

E9: Antiracist Parenting in the Context of Multiracial Families

Co-hosts: SooJin Pate and Hannah Carney

Guest: Karla Benson Rutten

Intro (music by Mike Myth Productions):

SooJin: Welcome to the Antiracist Parenting Podcast, where we're working to create an antiracist world for ourselves, our children, and future generations to come.

Hannah: We are Hannah Carney and SooJin Pate. And we're coming to you not as experts but as parents who want to share our missteps and successes in raising antiracist children. Thank you for being on this journey with us, as we work together to build a community of antiracist parents who are raising a generation of antiracist kids.

SooJin: Hello, welcome to episode nine. Today we're starting a new series that answers a question posed by one of our former guests. So on episode two, Karla Benson Rutten shared that she'd like our podcast to examine this question. What do folks need to be thinking about as they embark on antiracist parenting, especially in the context of multiracial families where one parent or primary caregiver is white, and the other is a person of color? Well, we thought that was a great question. So we'll be answering that question and more with our beloved guest, Karla, who joins us again today. But before we get to that, we want to take a moment to acknowledge the mass killings that took place in Atlanta and Boulder. Our heart hurts for the lives that were taken and the families who are now mourning those losses. And I'd like to for us to take a moment to reflect as I say the names of those who were murdered.

From Atlanta:

Xiaojie Tan

Daoyou Feng

Soon Chung Park

Hyun Jung Grant

Suncha Kim

Yong Ae Yue

Delaina Ashley Yaun

Paul Andre Michels

From Boulder:

Eric Talley

Rikki Olds

Kevin Mahoney

Lynn Murray

Denny Stong

Teri Leiker

Tralona Bartkowiak

Jody Waters
Neven Stanasic
Suzanne Fountain

Four of the eight people who were killed in Atlanta were Korean American women. They looked like my aunts, my cousins and my friends. They look like me. And in that recognition as a Korean American woman, I felt something I'd never felt before fear of being killed simply because of the way I looked. I didn't go out that week, not once for fear of being targeted. And I realized and second guessing my comings and goings that week that this is what Black people feel like every day. Sxela's dad and I were talking about this exact thing the other day. He lives like a hermit in many ways because of this very reality. And while I knew why he was a homebody intellectually, I didn't know it viscerally, in my whole body until this happened. In our conversations. When I was sharing this with him, I recognize the immense privilege I've had and never feeling that level of fear until now. He felt that level of fear as a young boy. But for me, I've lived over 40 years of my life without ever experiencing that level of fear. And for many white people, they will never, ever know that kind of fear. And I want to live in a world where no one ever feels that level of fear. That week also taught me how amazing my community is. I had people reach out to me checking in the same Black friends I reached out to in the wake of George Floyd reached out to me, Karla being one of them. And of course, you reached out too, Hannah, and that all meant so much to me. My daughter and I, we went to the dentist this week. And the first thing the dental hygienist who is Somali said to me was, "I'm so sorry that people who look like you are being targeted. I stand in solidarity with you, sister." And I nearly cried right then and there because it was so incredible to be seen in that moment. And recognizing my difference, she recognized our shared humanity and since then, I've been telling everyone I know to go to Twin Care Dental on East Lake Street. If you live in Minneapolis/St. Paul area go there. The lead dentist is a woman of color and the majority of staff are Black and staff of color. And the quality of service and care are phenomenal. Both my daughter and I go there, they serve the entire family. And as we were walking out my daughter mentioned how she enjoyed the visit. Like when do you ever enjoy going to the dentist? Well, in our family we do now because of the incredible staff at Twin Care Dental. So anyway, I just want to say thank you to my community for showing up for me in this way. It means so much.

Hannah: Yeah, SooJin, we love you!

SooJin: Thank you.

Hannah: I also wanted to uplift an article that our friend and colleague, Patricia Izek, shared with us and I believe the article came through Teaching Tolerance, which now has a new name, I think it's called Learning for Justice. And it's an older article, but still very relevant. It's called *When Bad Things Happen: Helping Kids Navigate our Sometimes Violent World*. And it just shares information about

different kinds of violence that happen and how parents and educators can work together to kind of help kids work through that. And of course, adults need this too. But I just wanted to uplift that article.

SooJin: Great. Yeah, that's, that's great. And I just before we move on to our accountability check in, I just wanted to say a little bit more in regards to the mass killings. You know, these mass murders are flashpoints, and they have to serve as a wake-up call for our society. If we don't change the conditions that allow these things to happen. We're going to see more, not less, of these atrocities taking place. And I believe that if we lived in an antiracist world, none of these killings would have taken place. While the motive is not yet known about the Boulder shooter, we do know that he had repressed rage from being bullied for being Muslim. Experiencing Islamophobia doesn't justify what he did. But these acts of dehumanization can only be done by people who are dehumanized themselves. And white supremacy is a system of dehumanization, it's difficult to take another life when you see them as fully human, when you see them as a sister or brother or nibling, like that dental hygienist saw me. So I'm not suggesting that antiracism is the antidote to everything. Not at all. But I will say this, antiracism works to re-humanize ourselves, and antiracist parenting works to preserve the humanity of our children who are automatically born with that. So how much better off would our society be, would our world be, our planet be, if we saw each other as beautifully and wonderfully made human beings? And for me, it was just a reminder of how important the work that we're doing is.

Hannah: Yeah, absolutely. And it, it reminds me of when Kathleen Devore was with us and talking about how antiracism work is healing work. And when you are healed, you are less likely to continue that cycle of trauma...

SooJin: And violence.

Hannah: Yeah. So I think we're ready to move into our accountability check in where SooJin and I check in on the commitments we made from the last episode. And I can start us off. My commitment had been around getting signed up for this workshop called or not workshop. It's a workshop series actually called the Arc of White Womanhood. And Robin Alpern, who was one of our guests on our last episode is the co-leader of that series. And so I did sign up. I haven't actually been able to attend the live sessions. But I've watched the recordings, and I've met with my accountability group, like within the class, I guess. And so in general, I'm learning some really interesting aspects related to world history, and how human interaction has evolved over tens of thousands of years. The most impactful thing I've learned, however, came out of a podcast episode that was recommended as part of our homework. And the podcast is called Medicine Stories. And the host interviews Lyla June in Episode 38. And Lyla June shares a really important perspective about ways in which people with European ancestry like me, can be reconnected with our indigenous European ancestors, and can learn to understand and love our ancestors. And by engaging in this work of loving our ancestors and understanding the trauma that

they experienced, we are able to love ourselves and others. And to me, you know, I see this as part of this, you know, ending the cycle of trauma and violence, and, and putting the possibility of fully healing within reach. And I also find this work really challenging, because, as I have been going through this course, on the Arc of White Womanhood, simultaneously, I've been engaging in conversations with my family and extended family. And I learned in the last few weeks that some of my ancestors enslaved people in Kentucky.

