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"Hear Us, See Us!": How Mothers of Color Transform Family and Community Relationships Through Grassroots Collective Action

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"HEAR US, SEE US!": HOW MOTHERS OF COLOR TRANFORM FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH GRASSROOTS COLLECTIVE ACTION

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Jennifer, Alexandria, VA

For Evelyn

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation illuminates the local grassroots collective action of women of color and the transformative effects their community organizing efforts have on community and family relationships. Prior research highlights the reciprocal relationship between identity formation and collective action (Moore 2008; Gravante and Poma 2016; Polletta 2001; Whittier 2013; White 1999). Analysts have studied how the intersecting identities of participants motivate and contour collective action (Crenshaw 1991; Law 2012; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015) and how collective action processes influence participants' gendered lives and biographies (McAdam 1999; Perry 2013; Warren, Mapp and Kuttner 2015). Less understood however, are how participation in local collective action shapes and is shaped by *family relationships*. The current study addresses this research gap by examining the intersection of grassroots community organizing and family life among primarily African American and Latina mothers and grandmothers who live in materially poor neighborhoods in Chicago. The study focuses on a "family-focused" model of community organizing led by women of color, whose intersecting gender, race, class, and immigrant identities are seldom supported by traditional, stereotypically masculine models of contestation that often ignore or devalue their family lives.

Findings are based on 15 months of participant observations of family-focused collective action and 47 in-depth interviews with "motherleaders" (Cossyleon 2018) from Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), a Chicago-based community organizing institution with a statewide reach. The central sociological finding is that collective action has the propensity to

transform cross-community and family relationships among hyper marginalized women of color. These social transformations were achieved, in part, through COFI guided *race-conscious nudges*, meaningful organizing symbols, and the practice of what I call *restorative kinship*. Findings indicate how institutions can help to bridge racial and cultural differences, the importance of organizing symbols in shaping collective participant meanings and family lives, and how community organizing leaders used collective action techniques and experiences to transform intimate family relationships. Research, practice, and policy all need to uplift and take seriously the family lives and intersecting identities of participants of collective action. Scholarship must continue to explore how the collective action participation of marginalized groups produces intimate social effects that are often deemed separate from the organization and development of participants and their families.

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN OF COLOR AND THE INTIMATE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

In April 2016, parent leaders from some of the most marginalized[1] communities in Chicago gathered for an intimate half-day training in preparation for a trip to Springfield to meet with their legislators. These leaders, most of whom were mothers and grandmothers of color, participated in mock scenarios, taking turns telling legislators why they needed to support several bills that would deeply impact participants' families and children. An African American leader named Jenna enthusiastically said to the group, "A lot of you have gone through the leadership trainings and have made changes in your own lives and families. This is when we look to change laws and policies that keep our families from thriving. This is serious business." Sandwiched between community organizing trainings and important policy changes, Jenna referred to a component of grassroots collective action that is often missed by social movement scholars: how mobilization processes interactively shape participants, their relationships, *and* their families. The family life of participants and their collective action experiences should not be discussed as separate entitles, but rather as co-shaping processes that intimately contour social relationships. This is especially true among groups who have been marginalized on multiple fronts because of their race, gender, and immigration experience, and who often depend on intimate relationships

[1] Following Olivos (2006), I describe underrepresented communities as subordinated, marginalized or oppressed to denote a critical perspective, as opposed to using such terms as "at-risk," or "disadvantaged" (14). Exceptions exist for direct quotes.

for survival.

Collective action encompasses the activities of groups towards social change and comprises one of the few ways marginalized communities demand and enact their power. Groups who are subordinated because of their race, gender, religion, and or immigration experiences, as well as for many other reasons, participate in collective action to acquire social, ideological and material change. Importantly, at a personal level, participation in these movements also shapes and is shaped by participants' social relationships. Related to social movements, *community organizing* is a local form of collective action, where people with similar grievances build relationships with each other and with other community stakeholders and policy-makers to address those grievances (Christens, Inzo, and Faust 2014). Through community organizing, I study and learn from local collective action to provide evidence grounded in everyday people, whose efforts are inextricably connected to social justice movements worldwide. Scholarship has tended to analyze collective behavior such as crowds, protests, community organizing, and social movements as separate entities. However, it is useful to engage broadly with analysts who document varied components of group mobilization, within a wide range of contexts because doing so provides us a more holistic understanding, including especially, of the affective and intimate social effects of collective action.

Prior research highlights the reciprocal relationship between identity formation and collective action (Moore 2008; Gravante and Poma 2016; Polletta 2001; Whittier 2013; White 1999). Specifically, many analysts have studied how the intersecting identities of participants motivate and contour collective action (Crenshaw 1991; Law 2012; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015) and how collective action processes influence participants' gendered lives and biographies (McAdam 1999; Perry 2013; Warren, Mapp and Kuttner 2015). Most of these studies investigate

how *individual* lives intersect with collective action, and many are focused on biography. Less understood however, are the ways that participation in collective social change efforts shapes and is shaped by *family relationships*. By family relationships, I mean the social interactions among constructed networks of "kin and non-kin," (Stack 1974:31) often spread over several households and geographic contexts.

This study addresses this research gap by examining the intersection of grassroots community organizing and family life among primarily African American and Latina mothers who live in materially poor neighborhoods in Chicago. I refer to these women and some men as "leaders," to use the language they employ within their community organizing activities. To this end, I ask:

1) How are family and collective action reciprocally shaped through cross-community organizing?

2) How do groups organize across differences that have often divided them?

3) How do both of these processes shape leaders' social relationships?

To answer these questions, I use mainly ethnographic methods, including participant observations and one-one-one interviews with community organizers (leaders and staff) affiliated with a nonprofit organization located in Chicago called Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), carried out from April 2016 to July 2017. I also supplement evidence from these sources with a content analysis of community organizing materials collected during the time of the research.

In this introductory chapter, I examine the contributions and shortfalls of three areas of research that build on each other and inform my study. First is work that recognizes the importance of an intersectional approach to identities, which breaks historical patterns of erasing

the grassroots collective action of women of color. Second, is scholarship that acknowledges collective action as a gendered and gendering process. And third is research on the social effects of collective action. Situated within these combined fields of inquiry, my study contributes to collective action research by documenting the interplay of community organizing and family relationships. I end this chapter with an introduction of the remaining chapters.

The Collective Action of Women of Color

Intersectional Identities

The concept of "intersectional identities" was introduced in academia by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) to explain the experiences of black women within the Violence Against Women Movement. As Crenshaw explains, "because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (1244, emphasis in original). Crenshaw (1991) points to how race, gender, class, and sexuality interact to shape black women's everyday experiences, and importantly, their experiences of politics. What Crenshaw calls "political intersectionality," is also fundamentally important to the study of the collective action of women of color. "The fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas" is an ongoing problem (Crenshaw 1991: 1252). Ultimately, simplifying or homogenizing intersecting identities within political discourse or action decreases the possibilities for women of color to claim their power as agents of change (Crenshaw 1991).

The study of identity within social movements has widened in scope in the past several decades. Analyses of identity have focused on shared or collective identities, the expression of identity through mobilization tactics, and the recognition or reconstruction of identity as a movement goal (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Bernstein 1997; Polletta 1994; Taylor and

Whittier 1992). Scholars for instance, document how intersectional gender identity motivates and shapes collective action (Bailey and Stallings 2017; Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Kelly 2015; McKee, Hurwitz, and Taylor 2012; Auyero 2003; Messner 1997; White 1999). Other researchers argue that regardless of explicit movement intentions, participants construct identity through their participation in collective action. Joane Nagel (1995), for example shows that collective action among Native Americans helped to create individual and collective "ethnic renewal," which she defines as acquiring or asserting a new ethnic identity and reconstructing an ethnic community, respectively (948). Others argue that identity making should be analyzed together with material interests, incentives, and collective action strategy (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Wulff, Bernstein and Taylor 2015). Also, Moore and Hala (2002) importantly point out that people (identities) organize social structure, including social movement organizations, which take shape and evolve through social interaction and the contextual meanings participants make.

Less directly engaged with these forms of scholarship, a group of scholars have begun to write about how the intersecting identities of women of color shape and are shaped by their participation in collective action, and specifically how intersecting race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration experiences of women of color motivate and sustain their collective action just as much as their material motivations do (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015; Law and Martens 2012; Pardo 1988). One of the reasons for this, they argue, is that the social identities of these groups are often subordinated in society and are made fragile by unstable political and economic conditions.

Across many disciplines, women of color have written about intersectionality within their own political struggles. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, dozens of feminists of color, mostly Latina women, document how multiple identities converge in their consciousness and social life,

amidst shifting political landscapes (Moraga and Anzaldúa and 1981, 2015). Their stories highlight familial and institutional conflict that only fully make sense through an analytic framework that recognizes their complex identities, and which takes seriously that that politics is not just a set of interests lodged in people's heads, as most scholarship has assumed, but lodged, also, in the body, "a theory in the flesh" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015, 19). This framework acknowledges that skin color, homeland, and sexuality combined create a political identity out of necessity. Within collective action, intersectional identities (Crenshaw 1991) and a theory in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015) are theoretical pillars that extend far beyond including women of color at decision and policy-making tables. Instead, these are active processes of recognizing that women of color should and need not be separated into neat categories in order to participate in political struggles, and places into sharp relief the critical importance of understanding that political identities are in-the-making, not stable and fixed, for those who are socially and materially marginalized.

Yet much of this work focuses on individual adult identities. Overlooked, in these analyses of the intersecting identities of women of color is the importance of family. In the study of collective action, we have several indications that family can serve to support or stymie collective action (Chavez 2000; Fantasia 1988; Law 2012). For women, their family obligations can be used by others as an excuse to rob women of public leadership roles, which are often held by men (Chavez 2000). Perhaps the most purposeful examination of the family lives of women of color and collective action can be found in the anthology *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind: Concrete Ways to Support Families in Social Justice Movements and Communities*, edited by Victoria Law and China Martens (2012). In this volume, scholar-activists and writers describe how gender, race, and class shape their everyday experiences and give suggestions for how allies

can support the collective action of single, queer, and or materially poor mothers and caregivers. The anthology also speaks to the racial, gender, ability, and age divide within movements and pushes readers to fight for more supportive struggles that support the needs of agents of change. As Law argues, "Various social justice movements and radical left philosophies challenge us to create personal and social change but often provide no support for mothers who try to do so." (2012: 3). Law's assertion is a key starting point for this study, which provides evidence for how a family-focused model of collective action that supports the intersectional identities of women of color works, and how it might be extended.

