



Solidarity: The Role of Non-Black People of Color in Promoting Racial Equity

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Abstract

Multicultural behavior analysts must stand together to address the issues of systemic racism collectively, show solidarity, and support Black lives. This article discusses the role of culturally and linguistically diverse behavior analysts, the mechanisms underlying barriers to showing solidarity, and the mechanisms required for cultural evolution to promote a compassionate and nurturing approach to racial equity. It is critical that non-Black people of color actively participate in antiracist advocacy to express solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Keywords Cooperation · Cultural evolution · Diversity · Equity · Systemic racism

Denisha Gingles, Guest Editor

Not long after the publication of the Special Issue on Diversity and Inclusion in *Behavior Analysis in Practice* (Zarcone, Brodhead, & Tarbox, 2019), we witnessed the culmination of systemic racism unfold. George Floyd was killed by a White police officer kneeling on his neck in an 8-min prone restraint. Breonna Taylor was fatally shot in her home by police looking for a suspect who was already in custody. Tony McDade was shot to death by police officers, without warning or de-escalation attempts (Thompson, 2020). The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013, with the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Black teenager Trayvon Martin, which spurred national attention, resulting in campaigns and protests (Day, 2015). The murders of Floyd and Taylor in 2020 resulted in worldwide protests and

recognition of the public health crisis of disproportionate Black deaths as a result of police brutality (Booker, 2020; Fuller, 2020; Watkins, 2020). Serendipitously, yet prior to the aforementioned events, Matsuda, Garcia, Catagnus, and Brandt (2020) published a review of behavior-analytic articles focused on reducing racism, which revealed that zero articles met their inclusionary criteria. This is a significant indicator that the field of behavior analysis requires thorough and mindful attention to conceptualize and develop strategies to mitigate issues related to racism.

There have been several discussion pieces published to promote cultural understanding and humility geared toward practice, such as self-reflection, developing awareness, and reiterating the ethical obligations in working with clients of diverse backgrounds (e.g., Dennison et al., 2019; Fong, Catagnus, Brodhead, Quigley, & Field, 2016; Fong, Ficklin, & Lee, 2017; Kornack, Cernius, & Persicke, 2019; Wright, 2019). These are important contributions that promote the advocacy for and considerations of culturally diverse clients; however, the central tenet is geared toward educating White practitioners—understandably so, as the fields of behavior analysis, education, and psychology at large are predominantly White (Dennison et al., 2019; Lin, Stamm, & Christidis, 2018). Fazil, Wallace, Singh, Ali, and Bywaters (2004) suggest that the advocacy movement has been mainly a “White” phenomenon, resulting in more Westernized concepts of advocacy. *Advocacy* is a broad construct, but it is usually defined in the context of promoting social justice (of fairness in support, opportunities, and privileges within a society) for

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disadvantaged groups (Bowes & Sim, 2005). Bowes and Sim (2005) also indicate “the development of advocacy as a public ‘good’ enshrined in policy has not, in their view, been informed by the views and experiences of BME [Black and minority ethnic] communities.” As such, members of ethnic and racial groups may be minimized in their participation in individual and collective social responsibility (Astramovich & Harris, 2007).

Both allyship and contributions to systemic racism, especially in the context of injustice and mistreatment of Black people, are not limited to White individuals. Systemic racism is the large-scale and inescapable hierarchical system of oppression devised by White people and specifically directed at minority racial and ethnic groups (Feagin, 2006). As such, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Garcia, 2020) suffer disproportionately due to inequities created by White people with relative social power, thus resulting in a system where BIPOC are disadvantaged in both social and public policy as a result of racist framing, ideology, attitudes, and discriminatory habits and actions. Due to assimilation, people of color can also engage in the same racist ideology (e.g., non-Black people of color opposing the Black Lives Matter movement). The purpose of this article is to invoke introspection and promote solidarity-aligned behaviors for non-Black ethnic and racial people of color within the field of applied behavior analysis and facilitate a cultural evolution to reduce racism and prejudice toward Black individuals.

Cultural evolution may imply competition as a result of selection; however, cooperation is needed for evolution to construct new levels of organization (Nowak, 2006). Wilson (2007) proposed three distinct characteristics of human evolution: cognition, culture, and cooperation, where cognition and culture only emerge as a result of cooperation first. Therefore, to build an antiracist culture, it is critical that all members within that culture begin to cooperate with one another by engaging in acts of solidarity. The importance of demonstrating solidarity is to unify and ameliorate collective suffering. *Solidarity* is defined as “unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on common interests, objectives, and standards” (“Solidarity,” n.d.). What is a display of solidarity? Solidarity is overt actions that challenge (and in some cases, punish) preexisting racial attitudes, model antiracist verbal behavior, and demonstrate equivalences between injustices faced by Black and non-Black people of color. As Matsuda et al. (2020) reviewed, implicit racial bias persists as a result of longer prior social learning histories. Therefore, changing attitudes and perceptions of adults may be harder to measure and achieve on an individual basis, but engaging in specific overt antiracist actions also help model appropriate and desired antiracist behaviors more pragmatically. Antiracism is not the absence of racist behaviors, but rather the ideas and behaviors that actively promote racial equity (Kendi, 2019).