SooJin: Wow.

Hannah: So I'm literally a descendant of enslavers. So my work right now is to reconcile this need to love my ancestors. And the need to acknowledge and take responsibility for the behavior of those family members who chose to continue the cycle of trauma and violence by victimizing people in the form of chattel slavery, rather than choosing to heal their own trauma. And then I'm also figuring out like, how I'm going to be talking to my kids about all this. And it's not easy, as you can imagine. But I'm thankful to find wisdom and guidance, through the Medicine Stories podcast and Lyla June's work. And I also have been now started going to sessions called Coming To The Table, which basically brings together descendants of people who were enslavers as well as descendants of people who were enslaved, and having open discussions and kind of turning trauma into nonviolent action and healing. And so we'll share all of these resources, but I just wanted to list a couple of things that are helping me work through this.

SooJin: Wow, Hannah, you talking about that makes me think about Octavia Butler's book *Kindred*, because she, the main character is a Black woman who travels back in time to find out that she's a direct descendant of like, you know, enslavers. So it's a very complicated story, you know, because I believe she's a product of rape. But anyway, the reason why I'm recommending it is because the book does a really good job of, of holding kind of the complexities and the nuance, you know, of that moment. And then also, like, the ways in which the legacy of slavery enacts like in our relationships, in our racial relationships today. And so it's fictional, but, you know, sometimes fiction provides a path forward to healing because it's already kind of reimagining and re-envisioning what, what a healed society can look like. So I just recommend that book as maybe an entree or one avenue to start that process of reflection and healing, given the new information that you learned about your ancestors.

Hannah: Yeah, thank you - definitely will read that. I've heard of the book, but I haven't read it. So thank you.

SooJin: So my commitment, based on our session last month, was to reframe Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work for myself, in regards to people asking for a toolkit or some easy fix, to DEI in the workplace. And this reframing is done client-by-client one request at a time. And thus far, I haven't

been asked for a toolkit. But that hasn't stopped me from making shifts in my own thinking regarding how I approach my work as a consultant around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. So I used to spend a lot of time with clients talking about buy-in, how to get buy-in from leadership, how to get buy-in from staff. And since concluding our series on how white people can become antiracist, I haven't used the phrase buy-in, not once. And so instead of focusing on that, I'm instead recommending that clients put their energies and resources to the people who are already energized, and who are already "bought into the work" versus focusing on those who aren't. And I guess this doesn't directly speak to my commitment. But in making my commitment, I'm definitely shifting my approach and thinking about my own work. So with that, Hannah, do you mind setting the intention for today?

Hannah: Yes, and it's really helpful to hear kind of that shift in thinking, and it reminds me of the quote of like, the only people who have ever made a change in the world are a group of a small group of thoughtful people. It's something like that. And I know that's not exact, but it just reminded me of that, that sentiment of starting with the people who are showing up and care and want to do something,

SooJin: Yeah, yeah, like we don't need a majority to create change, right? We can start with a small minority that can create the momentum to then turn into a majority. Yeah. So thanks for that. I appreciate that, Hannah.

Hannah: Yeah. So our intention today is about envisioning a multiracial and antiracist society and becoming better versed in each other's narratives.

SooJin: Great. So with that, I'm so delighted to be able to welcome you all to re-introduce you all to our very special guest, Karla. And I know that you were here for Episode Two. But for those listeners who haven't had a chance to listen to that, or just you know, that maybe this is their first episode, tuning into our podcast, would you mind sharing a little bit about who you are, where you come from, and what you do?

Karla: Absolutely, thank you for having me again, SooJin and Hannah. I'm so happy to be here. And thank you SooJin for naming what we're going through yet again, as a nation, with the murders of our folks in Atlanta and in Colorado, and yeah. And in Minneapolis we're now about to start the trial for Chauvin, and so that it's bringing up a lot of things for folks. And it's so important to name, that we're all going through these things together. And we're all feeling lots of things about these actions for different reasons. And being able to name that is so important in all the spaces we're in. So I really just want to thank you for both naming that hurt, and sharing your own experiences as well as your identity. So thank you for that – just want to start there.

SooJin: And thank you for reaching out, Karla.

Karla: Of course!

SooJin: It meant so much to me.

Karla: You know, again, this idea of our shared humanity, right? I wept when I heard about what happened in Atlanta, because it really hurt. And I'm like, if I'm hurting, then I know all of my Asian and Asian American friends and kinship folk and all of that are hurting too. And that of course, you feel that you want to check in on folks. And so that's, yeah, you were one of the first people that came to my mind. So again, I'm here with you and for you. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. So again, I'm Karla Benson Rutten. I identify as a cisgender, heterosexual Black woman. I identify as a daughter, I'm a sister, I'm a spouse, mother, an educator, I'm an entrepreneur. I'm a first-generation college student, grew up in a working class, proud military family. I always start with those things when I identify who I am because that's who I am and how I have come to be. I also own my own coaching, consulting and training firm that's focused on diversity, equity and inclusion and strategic leadership development, similar to the work that SooJin does, outside of this podcast. And I'm also the Vice President of Community Engagement at Girl Scouts River Valleys, in St. Paul, where I work with my team to create new and innovative ways to bring girls and families of color to Girl Scouting. And so that's a little bit about who I am, I also am partnered, and I have two children.

SooJin: Great. So do you mind sharing maybe what your intention is for today?

Karla: Oh, absolutely. So my intention is to engage in a conversation with both of you and your audience about how we think about raising biracial and multiracial children. And just have an opportunity to talk about what that can look like, as we continue in this podcast, and even outside of this podcast, of course, to raise antiracist children, or what are the things that might come up? And so my intention is just to have an open conversation about all of that.