The Systematic Exclusion of Women Organizers of Color

For women of color, recognition within social movements they have helped to create and sustain has been a continuous struggle. Historically, research on collective behavior has placed considerable attention to the most publicly recognized actors of contestation. For a long time, national social movements and the work of men within collective action have been elevated by scholars as the catalyst of social change. Doing this has ignored the "intersections of oppressions" that fuel and shape social movements and has "erase[d] the activism of blacks, women and poor people" (Perry 2016: 97, 99). Women have often been initiators and sustainers of movements, from the recent #BlackLivesMatter to the Civil Rights and Farmworkers Movement; yet they have often been erased from these movements[2]. Women of color experience what Barnett (1993) calls the "triple constraint of gender, class, and race," yet they have always been the foundations and often-invisible leaders of social justice movements.

[2] The #SayHerName movement is an organized reaction to the invisibility of women within the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King certainly merit recognition for their charismatic leadership in the Civil Rights and National Farm Workers Movement (NFWM) (Ganz 2009), but not at the expense of expunging the grassroots work of women of color from history, politics, and social science scholarship. Within the Civil Rights Movement and the NFWM women of color raised consciousness of the problems that faced their communities and increased the democratic participation of African Americans and Chicanos. These activities sparked and sustained both movements. The black women leaders of the Civil Rights Movement are better known now as a result of scholarship that is intentional about uncovering the hidden figures of the movement (Barnett 1993; Robnett 1997; Ransby 2003). For example, Brown-Nagin's study of Septima Clark and other women at the Highlander Folk School showed that these women taught African Americans how to read, educated them on their rights, and offered strategies for fighting their oppression locally and collectively (Brown-Nagin 1999). Simultaneously, it was also African American women, like Fannie Lou Hamer, whom Robnett calls "bridge leaders" (1997), who recruited people to supporters in the fight for racial equality through grassroots organizing of the black community (19). Refusing to take public transportation, disregarding rules about where to sit, organizing around the right to vote, and peacefully demonstrating on city streets were all strategies collectively employed largely because of the disseminating efforts of African American women (Robnett 1997).

Similarly, materially poor women of color built the UFWM from the ground up. Lili Flores (2014) highlights that although Cesar Chavez is publicly remembered worldwide to this day for his important efforts, "neglected heroines" of the movement, like Helen Fabela and Dolores Huerta, remain largely unrecognized (see also Garcia 2008). Both women navigated motherhood, volunteered extensively in organizing activities, handled administrative duties,

registered voters, taught citizenship classes, and heavily advised Cesar Chavez. Moreover, many unnamed women in the movement held religious vigils, participated in picketing, were sprayed with pesticides, were arrested, and suffered violence at the hands of anti-union representatives. Yet, their fundamental contributions to the movement are often deemed auxiliary to the efforts of men. Overlooking the work of women, particularly lower-income women of color, within collective action is an explicit display and practice of power that excludes people based on their gender, ethnicity, race, and class position (Smith 1990; Pardo 1998).

As some of the scholarship above, has shown, within the past several decades, scholars have lessened the invisibility of women of color through research that documents women's important contributions to social change efforts across the world (Feldman and Stall 2004; Perry 2016; Pardo 1998; Brodkin Sacks 1988). Women have been at the forefront of movements around oil wars in Nigeria (Turner and Brownhill 2002), environmental justice in Central Appalachia and Atlanta, GA (Bell and Braun 2010; Gomez. Shafiei, and Johnson 2011), labor and union movements in Canada and Thailand (Coulter 2011; Mills 2005), reproductive and welfare rights (Silliman, Fried, Gerber Ross, and Guitierrez 2004; Nadasen 2002), among others. In these and other cases, women from socially marginalized groups have been the leaders of collective struggles.

Methodologically, scholarship at the local level has widened our understandings of collective action largely led by women of color (Hong 2011; Naples 1998; Swarts 2008; Smock 2004; Warren, Mapp and Kuttner 2015; Wood and Fulton 2015). We have learned for instance, about the crucial work of Puerto Rican parents in the Bronx, NY who fought to create the first bilingual public school (Back 2011) and the efforts of Mexican-American women activists in Los Angeles, CA who used their networks to improve their schools and churches (Pardo 1998).

We have evidence of the interracial alliances of Black and white low-income women in Durham, NC who challenged the closing of a racially integrated school (Greene 2011; Greene 2005). We became aware of the work of Barbara McKinney and other low-income Black women who fought to create one of the first nutrition programs for malnourished infants in Memphis, TN (Green 2011). As a result, we have a greater understanding of how the work of women within local communities has influenced systemic change. Still however, we know considerably less about the interplay of local collective action and the family relationships of these grassroots participants.

Collective Action as a Gendered and Gendering Process

Gender, inseparable from race, class, sexuality, other identities, is both embedded in and constructed through collective action (Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Whittier 2013). Collective action is simultaneously a gendered and gendering process, where "advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker 1990: 146, as cited by Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000). Gender is often associated with sex but is not assigned by sex; it is performed and constructed through interactive relationships (West and Zimmerman 1987) and encompasses the experiences of people who are non-conforming to gender categories and LGBT groups. Operating at various levels, socially and as a system of hierarchy, Lorber (1994) describes gender as an institution. Although I am intentional in reviewing research on women, I acknowledge that gender analysis within social movements similarly includes the study of men and masculinity (see Hodapp 2017; Messner 1997; Kimmel 2013; Heath 2003; Newton 2005; Okun 2014).

In the previous section, I introduced examples of women's organizing during the Civil Rights and the UFWM. These examples highlight at least three processes of gender within collective action. First, is the propensity of mothers of color to be involved in these collective endeavors as a necessity. Second, is how gender operates within movements that do not explicitly pursue overt gender-focused goals (see Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Shaw 2016; Taylor 1999; Viterna and Fallon 2008). And third, are the gendered strategies of relationship building and teaching, which women employed within their organizing efforts. Examining these processes further reveals additional aspects collective action as a gendered and gendering process.

Through social movements, participants construct, frame, reinforce, and define gender, while movement processes also serve to exclude groups who do not align with normative gender expectations. Research finds that women construct a feminist consciousness situated in their collective action experiences (Milkman and Terriquez 2012). Participants use gender to frame social movement goals, and as a cultural resource within social movement activities (Johnson 2015; Oliviero 2011; Romero 2008; Williams 1995). Social movement actors construct gender difference through collective action, which reinforces gender stratification (Taylor 1999). Moreover, movements led by white, middle class, and heterosexual feminists have often either ignored or misinterpreted the experiences of women of color and LGBTQ communities (hooks 1981; Gumbs, Martens, Williams, and Ross 2016; Lorde 2007; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015; Ortega 2006).

Studies of women of color, written by women of color, help to uncover the unique collective action processes of these groups. For instance, black women in the Anti-Rape Movement shared songs, poems, and testimonies to pay homage to the struggles of their women

ancestors (White 1999) and black women used their experiences of intersecting oppressions in their fight for land rights in Salvador, Brazil (Perry (2016: 94). Perry (2016) calls this process "mobilized intersectionality," and argues that women were the leaders and initiators of this grassroots effort. This dissertation builds on scholarship that emphasizes the gendered processes of collective action because this work has made considerable strides and progress towards uncovering how intersecting identities matter within collective action.

Within mainstream community organizing literature, Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) were among the first to highlight how organizational structures of mobilization are gendered. They compare the famous Saul Alinsky model with a less-known women-centered model of community organizing at a time when women's unique organizing efforts were increasingly coming ashore. Stall and Stoecker (1998) show that the women-centered model is comprised of largely backstage and often invisibilized organizing that connects the personal and political, while the Alinsky model begins in the public sphere, separating private issues as distracting unless they serve to support public sphere organizing (Stall and Stoecker 1998). The authors acknowledge considerable variance among and within each model, hinting that no two organizing efforts are identical, nor is any organizing model intrinsically superior.

This variation is important to understand, however regardless of the formal model or approach groups use, mobilization activities have been shown by other scholars to be diverse. Reger (2002) shows that even within the same organization (National Organization for Women), some feminist participants gravitated towards a collectivist mobilization structure as a rejection of hierarchy, while others preferred a bureaucratic structure that reinforced hierarchy. Brodkin Sacks' (1988) research similarly illustrates divergent processes for men and women within the same movement. Her study documents how hospital support staff, sustained primarily by black

women, attempted to form a union at Duke University Hospital in the 1970s. Whereas black women leaders, or "centerwomen," were key in "consciousness-raising" speaking up at group meetings, building relationships through backstage organizing activities, it was men who held public leadership, speaking, and negotiating roles within the movement (Brodkin Sacks 1988: 121). Similarly, Robnett's (1997) appraisal of the Civil Rights Movement contends that race, class, and gender largely determined who became and stayed a formal leader.

Within social movements, motherhood has been one axis around which organizing has taken place. Scholarship has shown that mothers have been excluded from public leadership positions (Chavez 2000; Law 2012). Another set of research shows that through collective action, participants both extend and redefine mothering identities and ideologies (Coe 2015; Feijoo and Nari 1994; Naples 1998; Tucker 2004; Zwerman 1994). From grandmothers' participation in nativist movements (Romero 2008), to mothers' engagement with armed clandestine groups (Zwerman 1994), mothering identities are indubitably interwoven with race, class, gender, and immigration experiences (Naples 1998; Pardo 1998; Ruiz 2000). In fact, the survival of materially poor households often depends on the grassroots community organizing of women of color, most or many of whom are mothers (Anand 2017; Chant and Mcllwaine 2016; Feldman and Stall 2004). Naples' (1998) concept of "activist mothering" describes the gendered understanding of collective action and mothering as a simultaneous struggle against racism, sexism, and poverty. Similarly, Pardo (1998) argues that the Mexican-American women in her study regarded their community organizing as an extension of their identities as mothers. In Latin America, the gendered interests of poor women have been "instrumentalised by political forces" to organize mothers around the collective rights of water and the education of children (Molyneux 2001:157), noting how mothers are positioned to engage in these necessarily

collective efforts. Elsewhere, I have discussed the juncture of motherwork and leadership through my use of the term motherleader to describe the inseparability of these processes (Cossyleon 2018).