Anti-Black Attitudes in Culturally Diverse Households

One way to engage in solidarity-aligned behaviors is to consider and change verbal behavior. Linguistically diverse individuals should also consider their verbal behavior in both English and their native languages. For example, in Cantonese (a dialect of Mandarin Chinese), the term 黑鬼 (*hak gwei*) is commonly used to refer to Black people. This loosely translates to “black ghost.” Yet, the term 黑人 (*hak yun*) literally means “Black person” but is not used as often. Some attribute this to 黑人 (*hak yun*) sounding more formal, whereas 黑鬼 (*hak gwei*) is more colloquial. Inherently, this subtle choice of language (even implicitly) prevents solidarity to support Black people. Participating in one’s native community, whether in person or online, can help provide discussion, insight, and resources to address race equity within one’s community. Behavior analysts of linguistically diverse backgrounds should facilitate these discussions in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking communities. Fluent native speakers can provide translations and guidance on having difficult conversations with non-English-speaking family members and bridging generational and cultural gaps.

The truth is that anti-Black rhetoric and attitudes continue to be prevalent within communities of non-Black people of color and also affect intersecting racial and ethnic groups, such as Afro-Latinx people (Wade, 2006). The anti-Black ideas, thoughts, and actions within respective cultures interfere with the overarching goal of solidarity. Addressing concerns with one’s families, friends, and community can facilitate a cultural evolution. Recently, there have been calls in the media to address these issues within one’s own racial group (Acevado, 2020; Iyer, 2020; Meraji, 2016) due to the silence or even opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement from groups of non-Black people of color. There are two possible behavioral interpretations for this division: (a) some non-Black people of color living in the United States may have assimilated and adopted the underlying White-dominant attitudes via imitation and reinforcement, and (b) the ethnic or racial group had to deal with their own injustices and mistreatment as a racially oppressed group in the United States. For example, many Chinese Americans were mistreated and discriminated against due to the COVID-19 pandemic (“Coronavirus,” 2020). The harmful rhetoric of referring to the novel coronavirus as the “Chinese virus” and spreading rumors that the Chinese government manufactured the virus has resulted in harming Chinese-owned businesses and Chinese Americans being targeted and physically harmed. Another example is related to the demonization and mistreatment of Latinx immigrants, resulting in distress, fear, and violence, such as the directed attack of the 2018 El Paso shooting (Hutchinson & Mallin, 2020).

As such, the members within the group may feel resentful or be complicit as a result of oppositional, hierarchical, and comparative derived responding and engage in thoughts like “We didn’t protest or riot when we were discriminated against,” or “Nobody spoke out for us,” or “We need to focus on our own problems first.” Unfortunately, these sentiments are not uncommon from Chinese and Latinx group members regarding the mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement (Florida, 2016; Meraji, 2016). These thoughts may be a product of confirmation bias, where individuals selectively attend to verbal behavior and events that support their position, and the erasure of Black advocacy in the media, such as the case of Patricia Okoumou’s protest of the detention of migrant children in the United States (Aguilera, 2019) and the influence of Malcolm X on Asian American activism (Kochiyama, 1994).

Although the pain that individuals and groups as a whole face is valid, raw, and real, it is dangerous to compare injustices, as it begins to facilitate competition rather than cooperation. Historical contexts and conditions will vary between different racial groups, and non-Black people of color will naturally be more aware of the issues experienced by their own racial group. However, racial data suggest that police brutality is disproportionately greater toward Black people, resulting in the significant damage to and suffering of Black lives, and should be addressed as a public health crisis (Alang, McAlpine, McCreedy, & Hardeman, 2017; Charles, Himmelstein, Keenan, & Barcelo, 2015). To address a public health crisis, cooperation, over self-interest, is critical and needs to be accelerated (Goldberg, 2020).