SooJin: Awesome, awesome, well, in your intention, you've rolled in kind of the questions...

Karla: Okay.

SooJin: ...that I'd like for us to kind of help launch us into this conversation. So you know, how are you raising your multiracial children to be antiracist, given, you know, the makeup of your family? And more specifically, and this goes back to the question that you posed for us. What do folks need to be thinking about as they embark on antiracist parenting, especially in the context of families where one parent or primary caregiver is white and the other is a person of color?

Karla: Mm hmm. Yeah, absolutely. So I shared that I am partnered, I have a husband, he's white, and identifies as white. And the way that we raise our kids, and I think in the last podcast I was in, I was talking, we were talking about raising children, right to be antiracist. And the ways in which we do that are the same. And the ways that I do that would be similar if my partner was a person of color. But again, it's a different conversation and approach in some ways, with my partner being white, because, you know, for us, and in any family that's multiracial, you're not only partnering with that person, you're partnering with their family, and their friends, and we'll talk about that later.

SooJin: Very good point!

Karla: So it's true. My other intention is to be very honest, during this conversation, but the way that we are doing that knowing that we are in a multiracial family is, you know, ensuring that our kids are aware of all of their ethnic identities, and in particular, ethnic identity of color, which is Black. Right? And, and ensuring that they are proud of that, that they know they are Black, they can lead with that. And that and they're not, you know, negating any of their other ethnic identities, right. And so identifying as biracial Black children is claiming all that you are, and that's fantastic, right. And so that's what we do. We are consistent and it's normalized in our house to talk about current events and things that happen, that are hard to talk about, as well as the celebrations that we get to do, right, in terms of Black identities, identities of color, again, making that normal so that they again, have that sense of pride. It's key. I worked in higher education for years, right, that was my main work. And there's advantages in that, because my kids grew up from birth, being surrounded by progressive, antiracist communities, and specifically the work that I did in diversity and multicultural affairs on college campuses. So they got to grow up again, in a normalized environment where the people they saw most of the time, were people of color, or antiracist white folks who cared for them. We were very intentional about daycare, my partner and I both work so they went to a Spanish Immersion daycare whose staff was mostly Latinx, fantastic brown women in particular, who cared for them like they were their own, and that was intentional. We'll talk about that a little later as well. Right. And so we just did all the things intentionally to make sure that they, even in Minnesota, have an experience where their identities are reflected and normalized. And we talk about what racism is, what oppression is and how to recognize it, when they see it. Right? Whether it's at school, on TV, out in the neighborhood, we'll ask questions to them and ask them to, you know, develop kind of a critical consciousness about that even when they're 10 and 12 now. But it's important to, for us to be really honest and open and as much as possible use language that they can understand. But now that they're older, they understand most of the things right. And so it's about drawing examples. And so really, you know, being honest with them, and with each other, about who's going to address what question or which thing that happens, who's going to address parents, or school administrators like that sort of thing. We're really a team and particularly in raising our kids and preparing them for, you know, the racism that they'll probably encounter as they as they grow up.

SooJin: So could you say a little bit more about how do you make those decisions about like, who's going to address? Like, you know, like, if it's more of a team effort, where it's not, you know, you're kind of dividing up the labor? How do you make the decision, like, okay, you're going to handle this, I'll handle that like, and how do you make that decision?

Karla: Right? Yeah, because it's case by case. Part of it is - who do we think will be heard? We talk together about okay, what's the issue? Who's in the best emotional state to respond to it? And who will be heard? And so if we've had an experience, where, you know, we had to address a comment or something made by a teacher, you know, those, sometimes a conference is coming up. And so we get to both address it. You know, we live in Minnesota, our schools, of course, like many schools, mostly white teachers. And one incident that happened years ago, we practiced in a way - we knew who was going to say what. William led. Why? We're going to say the same things. Why? Well he's white, teachers white, and he's male. And so we just know the way racism and sexism works, he'll be listened to, in a different way. So we're going to lead there, right with him. Now, it could be a situation where the feedback or what have you needs to come from - maybe it's me, if we're friends with the folks, and I have a relationship with them. Or if it's an administrator at a school, and I have that relationship, and I may be seen as authority, because folks know the work that I do around diversity, equity and inclusion. Then I might be the person sure that does it - the same with neighbors and things like that. So we just but we have those open conversations, but we think about, yeah, who in this world that we live in, who will be heard? What needs to be said? And then we make sure that we point out the why, like, at the end of the conversation, right? Because like why we chose to do it the way that we did? So but it does, it makes a difference. And those are the things in multiracial relationships and families that it's important to be comfortable with having those conversations with each other, or getting to that place where you are.

SooJin: Yeah. And I mean, it's recognizing privilege.

Karla: Yes.

SooJin: It necessitates a recognition of that.

Karla: Yeah.

SooJin: Could you say a little bit more about how you were saying that, in many ways, your parenting, regardless of the racial identity of your partner, you were going to be deliberate and intentional about certain things. But there are other facets given that, you know, you are partnered with a white man, that does change up, you know, some of the dynamics – you were referencing parents and family, and

friends and stuff. So could you say a little bit more about like, how does parenting shift and change precisely because you're partnered with a white man?

Karla: Absolutely. Parenting with a white partner. And I will say, as I'm being completely honest, I do believe there are differences when it and when we're looking at gender and I'm basing this on my own experiences, some anecdotal experiences. This is not researched at all. However, I think it's different depending upon the genders of the relationship.

SooJin: Sure.