Although we are making strides in the right direction, in terms of understanding how gender (and intersecting identities) shape collective action processes and experiences, research and practice indicate we still have work to do. In particular, as collective action scholars, we need to focus more attention on the collective action of immigrants (Menjivar and Agadjanian 2007; Andrews 2014), on understanding why black and brown women continuously struggle to live out their multidimensional identities within collective action (Brown, Ray, Summers and Fraistat 2017; Collins 2017; Law 2012), and on learning about and building models of contestation that support the intersectional identities of participants of cross-community organizing (Carroll 2017; Law 2012). Perhaps the first step in this process is elevating and recognizing the intimate social effects of collective action as important in their own right.

The Intimate Social Effects of Collective Action

In the previous sections, I discussed why it is important to analyze collective action through a lens that recognizes the intersecting identities of women of color. Doing so helps us to better understand the full lives and experiences of people in movements, whose identities cannot be reduced to variables and who often have to deal with multiple sources of oppression. I have also suggested that although we still have work to do, gender analyses of collective action have moved us in the right direction in terms of understanding how intersecting identities shape collective action processes and experiences. Next, I highlight work that relates to what I call the intimate social effects of collective action, a vitally important and understudied area of research. I chose to say “effects,” instead of “outcome”

because effect implies a substantive antecedent that causes a change, with space for fluidity, whereas outcome suggests the static results of a particular activity. Effect is also relational, leaving room for emotion (See Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001 for the importance of emotion within social movements) and is most associated with sets of questions that elicit meaning-making responses (ie. what was the effect of the protest vs. what was the outcome of the protest).

Collective action impacts laws and policies, but also constructs cultural and social effects (Earl 2004; Jasper 2014). As Kelly Moore (2008) suggests, regardless of the success of organizations in achieving their explicit goals, through collective action "people join or separate logics of thought and action in new ways, activity that is, in and of itself, socially important" (188). Social movement participants create cultural meanings and interpretations through their experiences (Goodwin, Jasper, Polletta 2001; Jasper 2014; Moore 2008; Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford 1986). Meaning-making involves "what players think they are doing, what they are experiencing, hoping and desiring" (Jasper 2014: 38). But meaning-making processes simultaneously occur when social movements engage the feelings of broader audiences through the construction of narratives, chants, collective identities, and ideologies, which act as "carriers of meanings" (Jasper 2014: 49-50). Other well-known social movement scholars include social effects within their definition of outcomes of "contentious politics," which is what Tilly and Tarrow (2015) name the as convergence of contention, collective action, and politics (10). The authors define "outcomes" of contentious politics as "changes in conditions… including transformations of political actors or relations among them" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 238). Thus, it is not only policies and laws that are transformed through collective action, but also people and

their relationships with one another-- to include those tied to the collective action, and those who experience the cumulative effects of it.

One of the ways that his has been studied is through the biographical consequences of collective action, or the social effects of social movements for participant careers and life choices (Giuigni 2004; Polletta and Jasper 2001). In a review of research, Guigni (2004) defines the biographical outcomes of movements as powerful and enduring "effects on the life course of individuals who have participated in movement activities, effects that are at least in part due to involvement in those activities" (489). The bulk of research on the biographical outcomes of participants of contestation involves follow-up studies of participants of New Left movements. These studies find that engagement in collective action influences participants' political orientations, their likelihood to choose teaching or helping professions, and their inclination to marry later, divorce, or never marry (McAdam 1989; Fendrich 1977; Whalen and Flacks 1989). These findings are concentrated largely around white college educated participants, most of whom were substantially time and energy invested in movements (Guigni 2004).

Another stream of research examines the personal consequences of social movements on participants who less consistently participated in collective action activities, but nonetheless experienced lasting effects (McAdam 1999; Nagel 1995; Sherkat and Blocker 1997). For example, one study examined the personal consequences of participants of student and anti-war protests during the 1960's and found that these activists were more likely to have higher levels of education, were less religious, and they were less likely to have children (Sherkat and Blocker 1997). Another study of LGBTQ activist-sociologists found that their participation impacted their future careers (Taylor and Raeburn 1995). And last, Nancy Whittier (1995) argues that

women's movement had intergenerational effects on participants who expressed their radical feminism through music and other cultural activities.

Visibility and power is another social effect of collective action, which is particularly important for women of color and other marginalized groups. Abramovitz (2001) argues that even before the 20th century, low income women "asserted their power," and shaped US welfare policies to be more responsive of their needs (119). Recently, Warren, Mapp and Kuttner (2015) wrote about how low-income mothers transformed from "private citizens" to "public actors" through community organizing in schools and communities (15). Through the Logan Square Neighborhood Association[3] in Chicago, parent leaders changed their thoughts and actions and began gaining confidence, they took on new challenges, and started to also see themselves as connected to legacies of collective struggles (Warren, Mapp and Kuttner 2015). Flores and Cossyleon (2017) argue that through the de-privatization of personal narratives in the public sphere collective action facilitates the social integration of citizens returning from incarceration.

With few exceptions, the focus of scholars has been to study collective social relationships; this study examines the intimate social and familial relationships constructed and re-constructed through collective action Anna-Britt Coe's (2015) research in Ecuador and Peru shows that youth activist women understood their political activism as a means to change gender hierarchies within the family, the household, and intimate partnerships. Coe's work is a prime example of how political action is linked to efforts to make family relationships more egalitarian and fulfilling. A fruitful way to understand the intimate social effects of collective action is to ask people who participated in the action to describe how it shaped their lives and relationships.

[3] At its start, COFI began Leadership Trainings in Logan Square and helped LSNA to develop their Parent Mentor Program through a consulting partnership.

As opposed to having a set of life outcomes to test against occasional or sustained activity of contestation, first-hand stories from participants of collective action uncover meaning-making processes and how their intersecting identities shape those processes. For instance, instead of seeing a movement that supports the veiling of women and the creation of women mosques as repressive, through the narratives of women involved, we gain a different perspective. Mahmood's (2005) study shows that women in Cairo, Egypt who participated in an Islamic revival movement saw veiling is an act of agency, a social marker of piety, and a personal means towards being pious. Women's increased Islamic education gave them tools to defend their views among family and fuel to their collective actions (Mahmood 2005). Similarly, although at first sight the activities of materially poor mothers within their children's schools and communities indicate their involvement in politics, asking them about how they saw it, as Mary Pardo (1998) did, brings to light how these women did not see themselves as involved in politics at all, but rather as doing "what needed to be done," as mothers working and caring for their family (Naples 1998:130).

Study Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the three areas of research presented in this chapter. First, through a study focused on the local grassroots collective action of mainly women of color, I bring to light their unyielding work that is often minimized or erased in social movement literature. Second, I add to research that recognizes collective action as a gendered and gendering process that intersects with participants' complex identities. Third, I study the meaning-making processes of participants of mobilization by exploring what I call the intimate social effects of collective action, particularly within family life. Through mainly ethnographic evidence, I illuminate the family-related intimate social effects of collective action, which considerably adds

to what we already know about the cultural and social effects, the biographical consequences, and the power and visibility that result from collective action. My research gives voice to the intimate social effects of collective action on the social relationships of mainly materially poor mothers of color who are indeed powerful agents of change. Next, I briefly breakdown the dissertation chapters.

Chapter Summaries

In chapter two, I present the research methods, the rationale for those methods, and the main research site, an organization called Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), which supports a parent-led action group called Parents Organized to Win Educate and Renew Policy Action Council (POWER-PAC). In chapter three, I uncover how the process of collective action is contoured by intersecting identities of gender, race, and immigration experience through an examination of the bridging strategies leaders participate in, which I show impacts cross-community relationships and perceptions beyond organizing goals. In chapter four, I show how the family relationships of lower-income leaders shape their community organizing by documenting the strategies, organizing symbols, and participation changes related, in particular, to leaders' negative family responses to their engagement in collective action. In chapter five, I document how community organizing shapes leaders' family relationships by showing how leaders use community organizing tools to strengthen their family relationships. In chapter six, I conclude by offering research and policy implications of my study and reflect on unanswered questions and possible future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY LIFE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

To study the interplay between family life and collective action, I used mainly ethnographic sources of data: interviews and participant observations. Specifically, I carried out 47 in-depth one-on-one interviews with community organizers and staff affiliated with a non-profit community organizing institution called Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) and for 15 months (April 2016-July 2017), I conducted participant observations of their organizing activities. These methods aimed to understand and to learn about how family life and collective action were related—a relationship I believed to be complex and understudied. Combined, these ethnographic methods complemented each other. They allowed me as a researcher to learn about what collective action participants actually do, to document personal narratives and interpretations of lived experiences, and to uncover meaning-making processes of collective action participants. In addition, I reviewed community organizing documents (paper and web-based) collected throughout my field work to learn about COFI's organizing approach and its public profile.

Like other ethnographic research, I started out this study with an understanding of social movement theory, with specific aims and goals, and I remained open to learning from the agents of social change in my study. As Paul Atkinson (2015) notes, there is a "sustaining myth that ethnographic research is so purely exploratory that one does not enter the field with any prior

concepts or hypothesis" (45). From the start of this research, I believed there to be a substantive interaction between family and community organizing and I sought out to uncover some of the key missing pieces from collective action research on this topic.

This chapter first introduces COFI and the neighborhoods where COFI parents (leaders) organize. Then, the chapter details my entry into the field and the methods I chose to use to answer the study research questions. Last, I introduce COFI's family-focused model and Parents Organized to Win Educate and Renew Policy Action Council (POWER-PAC), the parent-led membership action group, which receives institutional support from COFI.

Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)

COFI is a Chicago-based non-profit organization with a statewide reach that supports mainly lower-income mothers' involvement in community organizing. Founded in 1995, COFI evolved from a successful pilot project called Women Leaders in Action in Chicago (1989–1993), which aimed to help develop the leadership capacities of women in areas that historically had little policy-making input from low-income families of color. COFI was formed through the political support of a sponsoring committee of 18 community leaders[4], including Della Mitchell (founder of Brand New Beginnings, a housing advocate for homeless residents), Amanda Rivera (a teacher and principal), and Lina Cramer (Director of Jane Addams Center of Hull House). Former President Barack Obama, who was a well-known community organizer in Chicago at the time, was also part of this committee.

