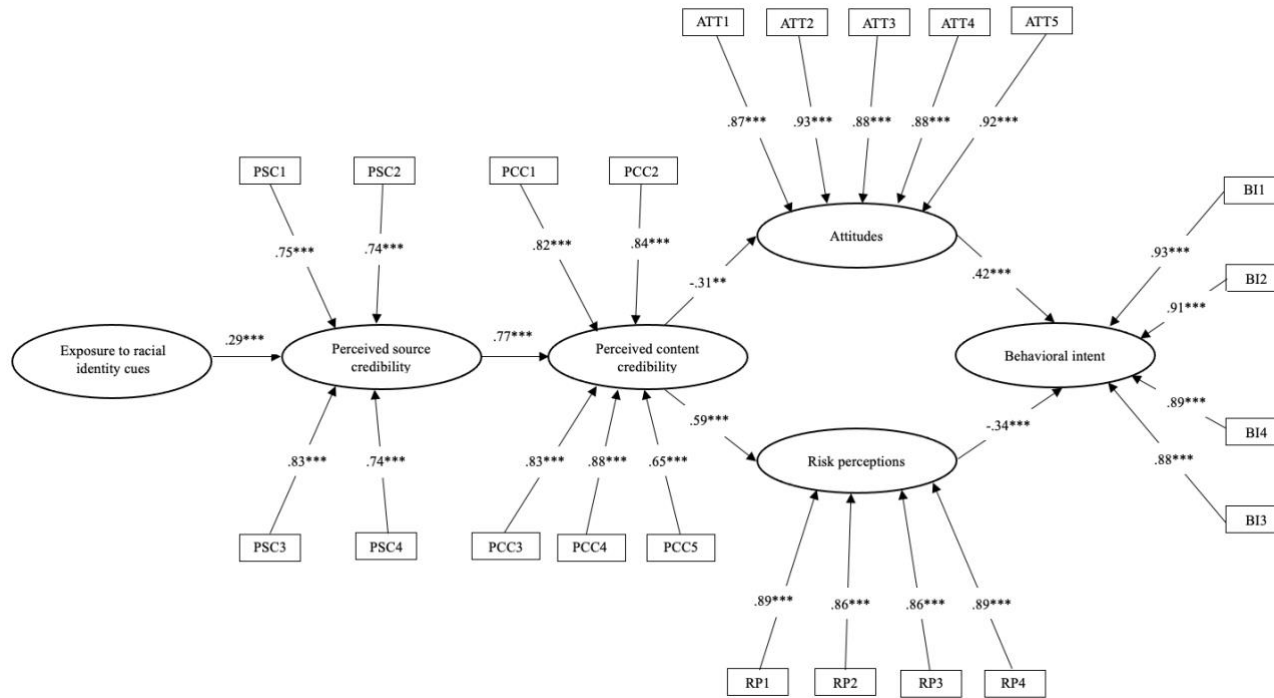*Interaction Effect Between Racial Cues and Message Format*

Figure 2.
The SEM result model

Note: PSC = Perceived source credibility; PCC = Perceived content credibility; ATT = Attitudes; RP = Risk perceptions; BI = Behavioral intent; ***p < .001.