Karla: I believe that culture or strong monoculture runs through or often through the mother, in our particular type of relationship. And so as a Black mother or if the mother is a person of color, I think there's ways that the culture gets passed through easier, more intentionally. Again, I have no research backing this up, but I bet something exists, or be a great research topic. And so I mean, that's a difference. I think things can look differently if you're in a heterosexual relationship. And if the mother's white and father is of color or what have you, I again don't know for sure. So I'm coming from this identity is what I'm trying to share. I'm coming from my identity as a Black cisgender woman, married to a white man. And so the reason I think that that is different is even when before we started dating, officially, I had questions like, I needed to understand what kinds of conversations or reflections this white man had had about race and identity. And all of those sorts of things. He is and continues to be the only white person I've ever dated, and had a relationship with, right. And so, you know, I needed to make sure that this was going to be a person who I could lean on and count on to be a support to me, as I, as a Black woman navigate this world, right. And so there's the big difference right there, if you are partnered with the person who is white, again, regardless of their gender, they have lived a life of privilege that is just solely, so different from a person of color in terms of race in particular. It's just a different way of being and living. And that partner could potentially have lived a life where they never ever encountered or had to engage in a conversation about racial identity. Okay. And so for me, as a Black person who is proud of my identity was raised in a community where we were celebrate, we celebrated that, like, there was pride again, and we had to manage and navigate racism, all the time, and all of the institutions and things that we were in, right as a family. And so that's just a different way of growing up. And so the big difference came as I even contemplated this relationship and asking serious questions about, okay. Talk to me about what you know, what you think about your own race. And I asked it that directly, I just, I needed to know what how he would respond would he turn read all the things. And he gave great responses, because he actually had left out of his very white community and like, lived his life in spaces that were ethnically diverse, diverse around nationality, all the things that I would want, right? So that he had an understanding of his whiteness, he understood privilege, he understood racism, he had actually had an analysis very well

read had different experiences. And so I was like, okay, okay, so that felt better. But that was like date two – I kid you not.

SooJin: I'm with you – they need to be vetted hard!

Karla: Yeah - can't just be cute. So that made a difference. And so that's what the difference is, was for me. And I do believe that that's the difference in interracial couples, when one person is a person of color, and the other is white. The differences again, your lived experiences are just different, even if it's a person of color who grew up in an all white community, maybe never even thought about their racial identity, but is perceived as a person of color. The way that you're perceived and the way that you're treated will be different whether you recognize it or not. Like to talk about it or not, there is a difference. And then if you decide to have children, either that you birth or adopt or what have you, who are multiracial. That's when that's going to come up. And so that's the difference as well. Right? When you are partnered with or marry someone who is white, if you're a person of color, the differences you know, there's the potential that your children may look nothing like you. They will more than likely experience things that your partner who is white has never experienced or never thought about. And so all of those things come up again. And are just enhanced and intensified when you decide to have children and raise children together, and you have to be able to have had conversations about what that will look like and how you will, what kind of decisions you'll continue to make, so that you can be an aware and informed, a knowledgeable and antiracist parent. Right. You have to work at that. Yeah, you have to be very intentional, for sure.

SooJin: So, can you say a little bit more about like, have you had struggles and conflict regarding family and friends?

Karla: Raising our biracial children?

SooJin: Yeah. Yeah. With his white family and white friends.

Karla: We haven't I think so it's interesting. So many stories. You know, I will share so no, not in terms of that were contentious or you know. I'm not big into pop culture. But I'm sure like many people may have seen the interview with Megan Markel.

SooJin: Sure, yeah.

Karla: So no person of color was surprised to hear allegations about the white family wondering what color their children...nobody, come on. That's not at all surprising to me as a person of color. We never had anything like that, at least that anyone said to our faces, right? I have no idea because I don't know what folks may have thought or said or anything like that. I will be honest, in this in two ways. So my

dad was not thrilled to learn that I was dating a white man. I will say he was not thrilled and that was a challenge. That was a challenge when we were dating when he realized this was more than just oh, Karla's doing whatever. Right?

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: When he realized after, I think a year that we were still dating, he was clear that this was not acceptable. And I understood why. I completely understood why. And I knew going in for both our families that this could be and I asked my partner, I said, you know, before we decided to start dating, what's your family going to say? And he said, I think they'll be fine with it. I think they'll be surprised. But I don't anticipate any issues. And I said, well, I know my dad will not like this. Right? And so we talked about that. And he didn't. And it was because again, he grew up in the 30s and 40s in the south, right? White men were not a trusted community. And that is not who even though again, he was in the military had friendships, relationships with white folks, and you know, work, all the things for sure. But when it comes to a relationship, he was very much like...

SooJin: Not when it comes to his baby girl!

Karla: Yes and it was based in this very real fear for him of how I would be treated in the relationship by society. So I understood that. And so it didn't create conflict between William and I, some of his siblings didn't understand why, like, why would he be so upset? This is great, blah blah blah. And I had to have those conversations of you know, historically, this doesn't usually work out well, right layer on top of that the history of rape and assault of Black woman by white men, like of course, I completely understood that. So before we actually got married, we got engaged, my dad was like, alright, you want to do this, I love you. And love will supersede my disagreement with this relationship. And actually, he actually liked my partner, we grew up in the same area, our families already knew each other. It really was just, you know, he just did not approve of that. Right. And again, I completely understood and I knew that was the risk I was taking potentially, to lose that relationship with my father, but inside I also knew that our love and our family and our relationship was stronger than that. And so we worked that out. Yeah, right. But that was a concern at the time. The other things that we've encountered with family there was a time when my in-law sent our first daughter a Halloween costume. Oh no, she didn't send, but she was going to. She said, I got a monkey costume for your daughter. At that time, my partner was livid was like, "No, you are not going to give my Black child a monkey costume." And he had to have a conversation with her about what that looks like, the history of how Black folks were stereotyped to be ape-like. And she had no idea. This is my white mother-in-law. She had no idea, just hadn't thought about it. Thankfully he knew, William, my partner's name is William, he knew he was going to be the person to address this because he was as livid as I was, I actually was less livid because I knew she had no idea.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: But he was just like, appalled. And so upset. So those are the things kind of that happened with my white family, things come up that are just this unconscious biases or just unaware of what they're saying. And those are the situations where William will set the record straight or needs to address those sorts of things, and does it in a way that is, and he can do it in a way that can be heard. Actually, though, I think I know that I can do it in a way that can be heard, but again, with his privilege, and his feeling of this, "I need to do this with my family so that they understand the implications." It's great, right? So there'll be those sorts of things. But, you know, I so I don't know with my white family, what they initially thought. I would assume they weren't so pleased, either. And I don't know if "pleased" is the word – maybe this is so outside of what we ever expected our sons or daughters to do. So, but yeah, but never anything blatant from friends or family. Yeah, in answer to that question.

Hannah: So I have a question about, so when you your kids are, I remember middle school age, because that was the episode you were on. So I don't remember the exact ages. But you're kind of getting to the point where, you know, they're going start maybe thinking about more intimate friendships or dating or things in that area.

Karla: Hannah, they are 10 and 12 – they are not ready for that!