From its start, COFI was intentional about not dichotomizing the personal and the political and placed the economic and social advancement of women at the forefront of

[4] Mary Scott Boria John Schmidt Coretta McFerron Kaye Wilson, Barbara Engel, Jacky Grimshaw, Also, Anne Hallett, Judy Hertz, Maria Mangual, Della Mitchell, President Barack Obama, Elce Redmond, Pastor Alvin Bergh.

organizing (O'Donnell and Scheie 1999). According to Ellen Schumer, who co-founded COFI with Sandy O'Donnell, the *family-focused model* reportedly branched off from other organizing traditions dominant in Chicago, including the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Midwest Academy and the Gamaliel Foundation to build a more family-friendly organizing environment that took into account the voices of mothers from economically oppressed neighborhoods (Schumer, interview, April 2017). Similar to the tradition of Jane Addams, which focuses on strengthening community ties, economic justice, and the importance of education (Hamington 2010), COFI supports parents to recognize their innate leadership abilities, build relationships, and to learn about systems that perpetuate the inequality they experience on a daily basis. In COFI Leadership Trainings, parents begin by setting and achieving personal, family, and team goals before connecting with other teams across the city and state. Throughout their work, COFI emphasizes the commonalities, instead of differences between family and community leadership, and between private and public issues and aims to construct a social movement around issues that deeply affect lower-income families (COFI Notes 1995).

COFI Teams and Overlapping Neighborhood Inequalities

Gender, race, poverty, and violence. Participants (leaders) in this study faced barriers to collective action because of their gender, race, immigration experience, and their higher levels of community violence and poverty—all of which created overlapping experiences and cycles of oppression (Buitrago, Rynell, and Tuttle 2017). As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the community organizing of leaders in this study was led by women of color, largely mothers with small children and grandmothers who helped to care for those children. Leaders were often underemployed, lived in poverty, and resided in neighborhoods with higher levels of racial segregation and violence. For them, community organizing was intimately tied to their

experiences of intersecting oppressions. Their collective struggles were a necessary fight for the survival of their children and families.

Women-centered organizing. The local community organizing teams comprised of COFI leaders were overwhelmingly comprised of Latina and African American mothers and grandmothers, many who were recent immigrants. It is important to highlight these demographics because women, especially mothers of young children, have consistently been underrepresented in policy making tables and continue to experience barriers to holding leadership positions within their communities (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Women are also highly underrepresented in public offices, executive positions at large corporations, and they consistently work more hours than men (for less pay), regardless of being in dual earning households (Hochschild 1989; Lareau 2002; Sayer 2005; Stanberry and Forrest 2013).

Both African American and Latina women's work in the US are increasingly devalued and underpaid. Recent Census data estimates that African American and Latina women make 65 cents and 58 cents per every dollar white men earn, respectively; in comparison, white women make 81 cents per every dollar white men make (Gould, Schieder, and Geier 2016; Wilson and Rodgers 2016). Moreover, data indicates this gender wage gap is larger in the Midwest in comparison to other US regions (Wilson and Rodgers 2016). Part of this discrepancy, apart from prevailing sexism, is the unfortunate expectation that in order to be an "ideal worker," women are expected to avoid, postpone, or rarely see their families. In some cases, women have to mother from afar as the entrance of white middle-class and upper-class women into the workforce created the increased demand for underpaid domestic labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Women of color also overwhelmingly work in caregiving professions, in comparison to white women (Ibid), and they often live in segregated neighborhoods.

"Organizing in some of the toughest neighborhoods anywhere." At the start of the research, there were 30 small teams of leaders located in 14 neighborhoods in Chicago, many of which encountered segregation, poverty, and higher rates of violence, and low levels of voting turnout. The Chicago neighborhood teams included Austin, Englewood, East Garfield Park, Hermosa, Kenwood, Little Village, North Lawndale, Pilsen, West Town, and Woodlawn community areas. The neighborhood teams outside of Chicago included Aurora, East St. Louis, Evanston, and Elgin. Many of these areas also had high rates of Latin American immigration, particularly Little Village, Pilsen, Aurora, and Elgin. Notably, the suburban Chicago areas and downstate communities where COFI leaders organize are also increasingly experiencing growing levels of poverty and disadvantage (Allard 2017). The quote that introduces this section comes from COFI's website (cofionline.org), which highlights their organizational efforts to reach often politically disconnected parents (accessed April 2016).

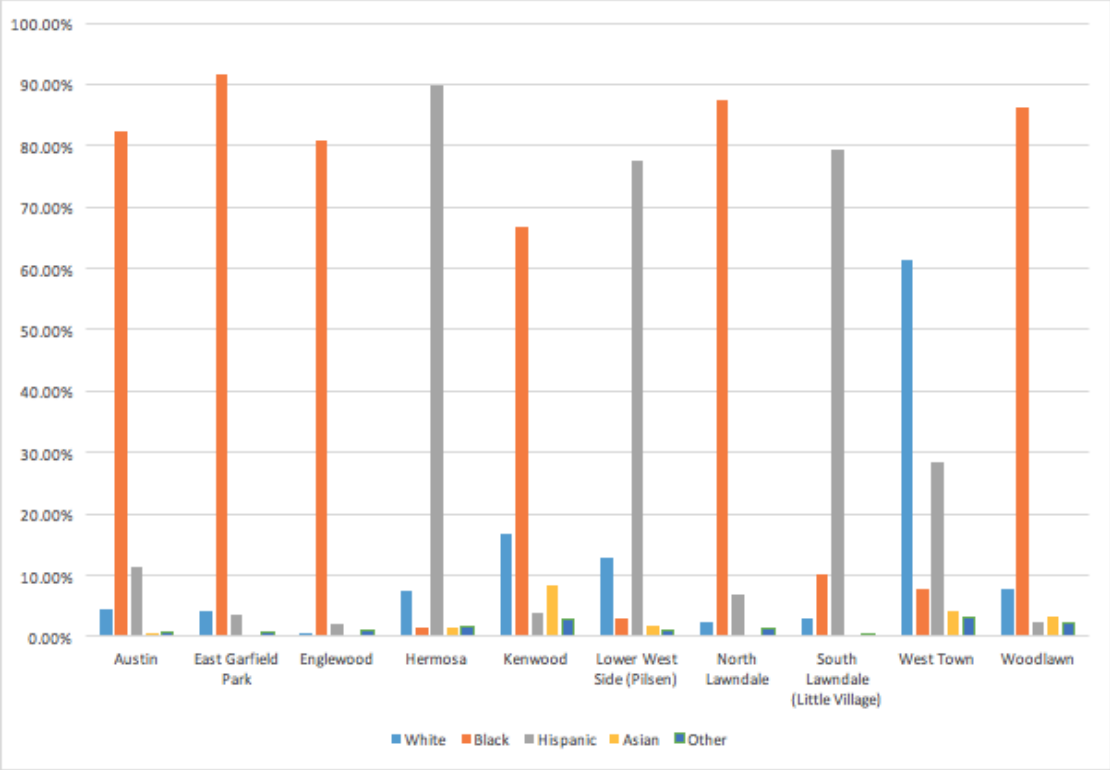
Racial and economic segregation. As is evident in Figure 1 below, the Chicago Community Areas where parent teams participated in community organizing are highly segregated by race. For instance, Austin, East Garfield, Englewood, Kenwood, North Lawndale, and Woodlawn range from 66 to 91 percent African American. Hermosa, Lower West Side, and South Lawndale range from 77 to 89 percent Hispanic[5] (CMAP 2015).

Moreover, many of these community areas have among the highest levels of poverty in Chicago (Paral 2016; See Figure 2). One exception is the West Town community area, which has a poverty rate of 15 percent (notably also has the highest White population of these community areas as seen in Figure 1). The other communities rage in poverty levels from 21.5 percent

[5] "Hispanic" is used here because the data source labeled its findings this way, although I use the term Latino/a, which is more inclusive of groups with non-Spanish origin and non-Spanish speaking communities.

(Hermosa) to 45.4 percent (Englewood). In comparison to the City of Chicago overall, which has 21.7 percent of incomes below the poverty level, the community areas where COFI teams organized, were sometimes double this rate. For example, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park and Englewood ranged from nearly 43 percent to almost 45 percent of incomes below the poverty level[6].

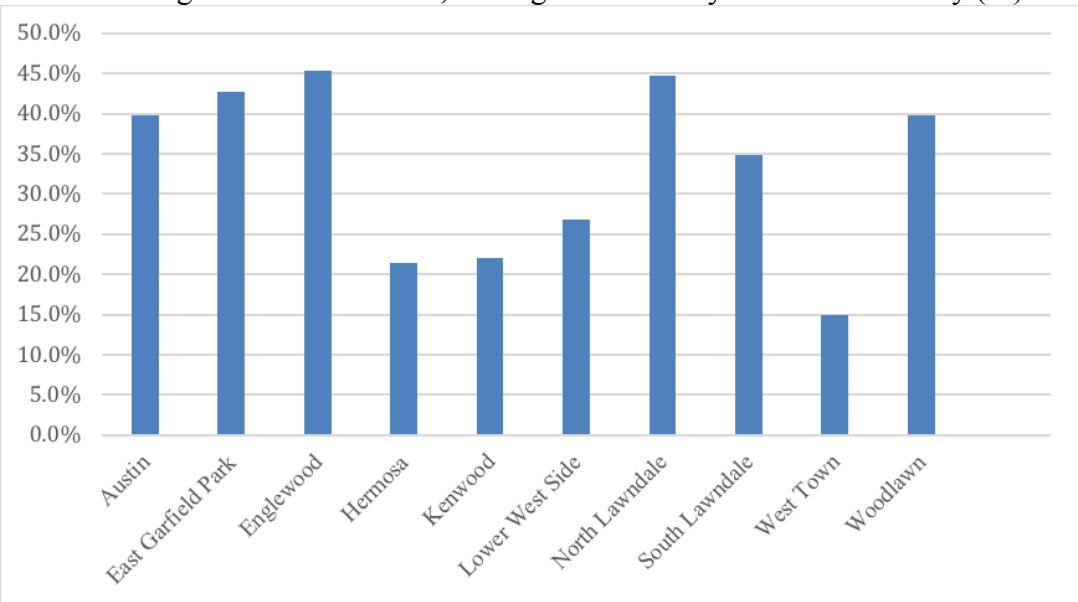
Figure 1. COFI Teams by Chicago Community Areas and Race (%)



Data were compiled from numerous sources including the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011-2015 American Community Survey (ACS), the Illinois Department of Employment Security, the Illinois Department of Revenue, and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning https://datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/dataset/community-data-snapshots-raw-data

[6] The Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) sets poverty guidelines. A family of three is considered below the poverty level if they make less than 19,790 per year. See https://aspe.hhs.gov/2014-poverty-guidelines

Figure 2. COFI Teams, Chicago Community Areas and Poverty (%)



Paral 2016, based on data compiled from the Decennial Census, 2008-2012 and the American Community Survey "Chicago Community Area Data."