Mechanisms of Cooperation to Increase Solidarity

There are mechanisms of cooperation required for evolutionary change: direct reciprocity, indirect reciprocity, network selection, and group selection (Nowak, 2006). These mechanisms are also applicable in the context of culture change. Direct reciprocity is when two organisms have opportunities to cooperate with one another. One may cooperate now in the hopes that the other will also cooperate in return. This is akin to mutual occasions of reinforcement. Cooperation in this case can look like overt verbal behavior that empathizes with and validates the other’s feelings or overt verbal behavior or action that corrects racial inequities such as microaggressions or other forms of mistreatment. By individuals cooperating initially, it may increase the likelihood that the other member will do the same. By engaging and interacting with members of other races, each member is likely to contact reinforcement from the other as a result of repeated encounters, and this can result in increased cooperation and thus benefit both groups. Indirect reciprocity, on the other hand, does not mutually benefit both

members. One member may be in a position to help the other, but there is no chance of repeated encounters or opportunities for the other to return the favor. After an individual contacts direct reinforcement as a result of direct reciprocity, the act of cooperating itself may become a conditioned reinforcer. Therefore, indirect reciprocity is related to rule-governed behavior and conditioned reinforcement, underlying the cognitive aspects of antiracist actions. If an individual cooperates with another despite not receiving an immediate reinforcer, the individual can model desired behaviors to other members who engage in social referencing. Network reciprocity is the extension of cooperation to multiple members within a group, where the benefit of cooperating outweighs the risk or costs, much like a metacontingency. The outcome of both direct and indirect reciprocity can facilitate overall group gains and initiate a cultural shift. Finally, group selection is related to cultural selection. Cooperative group behavior as a whole is more likely to be more successful than a group of competitors or defectors. The reason being is that the payoff of cooperating is much higher overall and contributes much more to the group than those who simply do nothing to reciprocate. A group of defectors, in this case, can be conceptualized as individuals within a marginalized racial or ethnic group that does not offer solidarity or engages in overt acts of antiracism.

The more likely it is that members of non-Black racial and ethnic groups participate in acts of cooperation with Black activism, the more likely they will contact reinforcement. In doing so, these members will continue to cooperate, even without immediate socially mediated reinforcement or benefit, which will contribute to antiracist cognition. By extending these actions to more members, inevitably like-minded groups will emerge and, ultimately, create a paradigm shift in cultural practices.

Conclusion

The marginalization of people of color may create a sense of invisibility, race-related stress, and even fear where members are less likely to self-advocate, participate, and even facilitate erasure of their own racial and ethnic identity (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2016). These behaviors are likely a product of learned histories due to previous members’ modeling and engaging in the same behaviors across generations or are even a result of avoidance of and escape from creating dissent in a White-dominant society. There is mounting literature directed toward White individuals on practicing allyship and antiracism, which is warranted (Arnold, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Hagerman, 2018; Oluo, 2019; Tatum, 2017). Still, non-Black people of color should not be excluded from those practices simply because they are people of color who have also suffered injustice and racism. Allyship requires one to also carry the weight and burden of underinvested and oppressed

communities. Even if non-Black people of color do not fully understand the extent of the oppression of Black lives, they must make a concerted effort to listen and engage in behaviors that do not reinforce their biases on a day-by-day basis (Lamont, n.d.). By actively participating in acts of solidarity, non-Black people of color can facilitate their own cultural evolution. By engaging in repeated overt acts of support and cooperation, starting with the Black Lives Matter movement, *all* people of color are more likely to contact reinforcement for doing so, and per Novak's (2006) conceptualization, they are more likely to facilitate large-scale change. By sharing our voices within our communities—our families, our work, our teachings—we are gradually shaping solidarity. That is the start of racial and ethnic equity that we are all striving toward.

Examples of Cooperative Actions to Enact Today

Direct Reciprocity

- Participate in trainings and continuing education units offered by BIPOC.
- Seek mentorship from BIPOC from different racial or ethnic groups in supervisory or higher education roles in the field.
- Model antiracist language, and praise others for engaging in antiracist language in English and non-English languages.

Indirect Reciprocity

- Provide mentorship within and outside one's cultural community.
- Participate in service, such as volunteering with organizations that support BIPOC.
- Incorporate the research and works of BIPOC in the field into coursework, trainings, or supervision in behavior analysis.

Network Selection

- Join organizations in the field supporting BIPOC, such as Black Applied Behavior Analyst, Inc. (2019) and the Association for Behavior Analysis International's (ABAI's) special interest groups, such as Culture and Diversity and Behaviorists for Social Responsibility (Association of Behavior Analysis International, n.d.).
- Facilitate small-group discussions and meetings related to BIPOC perspectives and antiracist actions in the context of practice, ethics, and behavior analysis at large.

Group Selection

- Voice concerns regarding the silencing of BIPOC.
- Leave groups, organizations, and companies not committed to antiracist actions.
- Support groups, organizations, and companies committed to antiracist actions via time, energy, and/or financial donations.

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