Hannah: Well, I don't know. I have to figure out the whole child development thing.

Karla: Seventh grade, that's it.

Hannah: My question about like, how do you and your partner talk to your kids about like, interracial friendships, and maybe at some point, beyond friendship and into more like a dating relationship type of thing.

Karla: You know, we talk about the importance of just relationships in multiple ways, whether it's friends, we are not at any sort of intimate relationship conversation with children.

Hannah: I have a lot to learn, obviously!

Karla: I was raised by older parents who also didn't talk about that sort of thing. So you know, anyway, I digress. We talk about the importance of an ethnically diverse friend group, and specifically about the importance of having friendships, and relationships with people of your racial identities, it's important to find that kinship to find folks who can recognize the things that you're going through, whether it's around racism, your hair, whatever, it is something that someone says to you, if you're in a friend

group, and someone says something about Black folks, it's probably nice if your friend group is diverse enough for you at least have a buddy in that group that looks like you, right? So we talk about that, we're honest about that. We also model in our own friendships that we have interracial friendships, we have friends of all races and ethnicities, and always have and are, you know, explicit in talking about why that is, we live in a predominantly white neighborhood. So for us, it's important that the people we bring into our homes or at least used to pre-COVID are able to be reflective of our own identities and our children's identity so that that's normalized for them. Right. And so we talk about the importance of diverse friendships. First of all, we talk about you want to be you want to surround yourself with people who treat you well, who respect you who care about you who validate and affirm you. That's first.

SooJin: Yes.

Karla: But you know, we're not having conversations about your best friend must be a person of color. No, right? But we involve them and engage them in co-curricular activities so that they will be naturally surrounded by people of different ethnic identities. Right. So the sports that they're in, their elementary school, middle schools actually are fairly ethnically diverse for Minnesota. And so the things that they are involved in, we've noticed and I affirm when friends that come over are, you know, lots of different ethnic identities, I love it, when my kids would have birthday parties. Even up until last year, the friends that come aren't all from their school, right? They're from all over different schools and from all of the different environments that they're in. And it is a very, interracial, multiracial group of kids at their parties. And I love that right? To them it is like, these are just my friends I know from all these different places. But what it shows their friends, their white friends here, who are in more homogenous communities is like, "Oh, huh, it's possible to have this interracial group of friends." And so that's what you just have to do even in our own adult lives, it would be easy for us to surround ourselves just by people who look like us, right? Well, harder for people of color, sometimes, depending upon where you live. And you have to be intentional about creating friendships outside of what's just around you. And so we model that. And, and I talk about that, and William talks about that. And when we find ourselves in activities or things, and we noticed that it's all or mostly white folks - we just actually had this conversation. And we're like, we got to figure out how to diversify this group the next time. Right? Because again, it just grows your community, as well. So yeah, we're again, honest and explicit in those conversations, but also in our actions. Right? We can't talk about the importance of being antiracist people, and have just a totally homogenous friend group, in this white neighborhood we live in, right. So it's about that modeling piece, too.

Hannah: Can you think of like a specific, like, question that one of your kids has raised, like, on the topic that has, or even maybe like a book or something that like, there was like a, like a specific conversation that kind of came out of it? Like an example?

Karla: You know, one that comes to mind when you ask - my son has fair skin. And so if you saw him on his own, I don't know that you a person would think he's Black. Right? I don't think you would think he's white, but you're not going to think he's Black unless you see him with me. But if he was out just with his father, and they didn't know that his mom was Black, no one would think Black. So what this shows up as in school, sometimes when he is with friends, and sometimes the friends are - and he actually has an ethnically diverse class. And sometimes the Black kids would say, if they don't know him, or wasn't in classrooms with him and hadn't seen me. And he'd say something well, as a Black kid, or blah blah blah, it's in class or something. And he's doing his report on a Black person, or anyway he has named and claimed his Blackness. And sometimes the hardest for him to understand is when even the Black kids would say, well, you're not black, you're white. That's hard. And so my conversation with him is that, you know, it's not about the color of your skin, it's about who you are, and where you're from, and your history and your ancestors and all of that. And so we talk about how he can respond to those questions. But that gets hard, because that is messed up, particularly when it's a Black person, I think that's what hurts him the most. Right? When it's a Black person who says that and he's just like, I don't know what to do. Like, why would they say that? And I said, well, if your understanding of ethnic identity is only based on the people that you see, and the Black people that you see have brown skin and the white people have white skin, that's all you know, or see, that's where that comes from. Right and who knows what families are saying, right? So you have to understand and be secure in your identity as a biracial Black kid that that's who you are, and you get to name and claim that right? So again, not easy conversations, but that's when that comes up with friends. And for me, I just want to make sure that my kids, when those things happen, that they don't move away from Blackness and their Black friends who may not always treat them, well, maybe they're not their friends, right who don't treat them well, because that's not what everyone believes. Right. And so that's that line with that. In my experience working in higher ed, that often is what I would hear from multiracial kids who are in college, their experiences of not being accepted by white family and white friends and not being fully accepted by their friends of color, whatever that ethnic identity is. And so then they just sort of don't know what to do and come to school confused. And sometimes they move away from all things people of color, which is then hard in a college environment, when against the same sort of thing, your white friends see you as a person of color. And so but you don't, that's a hard existence in college. So for me and my partner, we are trying to raise our kids to again, always hold on to their identities, and in particularly being biracial Black kids so that they have that to hold on to and remember, even when others might be saying something different.

SooJin: Karla, the story that you just share kind of reminds me of or makes me think about like colorism in communities of color. And is that something that that you talk about? With your kids? or? Yeah, just curious about that?