STOP Survey findings. Perhaps more accurately telling of the economic circumstances of COFI leaders is the results of a self-led survey conducted by parents to understand the state of debt and income among COFI parents and their neighbors in 2016 (findings presented in the Stopping the Debt Spiral Report cited above). Nearly 80 percent of the 304 survey respondents were women. Most lived in Chicago (58 percent), the Chicago suburbs (24 percent), followed by East St. Louis (18 percent). Half of the respondents were single, most were African American (53 percent), followed by Latino (37 percent). The majority of households who participated in survey reported having a paying job (61.5 percent). Fifty-eight percent of people who took the survey had an annual income of less than $15,000, most had no benefits or savings as a result of that work, while 40 percent were part of a food stamp or WIC program. The majority of people who took the survey said they had multiple sources of debt, including student loans, unpaid tickets, utility bills, and medical bills—with 74 percent of those with incomes lower than 15,000 a year reporting that they most often cannot stay ahead of debt. And last, the survey findings

highlight how debt impacted perceptions of moving ahead in life, which for many respondents culminated to feelings of frustration, sadness, anger, and a sense of being overwhelmed.

Disproportionate levels of violence. Beyond segregation, poverty, economic insecurity and debt, many of the areas where COFI parents organized experienced higher rates of violence. Higher rates of violence are often coupled with poverty, and lower levels of formal education that have historically been concentrated in Chicago's South and West Sides (Kapustin, Ludwig, Punkay, Smith, Speigel and Welgus 2017). Taking a closer look at Austin for instance, with a population of nearly 100,000 people, the per-capita income (the average income per person per year) is $15,954, compared to $28,202 within the overall City of Chicago. Austin also has a 22 percent unemployment rate, 24 percent of residents do not have a high school diploma, 29 percent of households are below the poverty line, and in 2015 there were 266 shooting victims (CMAP 2015; City of Chicago Data Portal 2014.).

Civic participation. Voter turnouts provide only a baseline marker of civic engagement in Chicago communities. However, among the communities where parent leaders organize with the support of COFI, there exist some of the lowest voting participation in the City of Chicago. For instance, the 16th Ward, comprised of Englewood, Back of the Yards, Gage Park, and Chicago Lawn community areas, has historically ranked lowest in the voter turnout rate in Chicago. In 2015, for the mayoral election in Chicago only 27.9 percent of *registered* voters in the 16th Ward actually voted. The next lowest voter turnout (30.6 percent of registered voters) for the same election occurred in the 27th Ward, which includes the West Garfield Park area, the Near West side and Cabrini Green. Greatly contested Chicago wards have been largely determined based on race, and most recently redrawn in 2012[7]. Also, the areas where leaders organize have higher

[7] http://www.wbez.org/no-sidebar/approved-ward-map-95662

rates of people of color, immigration, and residents with an undocumented status (i.e. Little Village), all of which can be barriers to engaging in politics (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006). In short, the areas where COFI parents organized ranked low in voter turnout and civic engagement and high in other markers of inequality, like poverty, lower levels of formal education, and unemployment. And although women of color experience more barriers to holding leadership positions in their communities, the current study shows how women, particularly mothers and grandmothers, contested these roadblocks. These and other overlapping obstacles did not paralyze the meaningful engagement of COFI leaders within their communities, as I show in the ensuing chapters.

COFI's Family-Focused Community Organizing

At its core, COFI's family-focused organizing model, recognizes that personal, family, and community issues are "all intertwined" and is committed to meaningfully approaching all three levels for holistic social change (Schumer 1995: 4). While working on policy campaigns that directly impact family and children, the model aims to build stronger leaders, families, communities and is intentional in its strategies and resources to accomplish these goals. For instance, family focused community organizing provides parent leaders with organizing tools that that can be used within their family relationships. These include skills of communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and goal-setting. The family-focused model also recognizes that to engage parents, largely lower-income mothers and grandmothers, they need to support parents with childcare during organizing activities, travel reimbursements, paid opportunities when possible, and food and snacks at events. Food at organizing events is important because it is not only nourishing of the body, but it is also a socially important component of relationship

building, particularly among groups from different communities who without COFI supported organizing might otherwise not meaningfully interact.

COFI's reach. With the support from mainly philanthropic foundations and private donors, COFI sponsors Family-Focused Parent Leadership Trainings (hereafter "Leadership Trainings"), attended by predominantly mothers and grandmothers from highly marginalized neighborhoods (more on trainings below). COFI began its leadership trainings in the Logan Square Chicago neighborhood, and the city's West Side and has since spread to over 20 neighborhoods in Chicago and several communities across Illinois, including Elgin, Aurora, Evanston and East St. Louis. According to a COFI Notes newsletter (1995), COFI developed a leadership curriculum for parents and teachers focusing on "self-assessment, storytelling, confidence and leadership skills and as goal setting for all aspects of their lives."

At the start of the study, there were 18 staff members and 19 parent peer trainers, who supported the implementation of these leadership trainings and other local organizing activities. Staff included full time organizers, but also project coordinators and directors, and administrative staff. During the study, COFI hired two parents part-time as "Team Builders," to support with community organizing activities. Moreover, COFI's nine-member Board of Trustees was comprised of advocates, civic leaders, and educators in Chicago, along with one COFI parent leader. In addition, parents participated in statewide-leadership events several times a year where leaders from Chicago and the four areas across Illinois gathered to discuss local and statewide community organizing campaigns. Last, COFI is also a founding member of a recently formed nationwide group of community-based organizations[8], called UPLAN (United Parents Leaders

[8] Partner organizations as of October 2017 included: Abriendo Puertas / Partnership for Community Action (PCA), Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI), National Parent Leadership Institute (NPLI),

Action Network), which is comprised of parent focused community organizations for social change across the country. UPLAN aims to, "for the first time, have parents in the driver's seat setting and implementing a national agenda" (UPLAN Facebook Page, 2017).

Organizing Trainings and support. COFI's organizing trainings are led by other parent leaders and staff organizers with the goal of supporting the long-term community engagement of lower-income parents. To this end, COFI partners with schools, Head Start programs, Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) offices and other service organizations to recruit parents to participate their trainings. COFI is intentional about recruiting parents into their trainings who might otherwise be excluded from policy making processes. For instance, by recruiting parents from Chicago Public Schools (CPS), COFI reaches parents who have lower incomes, are racial-ethnic minorities, and who are English learners. According to recent CPS data for the 2017-2018 school year, 77.7 percent of CPS students are considered economically disadvantaged,[9] over 83 percent are African American or Hispanic[10], and 18 percent are bilingual[11] (CPS 2018).

Parents begin their community organizing journey through the first phase of training, *Self, Family, and Team* (SFT), followed by two other phases, *Community Outreach & Action* (COA) and *Policy & Systems Change* (PSC). Within these phases, participants: 1) build relationships and set personal, family, and team goals; 2) connect with the broader community to refocus their community goals; and 3) work with other parents from across the city and state to change systems. The trainings are held in local communities or schools each week and are

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OneAmerica, One Pittsburgh, Organizers in the Land of Enchantment (OLÉ), Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), Parent Voices, Teaching for Change, Washington State Parent Ambassadors, and Witnesses to Hunger.

[9] "Economically Disadvantaged Students" come from families whose income is within 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

[10] "Hispanic" is used here because of the data source label.

[11] "Bilingual" refers to the state definitions of students who are English learners.

scheduled to accommodate the complex lives of parents. During the trainings, COFI provides food and refreshments, childcare, and travel reimbursement, when applicable.

The SFT phase is the first and longest phase. This phase begins with self-reflection about parents' innate leadership abilities as keepers of their homes and children. Parents first set personal goals, that intentionally focus on themselves instead of on their children. Next, they set family goals, and finally a team goal within their small group. The training ends with plans to continue to establish connections with other leaders to work towards building a collective voice with the broader aim of making communities more "family-friendly" (COFI Website). Broadly, this means creating systems and policies that support families and children. I participated in a leadership training in Evanston, where the end of the first phase of training led directly into a "1.5" phase where parents met specifically to build relationships. In our small group of eight mothers, we met to stitch, crochet, and loom with the goal of selling some of our creations at local events. We called ourselves the "Stitch and Save" group at first and later modified this name to Parents of Evanston Allied for Childhood Education (PEACE), as we began to focus our team goal to improve the access of information around education in our community (I lived in Evanston during my leadership training participation).

During the COA phase, parents revisit their team goal and create a concrete plan for working towards that goal. They conduct a community survey to build relationships with neighbors and to gain perspectives that are rooted in the community. In this self-created survey, parents construct questions that help inform their team goals and also ask parents if they would like to join the group (i.e. What are your biggest concerns for the children and families in Evanston? What additional resources would you like to see to provide a better future for the children of Evanston?). They leave room for their goals to change as themes from the survey

emerge. Once the survey responses are tallied, parents plan a community forum comprised of people who took the survey, along with identified community stakeholders (teachers, government leaders, community-based groups, police), to share the results. Again, parents continue to build relationships, they gain feedback from the community, and they create action-based agendas based on collective grassroots concerns.