Karla: You know, we haven't - actually okay - I haven't named it as colorism. But again, because in our families, and in my family, and our extended family, there's so many different skin tones, that and on my side of the family, it exists for sure. I don't know actually, we don't ever talk about the colorism that shows up I think because I grew up in a working class, family, extended family and everything is like there was no time to spend too much time on the colors. And because we're all just Black here, right? And because my parents were older working class, and there was never a question, if someone was fair skinned, they identified as Black, there was no passing. You know what I mean? And you know, colorism is all about, you know, the lighter you are, the more you're accepted in white societies, and there's always this concern that someone will try to pass into whiteness, and what does that mean kind of thing. And so we haven't had the explicit conversation about this is what colorism is. However, what I often do and have intentionally done with my kids is when we talk about our ancestors, and historically folks who - Black folks who were fair skinned, or in this particular instance with my son, when he was like, "I'm black, why don't they think I'm Black?" And we were talking about skin color, then, you know, I will always go historical and say, well, let's look at some folks who look just like you growing up, but were Black and claimed Blackness in the 40s and 50s. You know, with a one drop rule, you were Black, right? There was not even if you tried to pass you couldn't. So we will go there, I will quickly pull up a picture of Charles Drew or Langston Hughes or Thurgood Marshall, you know, those sorts of things to say, listen, there's all different colors and things like that. We haven't yet though, had that direct conversation about the impact of colorism, colorism and what that can mean. But it's probably a good one to start to have. Because I would imagine that shows up more in high school, which my daughter is going to be in in a couple of years. But it is a good conversation to be aware of, or a topic to be aware of for families raising biracial and multiracial children because that's the thing. Right? And how do you make sure that your kids don't see themselves as better than, yeah, a person with darker skin or a particular type of hair or curlier hair or, you know, all of those things start to come up as well. So how as parents, are you engaging in those - so we have those kinds of conversations. For sure, for sure my kids have two different hair textures. I praise them both. I talk about how awesome their hair is. That's the thing. They should know for sure that parents who have multiracial children, particularly if there's a Black parent and a white parent. Hair will be a thing. And so making sure that you are affirming your child's beauty, intelligence, all of those things that they look like because the can be a not nice place, can be a cruel place around those aspects. So how are you affirming those things that are really important as well?

SooJin: So we just have one last question for you. In terms of just wrapping up this conversation, given everything you know, the journey that you've been on antiracist parenting with a white partner and raising biracial children. What do you wish you knew back then that you know now?

Karla: What do I wish I knew back then that I know now. So here's the thing. That's a little hard for me, because I did so much thinking beforehand.

SooJin: Ah, yes.

Karla: And I say that to say, you know, so here's what I would tell folks who either are potentially going to have or raise multiracial children with a partner who is in the context of a white partner and a person of color. You need to have these conversations about race and get comfortable talking about race and identity with your partner, or partners, or whoever's raising these children, right? Because if you're not comfortable before you have the children, imagine how uncomfortable you will be when your child comes home and says something racist themselves or experiences something and you have to intervene, and you've never talked about, right? And having that conversation about how the kid is going to identify, because it'll be a lot of boxes that you're going to need to check for your child's racial identity. And you want to have talked about that in advance. And, yeah, I think, and I also thought about where are we going to raise our kids, what kind of neighborhood I mean, that is important that your child or your children have access to on a regular basis, seeing people of color, people who look like them. So that, again, that's normalized. Because you have to provide a counter-narrative to the racist ideas and practices that are out there. And so that's something I knew going in, but it's so I guess, I would say that's even more reaffirmed. Right? For us, we moved to a suburb because that's what we could afford. You know, I didn't say I want to live in a mostly white suburb, we didn't say to ourselves, and we, you know, we were a little concerned about that. But there's the reason why we live in that particular suburb we live in versus another one we could have lived in, because we want to be in a city that was more ethnically diverse and progressive than the one right next to us that we could have moved to, but we intentionally chose this city for a reason where we live, right? We wanted our kids to be able to be around folks. But that's really important. Because once your kids get to school, really, regardless of the school, but particularly if you live in a white suburb, you have to have opportunities for them to socialize with other kids of color. And your friends need to be ethnically diverse. And so if you have to start building those when your kids are babies like that, it's just so, so important. And so all of those things were just like intensified that I already had thought about and knew, you know, that piece around. And a friend of mine said this to me, before I embarked in my relationship with my partner, who was also in an interracial relationship at the time and this piece around, you know, you have to come to terms with the fact that your children may look nothing like you. It's a thing. I mean, it's the thing, right? And so again, it's those concepts. So that's, and so what I learned was because one of my children is not necessarily perceived as Black when you first see him, outside of me being there. I hadn't necessarily prepared myself for that. How often that would come up. And so you have to think that's a thing. And so how. So I think I'm hyper aware of that. Sometimes. You know, I'm glad that right now, my kids identify as biracial Black kids, and they're proud of it. And that's just the thing that it is and that's great. And, but again, there was an intentionality for that that was important to me and my partner and our families. And again, they're always surrounded by Black folks anyway. So again, it's just sort of that's normal for them. Now it's the piece around, you know, how are you perceived or read by

your own people? So that'll be a thing. So that's the one thing I hadn't really thought about. But I have to think about.

SooJin: Yeah. And how are you navigating that? That's got to be hard.

Karla: But again, because he identifies as Black, it's easier.

SooJin: Yeah, sure.

Karla: And, you know, one thing that I do that's intentional - whenever it's a new doctor, or a new class, or a new school, I'm right there. Yeah, I'm his mom.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: Because I want people to be clear, yeah. I don't want any shenanigans to be happening. Or any surprise when I show up to a parent teacher conference, or anything like that. I'm at every game, I'm at the games, I'm at all the things just so that we're clear in case there was any not knowing.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: So there's intentionality there that you have to think about. And I again, a lot of this is, you know, part of just history that you have to understand. When I take my son and I know I'm not mentioning my daughter as much because she is perceived as and reads as a person of color. That's not as large of a concern. But for him, it's like, I have to think about that. When he was a little, I had to take him to the ER for what have you. I got his birth certificate in my pocket. Because when we show up, I might not be perceived as mom right away. Those are the things I have to think about.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: So that's the one thing for interracial couples to think about when they have kids that I probably didn't think so hard about because I didn't think about what that would be like, if my son if we show up at school, or particularly any type of hospital or anything like that, or the ER, I had to think about that. Like I better have a picture of me with him when he was a baby, birth certificate, my I.D. all of those things. In case I'm ever questioned about parents. That's it. That's it's a real thing.

SooJin: It is a real thing. When you're not prepared. It can go sideways, and horribly and yeah, very quickly. So gosh, yeah, that kind of navigation, like constantly having to be on guard and prepare for how people will perceive you.

Karla: Yes.

SooJin: Oh, my gosh, that is so exhausting.

Karla: It's exhausting. And it was more common when they were babies. So I would say that's a thing. I have prepared myself for a little bit. But I was surprised at how often I was misperceived.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: As parents of my biracial children, when they were babies outside of the people who knew us, that's a thing. And if you're not ready for it, and again, I think it potentially was gendered. I don't know if someone who is male identified and I think in Minnesota, the assumption is, if I'm a Black male or male of color with this child who is fair skinned or whatever - that's probably their kid my partner's white or, you know, whatever.

SooJin: Yeah, right.

Karla: Or if it's a white parent with a child of color, the assumption is, oh, well, there's an assumption of that kid is adopted.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: Or if it is a white woman, the assumption will be oh, well, the father is of color.

SooJin: Yeah.

Karla: But very rarely are people assuming that my partner is white. Or when my white male partner is out with our kids, the assumptions are more likely that they are adopted. Not that mom is Black. Right? We just know that as a couple because of the faces of surprise when we show up.

SooJin: Or that you're the nanny.

Karla: Well, that's usually what happens. They'll say, oh, that baby's so cute. That's usually the thing the way that shows up. Oh, what a cute baby rather than Oh, your baby's cute. Like honestly like it's real like that navigation and again, you just have to go in understanding that that's a thing or whose baby is that? I got that a lot. Like, are you kidding? So I would say that was another thing that surprised me the frequency at which I would get that - and in different contexts. This would be with some folks of color. And with white folks, I would get that a lot. Again, I understood it - didn't make it hurt less or

didn't make it less aggravating but it is thing. I think, again, if you haven't thought about your own racial identities or thought about what might come up or understand the colorism, or understand privilege, or all of that sort of thing, it just makes it harder then to navigate. Or if you don't have a diverse, ethnically diverse friend group that you then can process these things with, that will make it harder. So I think for me, those were the things that were surprising and made me glad that I had already thought about these things and already had the communities that I needed to be able to process all of that stuff that came up, that comes up.

SooJin: Karla, wow, such gems of wisdom and advice. And my goodness, I learned so much. And I consider myself very thoughtful about these things. So yeah, thank you so much.

Hannah: Karla, anything that you would like to promote or lift up before we do the lightning round?

Karla: Oh, I love a promotion opportunity. So actually a couple things. There's this book, it's really old like from the 90s. But it's a good one. So there's a book on this topic. It's called *I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla* again, there's a reason it's called that. *I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla : Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race Conscious World*. And I'll email you all that title, it was a book that was the first one I had found about this topic way before I had kids. But when I was in this relationship with this white man, who is now my husband, because I had thought about - how do we raise these kids? It was a foreign thing to me, I just had never thought about it. Good book. And to this day, I would recommend that. So that's one thing. Second thing that I want to lift up, I shared that I work at Girl Scouts River Valleys, and one of the initiatives my team works on is something called mentored troops. And it is an opportunity to create troops to ensure that we're creating troops that are ethnically diverse, with leaders who are ethnically diverse. And so if any of our listeners are people of color, or your children or your children who identify as girls are people of color, and you're interested in creating a troop that is ethnically diverse, you can check us out at: <https://www.girlscoutsvr.org/communityengagement> and check out the work that we're doing and yeah, we are creating new troops now. So lift that up.

SooJin: Great. We'll definitely include that in our show notes.

Hannah: Thank you. Okay, so we're going to do our lightning round. Antiracist parenting or caretaking is...

Karla: Ongoing an ongoing process.

Hannah: What's the last thing your kids did to make you smile?

Karla: Oh, they're always making me smile, the very last thing that they did probably played their piano and their instruments. So I love that. I love that they love music.

Hannah: Yeah, that's awesome. What are you reading right now?

Karla: Of course, I'm reading too many things all at once. But I'm reading - I'm finishing up *How to be an Antiracist*. I just started *Black Fatigue*. And I also am in the middle of *The Mothers*, which is a fiction novel. I need to just pick one and go with it. But I just can't. So many books.

SooJin: But it's a wide range. It's not like they are all the same genre.

Karla: Right.

SooJin: So I feel you on that - we're complex human. And we need different things in different ways.

Karla: Exactly, at different times.

Hannah: What are you doing to take care of yourself?

Karla: Good question. Well, meditation for me is very important. Every morning and every night. I do that and exercise at least 30 minutes of moving my body is a ritual every day that I have even when I'm tired. I do it in the morning because otherwise it just will not get done. Yeah, those are two of the main things I do and being in community in some way. With someone. Yeah.

SooJin: How long do you meditate?

Karla: In the morning, it literally is like two minutes. It's like just when I wake up and then in the evening 10 to 15 minutes just depends on the time.

SooJin: Oh okay.

Hannah: What's one thing you're committed to doing in your antiracist parenting journey?

Karla: Being completely open and honest with my kids about racism and how it shows up and how they can combat it and how they can, even as young people see it, recognize it and address it. So we are completely committed to that. And again, I say we because it's a partnership like, again, raising kids, and in particular, multiracial kids is a partnership with your caregivers, whoever those people are being on the same page with that, but yeah, making sure that's the commitment. It's like, I want them to be

informed even when they get tired of mom saying, "Did you notice that? What do you see here? What do you think about that?" They are, and like I said, the older they get. Well, right now they don't get as tired of it, I think because there's so much of it, that we see. And that they can see and understand now that all I have to say is, "Oh, what do you think about what happened in Atlanta?" Right? "What do you think, you know, what have they not said about the shooter?" So what can we infer like those sorts of things, and they already are right there. They're like, understanding how things can show up so that we are committed to continuing that and then also having them see their potential agency within their smaller spheres of influence what they can do. So we're committed to that.

Hannah: Great. And the last question, and partly why you're here today is what would you like Antiracist Parenting Podcast to explore, investigate, answer in a future episode?