The PSC phase involves the gathering of parents from different communities, and ethnic backgrounds together for collective discussion and action towards systemic change around issues important for families in each community and across Illinois. Graduates of these trainings often go on to join a COFI supported membership organization of parents called POWER-PAC *(Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew- Policy Action Council)*, which represents the needs of low-income working families and communities in the Chicago Metropolitan area. POWER-PAC is a "cross-community, cross-cultural membership organization of low-income and working parents and grandparents" (POWER-PAC Handouts October 2017). Guided by the principles of "equity, respect, open communication, commitment, passion, and dedication to our children and families and to each other, and diversity," POWER-PAC's mission is to:

> Connect with, listen to, and build relationships with parents and others; stand up for our children; impact and advocate for positive change in our lives, our families and our communities and sit at policy tables where decisions are made that affect our children and families; and to build parent leadership and unite voices of parents across communities" (POWER-PAC 2016).

To become a POWER-PAC member, you must be a parent or community member, sign a commitment form, where you pledge to work with "diverse parents" on policy change on behalf of children and families, and you must have attended COFI's Leadership Training (Ibid). There is no cost to become a part of POWER-PAC although membership responsibilities include: being

active in POWER-PAC campaigns; representing POWER-PAC in members' local school and community; and participating in fundraising activities when possible (Ibid).

POWER-PAC campaigns and activities. Below, I highlight ongoing organizing campaigns and activities of POWER-PAC that were evident during the time of the research. Although this summary is not inclusive of all POWER-PAC efforts, these sections detail the key activities of parents within their local schools, communities, and the types of changes and policies they advocated for. For instance, leaders spread information about early learning and food programs in their communities through ambassador programs. They supported bills through word of mouth, by testifying and writing letters to legislators, and by signing petitions. Leaders also joined coalitions and were in conversation with other change focused groups across the city, state, and country.

POWER-PAC held separate campaign meetings at least once a month, and as a larger group quarterly to update one another on their campaign progress. POWER-PAC had two "executive officer" co-chairs, two executive officer vice-co-chairs, and two co-chairs for each campaign, intentionally one Spanish-speaking Latina and one African American woman, positions that rotated. This inclusivity within POWER-PAC leadership served for representative purposes but also to facilitate communication among all POWER-PAC parents. All of the co-chairs were part of a "Leadership Council," which met with COFI's Board of Trustees at least once a year to have a say on COFI's budget, among other administrative and programmatic discussions. Co-chairs also took the lead in organizing and implementing meeting agendas based on group consensus, calling for voting on legislative issue goals and other matters, and connecting with COFI organizers for necessary support.

Community Organizing Issue Campaigns. At the time of the research, POWER-PAC had four organizing issue campaigns: Early Learning; Elementary Justice; Stepping Out of Poverty; and Recess Food and Health. Next, I describe the campaigns in the order of their inception through POWER-PAC, ranging from 2004 to 2015.

The first organizing campaign is the Elementary Justice Campaign, which had at least five overlapping goals during the time of the research. One, parents met with the Chicago Police Department and the Mayor's Office to win agreements around lessening police presence and training police in elementary schools. Two, COFI leaders hosted restorative justice workshops to teach parents and principals about the practice of peaceful conflict resolution to prevent school suspensions and expulsions. Three, parents monitored school climates and discipline data at Chicago Public Schools and they focused their restorative justice interventions primarily in schools with higher levels of suspensions and expulsions. Four, parents continued their involvement in national meetings with Dignity in Schools, a coalition of parents, youth, organizers, and advocates, which works to dismantle the "push out" of kids from school, including the school to prison pipeline[12]. Five, leaders advocated for several bills, which urged for policy changes to: create a parent advisory committee, eliminate the use of zero-tolerance policies in schools, and reduce suspensions and expulsions (SB100) and prohibit arrests of students on school grounds, with critical exceptions (HB5617).

The Early Learning Campaign had at least six ongoing agendas during the time of the research. One, leaders held Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his staff accountable for streamlining the preschool enrollment process to ensure children were able to adequately access early education. Two, they participated in the Governor Bruce Rauner's Family Engagement Subcommittee to

[12] http://dignityinschools.org/about-us/mission/

develop recommendations for engaging parents in early learning systems in Illinois. Three, leaders advocated for amending the Illinois Public Aid Code to expand the eligibility of the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to prioritize families with most need and those furthering their education (SB2555). Four, parents supported efforts to amend the Election Code for the Chicago Board of Education to move from appointed positions by the Mayor of Chicago to elections voted on by community members (HB00557). However, after two years of deliberation this bill did not pass. Five, parents held meetings with parents from other states that had parent councils to find out how they overcome barriers to being involved in their children's education. Six, through the Early Learning and Headstart Ambassador program, parents worked door-to-door in groups (with hourly pay) to enroll eligible children into early learning programs, relieving many barriers to enrollment for lower-income families.

The Stepping Out of Poverty Campaign (STOP) was similarly busy pursuing at least six local and statewide efforts. First, parents co-hosted a summit on children's savings accounts to continue the mobilization around saving accounts for all children at birth. Second, as a part of the National Campaign for Every Kid's Future, parents advocated for Children's Savings accounts. Third, leaders conducted and collected over 300 surveys on debt and economic insecurity from their families and people in their communities and they published a report with recommendations for "Stopping the Debt Spiral."[13] Fourth, COFI leaders supported the Wage Assignment & Consumer Protections Bill (SB2804) to increase transparency in the wage assignment process, or the process of accessing a borrower's wages when they default on a loan by non-traditional lenders, including payday lenders, which was signed into law in 2016. Fifth, leaders supported the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights Act Bill (HB1288), which became effective in January

[13] http://www.cofionline.org/COFI/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/COFI-STOP-Report.pdf

2017, to expand the protections of full time domestic workers to be paid minimum wage, at least one day off a week, and a short break during their shift. Sixth, parents supported legislation to reduce the hiring restrictions for people with criminal records who seek employment in healthcare (SB42) and schools (HB 494), both of which became laws, and they pushed to decriminalize minor offenses to reduce or eliminate incarceration and instead utilize the cost-savings to fund preventative programs like restorative justice peace centers (SB2295).

The fourth and final campaign, Recess, Food, and Health, also had several ongoing efforts. First, along with the Greater Chicago Food Depository and the Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign, parents launched a Food Ambassador program. In this program parents worked door-to-door during the summer months (with hourly pay) to provide information to neighbors about free federal summer meal opportunities. Second, parents advocated for and won Breakfast after the Bell (SB2393), which made breakfast a part of all Illinois schools. And third, leaders supported the Healthy Food Incentives bill (HB6027), which had it passed, would have improved and increased the access of recipients of the SNAP program to visit local farmers markets and other local food markets.

Beyond these four main organizing campaigns, POWER-PAC also advocated for passing a responsible Illinois budget that would fully fund undeniably necessary programs, including medical care and home care for elderly and differently abled residents, emergency housing shelters, child care assistance, and social and emotional health services. Leaders also advocated for implementing a progressive tax system in Illinois (SJRCA1), which would also help to fully fund these programs. As an COFI organizer explained “We should ask the wealthy to pay a little more in taxes to help balance the budget and restore some of these essential services” (POWER-

PAC Meeting April 2016). And last, POWER-PAC also pushed to create a new school funding formula for funding schools that are in most need (SB0231).

Shift to regional branches from group at large. Towards the end of the research, POWER-PAC went through a restructuring process that involved a newly formed "Governing Council," neighborhood branches, and community teams. The following description of the restructuring process is based on a PowerPoint presentation I attended during a regularly scheduled quarterly POWER-PAC meeting. During the meeting, the current POWER-PAC executive officers described the suggested changes as a necessary part of growing as an organization and called for a vote to approve these changes, which ultimately passed. The suggestions were based on a review of other models across the country, with support from COFI's research and community partners. The new structure would include a clearer communication system between parent members, community branches (made up of teams), issue campaign committees, a new governing council and POWER-PAC as a whole.

In their presentation to the larger group, leaders illustrated regional branches of POWER-PAC as branches of a tree, made up of at least three teams of parent members each. A team of parents included at least three parents, with at least one leader attending branch meetings. The main regional branches included the North and Northwest Branch, the Westside Branch, the Southwest Branch, and the Southside Branch. The regional branch method would allow for other branches from outside of Chicago to join as POWER-PAC increased its statewide capacity (COFI was already training parents in four areas outside of Chicago). Each branch would decide its own leadership structure and meeting schedule, which was accountable to its local community and to POWER-PAC, while also participating in POWER-PAC's Issue Campaigns. The membership would meet four times a year: once in the fall to set and vote on a research agenda;

in the winter for a holiday event, in the Spring for a membership meeting and to plan for the annual trip to Springfield (MOMS on a Mission), and in the Summer during the Annual Celebration of Hope picnic.

In addition to branches made up of teams, there would be a Governing Council, which was made up of two delegates from each regional branch and two delegates from each issue campaign committee. Delegates would meet quarterly, organize membership events, and help establish new issue committees. The delegates from the branch would have one vote per branch and would have to be active on an issue committee. Each delegate from the issue campaign committee also had one vote and would be made up of two issue committee co-chairs (essentially keeping the same system of co-chairs as part of a "Leadership Council"). Leaders stressed that delegates did not make decisions for branches (i.e. setting the agenda or strategy), but rather represented the branches collaborative decisions. To me, it seems that the greatest change within this newly formed structure was increased representation by regional branches within the Governing Council (formerly Leadership Council), and the propensity to allow for the seamless incorporation of other areas in Illinois.

Other institutional support. Beyond the leadership trainings and their support of POWER-PAC, COFI provides institutional backing for parents to engage in democratic activities in their neighborhoods, communities, and across the state so that they can develop a stronger parent voice for local and statewide systemic change. For instance, they offer meeting space for parents to get together, strategize, and socialize. They rent buses for parents to take trips to Springfield and to lobby legislators to support family-friendly bills. They open their doors for parents to use computers, printers, and faxes to conduct organizing business. They also support parents in other ways during difficult times. For example, one parent said they received mail at

COFI during a time of housing instability and several parents said that in cases of emergency COFI connected them with point people at organizations that offered rent and utility assistance.