Karla: You all are doing such an awesome job, I just want to give that shout out to you all about these issues that folks don't ever talk about. If you haven't done this one, I don't think you've done anything about building relationships across race. So building friendships, because again, that's major and raising antiracist children, they need to see you actually having close relationships with people outside of your race and identity. Because it's possible even in Minnesota as a person of color for me to only be friends with even if I live in a white community to only be friends with and only interact with people of color. Right, which we need as people of color living in Minnesota that I believe is a necessity, particularly right now. And at the same time. Whether you're a person of color, or a white person, your kids need to see you having real, authentic relationships where people are coming to your home, you're going to their home, and you are building friendships, that aren't surface level. But it's hard to just build relationships as adults in general, so layer on race, and all the things that could come up with that, that also is hard. And it's a particularly emotional laboring task for people of color. But you know what I mean, but our kids need to see it. So that would be an interesting topic to explore. What are the fears around that? What goes well, what goes bad? Like? That would be interesting. Because, you know, we're all we're not all on Facebook. But as my kids get older, and are in different things, and sports and things, you know, folks are like friend me want to friend me, it's like, well, I mean, I need to look at your Facebook friends. I can get a sense of how knowledgeable or not are you in terms of these things? Or what's your lived experience? And oftentimes, you know, those Facebook feeds can be telling. Facebook feeds and weddings. That's when you can see how homogenous or diverse your friend groups are. So I think that'd be interesting conversation.

Hannah: Yeah, thanks. And that reminds me of our guest, one of our guests from episode three, Kate Towle, actually, since that episode she has published a book on this topic of interracial friendships.

Karla: Okay.

Hannah: So yeah, definitely, we need to explore that more. So thank you. Anything else before we say goodbye?

Karla: I don't think so. Just again, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you. And I'm just again, so thankful and grateful to you both for creating this podcast for us to have these kinds of conversations.

Hannah: Thank you.

SooJin: I don't know about you, Hannah. But like listening to this podcast if I were a new parent, or thinking about having children. Wow, this so rich, right in terms of advice and things to be thinking through and reflecting on. So thank you so much for dropping all that today. Thanks, Karla. Okay, take care. Bye, bye.

Hannah: So good to see Karla again!

SooJin: It's so good to see her and to, yeah, I felt like she was completely and totally in her element. Like, she is an expert in this area. Um, and she's right. There's not a lot of people who talk about these things. And so I just think of just how valuable this particular episode is, in terms of all the insights and advice that she's passing along, based on all that she's learned and thought about, on her journey.

Hannah: So yeah, I mean, I just can't get over the amount of just mental, emotional, physical energy that goes into like pre-planning, every possible scenario, outcome, perception, interaction. And, you know, and it obviously has, you know, paid off because, like, when she's talking like, yeah, like things come up, but like this foundation that she has really built to support any possible scenario that could come up is I mean, obviously, like, like it helpful in that in whatever happens in her family, but it's also like, without doing that preparation, if you're not in the habit of preparing, and also just like, why do people have to prepare so much like, you know, like, just thinking about that whole, like, experience, and especially as a white person, I don't have to really think about most of the things that she was talking about. And so I just was like, so overwhelmed by that reality. And so anyways, that's what I'm thinking about right now.

SooJin: I can't get over how, in everything that she was saying, like in all of the examples in all of her kind of reflections, she kept talking about the word or kept using the word "intentional."

Hannah: Yes.

SooJin: And she is one of the most intentional, deliberate people I know. And I think for me, it continues to land like that that word continues to land on me every time she says it. Because it just

continues to be a reminder for me that I need to be super intentional and deliberate about everything, like everything is a choice, whether or not the choice and the decision happens automatically without you even thinking about it. It's still a choice. Right? And the more informed and the more conscious we can be about the choices that we're making, the better it is not only for us, but also for our children. And it's because of her intentionality that she has created such a strong foundation that has mitigated all the ways in which those scenarios could have gone sideways. Right. And, and, and in doing that, being so intentional, she's protecting her children. You know, that like, that's essentially what it comes down to. And so it makes me so this conversation makes me reflect and ponder on what are the decisions I'm making that are just autopilot, you know, that are not conscious. But I'm just like breezing through the day. And it's like, become habit, that I just do this. So, I think that that's my biggest takeaway for me is to be more reflective and conscious and trying to identify the decisions that I'm making that are not conscious choices.

Hannah: Yeah.

SooJin: So remember how the conversation from Lena that we had? It made me be more conscious about like where trauma is showing up in my life? And I feel like the same thing is happening here in this moment after the conversation with Karla, is where is unconscious choice showing up in my life?

Hannah: Yeah.

SooJin: Yeah, so I'm going to start being more intentional about that and trying to like create kind of an inventory of where that's happening because I want to be as intentional as I can be about everything.

Hannah: Yeah. Okay, so as far as my commitment, I think I'm definitely going to find a copy, either buy or get through the library of *Kindred* that you recommended to me. And I'm right now I'm at this place where I'm trying to figure out what or how I should approach talking to my kids about the shootings in Atlanta and in Boulder. And so far, we haven't said anything to them about it. I don't think they know. But I'm thinking a lot about that. And so I'm going to figure out how I want to approach that. That'll be my other commitment.

SooJin: Awesome. Wow, what a rich conversation.

Hannah: Yes.

SsooJin: So thankful that we have Karla in our community.

Hannah: Yeah, just that word "intentional." I think it's like, she's such a model.

SooJin: such a model.

Hannah: And that really, I think we all can, can work on.

SooJin: So before we say goodbye to our listeners, I just wanted to uplift this opportunity. So it's, you know, we are what about less than two months away from the anniversary of George Floyd's death, and on May 25th, there's going to be a day of celebration taking place here in Minneapolis. And Vice President Kamala Harris is actually going to be at George Floyd square on that day, on May 25th. So just want to give people a heads up about that, as well as I am a co-editor with Sha Cage of an anthology project called *Ode to George*, which is book celebrating, reflecting, and mourning the life of George Floyd and, and particularly George Floyd square, the site that served as a memorial during the summer of 2020. And so we are accepting submissions, and we will put in our show notes where you can go to submit, we're accepting poetry, personal essays, visual art, whether it be a drawing or photograph. We're accepting all that right now, and would love to receive your submissions. So with that, we thank you so much to our listeners, we hit over 1,500 downloads, yay, we could not have done that without you. So thank you so much for tuning in, listening, and I'm being a part of this community.

Hannah: Yes. Thank you so much. And we're wishing everyone peace and wellness.

SooJin: We just want to say thank you for joining us today. You can find more information about us and past episodes on our website antiracistparentingpodcast.com. A big shout out to Mike Myth Productions for the intro and outro music.

Hannah: This work requires us to challenge ourselves and take care of ourselves. Be well.

SooJin: Be antiracist.