Study Methods

Research Permission

I first became connected with COFI through my work with Loyola University's Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL), which is dedicated to community-engaged research. CURL and COFI were partnered on several projects, two of which included an evaluation of COFI's Parent Leadership Trainings, and a collaborative survey of COFI leaders and their communities on their financial circumstances and debt. As a graduate research fellow at CURL, I conducted focus groups of participants of COFI's leadership trainings and helped to translate the survey and results into Spanish. These opportunities allowed me entry into COFI where I was welcomed by staff and parents alike. Soon, I realized I wanted to study the community organizing of parents through COFI for my dissertation to learn more about the family-focused model and the experiences of leaders involved. I approached the executive director, Ellen Schumer with my ideas about conducting an interview and observational study at COFI for my dissertation. Ellen said she would speak to leaders and staff, and about a week later said leaders were open to having me conduct my study at COFI. My study began after receiving approval from Loyola University's Institutional Review Board in April 2016. That same month, I attended a parent-led POWER-PAC meeting to introduce myself and the study to leaders.

Dialog, Time, and Feedback

Open dialog with COFI ensured that updates and feedback about the study was a mutual process. Given my training in community-engaged methods through CURL and previous experiences, at the start of my study I sought input for recruiting and advertising the study from

COFI staff. Staff suggested I should put a deadline on my flier and add a colorful image of some sort. I asked COFI about the things they wanted to learn, which I incorporated into my study design (i.e. children's leadership). Before the start of the research, I attended a COFI staff meeting, which included organizers from across the city and state (some staff connected remotely via skype) and described my initial research questions and methods. Staff agreed that it would be beneficial for me to first begin participant observations for several months before attempting to recruit parents for one-on-one interviews. This would help to diminish some of the potential mistrust from parents to participate in my study. They also suggested I join a Leadership Training that was beginning in Evanston, a northern suburb of Chicago, which I did.

Entering "the Field"

I introduced my study at a POWER-PAC quarterly meeting held in Ekhard Park, just west of the Kennedy Expressway and Chicago Ave. One of the POWER-PAC co-chairs said I could make a one-minute announcement before lunch (which was at the end of the meeting). The meeting was attended by around 50 leaders and staff and I spoke briefly to introduce myself and explain the study. I said I was a graduate student writing my dissertation and I would be conducting paid interviews and observations at meetings and events to learn from them. I also said I was the daughter of immigrant parents and a first-generation college student. I said the study was voluntary and asked them please let me know if they did not want to participate (no one asked to be excluded from field notes). I also said this short introduction in Spanish, as everything else in the meeting had been translated.

Parents approached me after my short announcement to ask questions, share their contact information or invite me to community events. One leader asked me if I wanted to join a Spanish-English speaking group in the Pilsen community, which met weekly. Another parent

came up to me and asked me if I had a camera to take a photo of her bright blue hat, which had COFI patches all around it. “Take a picture, and make sure my shirt comes out!” She said. One leader asked me where I was from and I said Guadalajara, Mexico. In Spanish, he said, “Me too, but, you’re white!” I responded by saying something along the lines of, “There are whiter Mexicans!” We both laughed to ease the awkwardness. One leader came up to me and said I should come to her nonprofit in Englewood or to her writing group. Next, I talked to a leader who suggested I should visit *his* neighborhood school to learn how organizing really happens. One woman approached to ask me if it was true my dissertation had to be 16 pages long. I responded, “It’s typically a bit longer, maybe 100 pages?” I said. “What do you write?” she said in awe. I described the general content of a dissertation and she said she would like to be interviewed because she “had a lot to say.” I spoke to three more leaders, one of whom suggested I read a particular community organizing book and contact someone at the Chicago Community Trust (one of COFI’s donors). To say the least, I felt relieved that my research announcement went well, and I had a list of parents to follow-up with to begin fieldwork. I also realized and embraced the fact that my fieldwork would be guided by the offers to observe parents in action within their collective endeavors, under their terms. POWER-PAC leaders gave me two minutes at the end of their meeting to discuss my research and recruit—and I was the only thing keeping leaders from forming a line for lunch—which highlights how this research takes a backseat to the important organizing work leaders were doing.

Consent and Confidentiality

The consent and confidentiality were important parts of the interview and observational process Each person who completed an interview signed and received a copy of an informed consent form, in English or Spanish. Participants decided if they wanted to participate in an

interview in English or Spanish. The consent form outlined the goals of the research, the procedures, confidentiality, compensation and provided my contact information, along with contact information for my faculty supervisor and Loyola University's Institutional Review Board. Interview participants chose their own pseudonym to have ownership of the name that would guard their identity. I described the consent form out loud for everyone, asked for permission to record our conversation, and asked each participant if they had any questions before beginning the recorded interview. No respondent said they could not read or understand the consent form.

I received a waiver for informed consent of observations. However, to inform leaders and staff of my study, I created a colorful flyer explaining my study goals, observations, and interviews. This flyer was distributed during my introduction of the study in meetings with leaders and it was posted on a message board at COFI's office. I let parents know that they could opt out of the study at any time and gave them several methods of contacting me through email, telephone, and in person.

I have taken extra precautions to guard the identity of my respondents. I decided early on that the pseudonyms from field notes would not match the pseudonyms from interviewees in my study. I also decided that I would not disclose participants pseudonym, community, age, number of children, and race together as this could identify participants (i.e. I would not describe a respondent as Maria, a 55-year-old Native American and Mexican mother of four from the Pilsen neighborhood). Last, although I recognize the rich ethno-cultural differences among Latinos and African Americans, I exclude ethno-racial markers that could compromise anonymity (i.e. I do not describe a respondent as a Guatemalan or Ethiopian leader).

Before providing background information about COFI, next I describe why and how I conducted interviews and observations and with whom. I also detail my rationale and process of collecting and analyzing printed and web-based organizing documents.

In-Depth Interviews

I conducted 47 one-on-one semi-structured audio recorded interviews to learn from the narrative stories of participants of collective action. I compensated participants for their time with a $20 gift card. Interviews, which lasted from one to three hours, were conversational and largely open-ended to elicit narrative stories, feelings, and themes that were important to those in my study. As Blee and Taylor (2002) suggest, semi-structured interviews "offer significant advantages for emerging research agendas on the cultural and emotional dynamics of social movements and on the construction of meaning and identities by social movement participants" (112). Interviews enable researchers to gain insight about processes and they provide opportunities to "learn about perceptions and reactions known only to those to whom they occurred" (Weiss 1994:10). Interviews are not aimed to be generalizable, but rather to provide immeasurable description about decision making, emotional responses, and meaning making processes (i.e. Flores 2016; Rosenblatt and Deluca 2012). As Polletta (1998) puts it: "in telling the story of our becomings—as an individual, a nation, as people—we establish who we are" (141). Narratives help construct collective identities because stories are telling not only of what happened but what it means to those participating (Polletta 1998; Moore 2008).

Interview processes. As staff suggested, I waited to begin interviews until I was in the field for several months in an effort to first develop relationships with COFI leaders and build rapport with them. Although I shared flyers in English and Spanish (with a Google contact number), which described the study in detail (Appendix A), most interviews were the result of

verbal recruitment and snowball sampling. I recruited the most interview participants by introducing myself and the study at organizing activities and through word of mouth facilitated by other interview participants. Participants shared contact information with me and I later followed-up to schedule an interview time and location that was convenient for them. I gained access to respondents with varying levels of COFI involvement, and whom I may have not encountered otherwise, through word of mouth. I interviewed affiliate respondents who were referred by COFI leaders as their organizing mentors or friends who were intermittently involved with COFI. I also recruited participants whom I met at larger COFI celebrations, fundraisers, and trips to Springfield with partner community organizing groups. I also recruited two COFI staff members who were no longer working at COFI at the time of the interview, one I had met while she worked at COFI and the other whom I met at a community event.

Interview locations were chosen by my study respondents. These included participants' dining rooms, kitchens, and living rooms, local coffee shops, restaurants, and COFI meeting rooms. I wanted to ensure that those who agreed to an interview felt comfortable with the location and to minimize the potential for cancellations because of travel barriers.

I used a short interview guide to remind me of my interview questions (Appendix B), although I was intentional in maintaining an open-ended and conversational interview with respondents. During interviews, I asked participants about how their families were involved in organizing activities and how their participation in organizing shaped their lives, particularly their family lives. I inquired about shifts in relationships with their intimate partners and children, asking for concrete examples of these changes. Interview respondents often lead the conversation and I followed-up to clarify statements. For instance, I asked "Tell me what you mean by that?" or "You mentioned this, can you explain that some more?" This allowed me as a

researcher to better understand statements that need clarification instead of assuming their meaning. It also allowed for respondents to tell colorful stories to explain their statements.

At the end of the interview, I asked participants if they had questions for me and proceeded to answer their questions honestly and without reservation. Many of these questions inquired about my personal life, my choice to study community organizing, and my goals and future visions. When I thanked respondents for taking the time to talk to me, they often said it was an enjoyable process that made them think about many things they had not thought of before. Respondents often said they were proud of me, they gave me advice, and many said they were eager to read research findings. Some also shared that as I participated and observed in organizing events, they were also learning from me and my input.

Interview respondents. In total, I conducted 47 one-on-one interviews with leaders who had various lengths and levels of involvement with COFI. I interviewed 35 COFI leaders who had participated in at least one of COFI's Parent Leadership Training, five leaders who did not participate in a Leadership Training but were familiar with and attended COFI events (affiliates), and seven full-time COFI staff. The 47 interview participants in my study lived in 27 different neighborhoods. Most respondents lived in the city of Chicago, followed by Chicago suburbs, and one respondent lived out of state at the time of the interview.

Demographics. Of the 35 COFI leaders in my study, 30 were women, five were men, and all were parents (24 had children under the age of 18). Of the five affiliates in my study, three were women, two were men, and all but one woman was a parent (three had children under the age of 18). Of the seven staff I interviewed, all were women and six were mothers (four had children under the age of 18).

Among the 35 COFI leaders I interviewed, 18 were Latina/o (Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Guatemalan), 16 were African American, and one was white. One woman also identified as Native American. Of the five affiliate leaders in my study, three were African American and two were white. And last, of the seven interviews I carried out with COFI staff members, two were Latinas, one African American, and three were White. Twelve respondents said they were first generation immigrants. Although I did not specifically ask about citizenship status, nine respondents alluded to or explicitly discussed being undocumented.

My study participants had anywhere from one to seventeen years of involvement with COFI, with an average of eight years. Interviewing respondents with different lengths and levels of involvement ensured that findings were not focused on one specific group of community leaders. The mix of leaders allowed for variance in narratives and experiences. Interviews with affiliates, all of whom had participated in some form of community organizing, also provided a contrast to different models of community organizing.

Participant Observations

I conducted participant observations and immersed myself in the "dialectic between being an insider, a participant in the world one studies, and an outsider, observing and reporting on that world" (Thorne 1983:216). I mirrored Barrie Thorne's (1983) perspective in her research and participation in anti-war mobilization who said she did not "suspend [her] emotions as a detached observer might have done" (232). I was open with respondents about why I was conducting observations, to collect data for my dissertation, the final stage of my graduate program. I also highlighted other truths; the importance of their work, my passion for the issues they advocated for, and my desire to share their stories to a broader public.

During observations, I was intentional about attending as many different events as I could, considering my own family and academic obligations. I avoided attending only the glamorous organizing protests and events with catered meals. Instead, I was present for many different opportunities to meaningfully engage. I went to English-Spanish conversation groups held in a van in the middle of winter, legs crisscrossed to fit all of us. I woke up early to go to Springfield and encouraged parents when they felt nervous before meeting legislators (admittedly, I too felt nervous). I rode a steaming hot school bus to summer picnics with parents, with my two-year-old daughter at my side. I even brought my mom to a meeting when a last-minute event changed our plans for the day—she was welcomed warmly. I attended weekly Leadership Trainings on Tuesday evenings with little sleep and pending academic deadlines. I helped to clean after events and made attempts to talk to as many people as I could. I mention these things to highlight how my observations for this study were invested. They became very much a part of my life, and they continue to shape me today.

Resistance to research. I should note that in the beginning of my fieldwork, I felt particular resistance from one staff organizer and one leader. The staff member I originally felt resistance from agreed to participate in an interview where she candidly described her initial hesitation with my presence. She said leaders were often "over-researched" and she was unsure about my intentions. However, after I shared findings from the study at the early stages of the study, she said my research helped her to again appreciate the family-focused model of social change championed by COFI, which at times felt "slow moving" as opposed to other models, and in short, this study reaffirmed to her that she *was* helping parents to make changes in their personal relationships. I was also able to interview the one leader who initially showed disdain for my presence-- she was the last leader I interviewed. She welcomed me into her home and

talked to me openly about community organizing as a way of life passed down from her ancestors who were enslaved on a plantation, pointing to photos of her family. When I presented my research to a group of parents and staff in February 2018, this particular leader told me that she appreciated that I got to know her before I started asking her questions.

Both of these initially hesitant study participants, highlight the importance of building relationships and trust that are evident in the methodological appendixes of classic ethnographic studies from Carol Stack to Elijah Anderson, to Elliot Liebow and others (Smith and Kornblum 1989). Another leader told me she felt I was "part of the family" because I "showed up" consistently at events to support. As other scholars have noted within their work, with time, respondents in my study seemed to ignore my role as a researcher (Glazer 1972 and Gans 1968, as cited in Thorne 1983). They stopped asking questions about the research and started interacting with me as a person with goals, as someone they supported and held accountable for those goals, and as a parent with similar visions for more family friendly communities.

I attended and took field notes at more than 90 unique organizing events totaling over 250 hours. These events included: consecutive leadership trainings; legislative trainings; organizing and statewide meetings; parent-led community forums; trips to Springfield to speak to legislators; door knocking to survey community members; and social events. The organizing events were typically bilingual (English and Spanish), with a staff or parent translator, and they were held primarily in Chicago and the surrounding area (including Evanston, Bloomington, and Aurora, IL). During participant observations, I documented interactions, paying close attention to how participants incorporated and talked about their families within organizing activities. Through this method, I was able to see parents in action within organizing environments and to

experience how leaders interacted with people from different communities and racial-ethnic identities.

I took field notes by hand in a small notebook. People often wrote notes at meetings and events, so it did not disrupt everyday occurrences. I expanded on my short jottings during events within 24 hours on my computer. It was not uncommon for me to have 10 typed pages of single spaced notes for one organizing event, which included as much as I could recall from conversations, interactions, atmosphere, non-verbal cues. I soon learned that every organizational event would produce handouts, flyers, and agendas of some sort. To keep track of the mountains of paper, I scanned handouts from each observational event, saved them electronically by event, and filed them in order by date.

Document Review

Reviewing organizing documents provided an added layer of information to supplement my ethnographic study. These documents included: COFI Leadership Training manuals, meeting agendas and handouts, COFI and POWER-PAC newsletters and reports, online vignettes and testimonies, and COFI's website and social media pages. Each document provided a different type of supplementary information, which was particularly helpful in the beginning stages of the study. I reviewed COFI's website to learn of the organizations' history and mission, training phases, past organizing wins, and to familiarize myself with names and faces at COFI. Meeting agendas and handouts gave me a better sense of how COFI organized meetings, the tasks and language they used, and how information was shared among organizers and the larger community. Training manuals helped me to learn about the COFI model and training content. Within other types of documents, I learned about how COFI defines family, community organizing, and personal transformation as a result of collective action.

Reviewing documents also allowed me to know about what was happening at COFI more generally. In addition to following leaders' invitations to gatherings, I learned about events through newsletters. It was even helpful to know about events I could not attend as I was able to ask interviewees about these specific events to learn about their experiences. Although this dissertation does not include any COFI photographs, agendas, or handouts, I use these documents to accurately describe and supplement my fieldwork.

Combination of Methods

A combination of methods granted me the ability to document and critically analyze the lived experiences and contexts of the participants in my study (Blee and Taylor 2002). To understand the interactive role and process of family life and collective action, I sought to answer "how" questions of how contexts and participants' intersecting identities matter (DeLuca, Clampet-Lundquist, Edin 2016: 216). Each method in this study—in-depth interviews, observations and a document review of organizing materials—complemented one another and supplemented possible weaknesses of the other. Interviews brought more personal and emotional narratives of participation and struggle around the relationship of family lives and collective action processes. Interviews allowed me to learn of experiences I could not observe, like intimate family disagreements concerning participants' collective action participation—and notably, how this made respondents feel. Through observations I documented the strategies, interactions, and collective processes of community organizing among parents from different races, ages, and communities and enabled me to personally experience the excitement, fear, and uncertainty that goes along with these processes. Observations also allowed me into informal conversations that, in contrast to a sit-down interview, were spontaneous and in the moment. The review of documents helped me to describe the content of organizing campaigns, the history of the COFI

family-focused model, and how the organization publicly emphasized community organizing activities and connects with action groups across the country—all evidence that provide a more comprehensive story to the forefront.

Analysis

I used open coding techniques to analyze field notes and interviews, which were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Analysis began as data was being collected in a back and forth process of theme development anchored in the everyday understandings of my study participants (Blee and Taylor 2002). I remained focused on the intersection of community organizing, gender, and family lives, while considering how these interwoven experiences were affected by varied oppressions in participants' communities and everyday experiences. I coded data by placing conceptual labels on data that described experiences, feelings, and events to uncover overlapping themes related but not limited to family relationships, gender, race relations, and power dynamics. Coding is "simply the process of categorizing and sorting data" which "serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data" (Charmaz 1983: 111). I analyzed each interview to answer my interview question and to identify meta-themes, while also doing open coding to allow for the emergence of other themes. Finally, I reexamined all data for common emerging meta-themes.

During the coding process, I wrote memos to describe emerging themes, at times pulling out interview quotes that I would later expand on. Within these memos I expanded on particular codes as "conceptual categories," which means I defined them, described their properties, explained their causes, described the conditions in which they developed, and drew conclusions about their sociological and practical impacts (Charmaz 1987). The memo writing process helped me to write early and often throughout this study. It also helped me to document my own

reflections around the themes that were developing, for instance if something surprised me in the data, I wrote about it. In addition, I used Excel spreadsheets to visualize the frequency and variance within themes once I recognized their importance in the data. For instance, I listed participant pseudonyms in the first excel column, whether or not they used the web of support within their family lives in an adjacent column, and how they used the web of support within their families, if applicable.

I used Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, which helped me to organize and keep all data sources in one accessible location. I uploaded interviews, field notes, and PDF documents for analysis in Nvivo. Through Nvivo, I coded or created "nodes" as I read and re-read each interview and my compilation of field notes. In total, I created 198 nodes across the data sources, which I then grouped and to inform themes for each data chapter. I also wrote memos within Nvivo and uploaded descriptive information about each interviewee. For instance, I uploaded spreadsheets with pseudonyms, age, neighborhood, race, number of children, number of children under 18, and other pertinent details. I also ran queries within Nvivo to further familiarize myself with the data. For example, I ran queries for the most common used 100 words within the data, which included community, family, and training. I also created word clouds in Nvivo based on the data, which I shared at report-back presentations at COFI.

Limitations

There are study limitations I would like to address. Through the methods I chose to study the interplay of community organizing processes and the family life of participants, I omitted other fruitful sources information. For instance, I was not able to observe families within their everyday interactions outside of organizing events, with the exception of my observations of family interactions during scheduled interviews in respondents' homes. Given that I sampled

interview respondents who were active members of COFI, this study is unable to speak to the experiences of leaders who are no longer involved with the organization. I also did not interview family members of participants, which would have provided a different perspective to inform my research. Nonetheless, both of these limitations could be included in future research, both conducted by me and other scholars of collective action. Despite these limitations, I am pleased with the findings derived from this ethnographic study and hope that I have justly represented the heartfelt stories that were so generously shared with me. I agree with Atkinson (2015) in that ethnographic fieldwork is personally and intellectually satisfying and is perhaps "the most rewarding and most faithful way of understanding the social world" (3).

Community-Engaged Methods

This dissertation study used community engaged-methods, which were focused on a research partnership instead of seeing study participants as research "subjects." Although COFI staff and parents did not participate in collecting or analyzing data nor in writing research findings, I shared early and more developed drafts of research findings, accepted feedback, and kept staff and parents informed about the progress of my research. Some of the quotes from this study were used in reports to COFI funders and in grant proposals, which ensured that this research had a broader reach and supported the work of the organization more broadly. Staff and parents said they were grateful for the study, which helped them reflect on their work and spread their stories "worldwide." Part of their feedback included my "intentionality" in not just observing, but also participating and sharing my story with them. The relationship I built with COFI leaders and staff is important and distinctive. I shared more about myself, my studies, and my family than I expected to, but doing so I think made a big difference in demystifying me as a

researcher and person. I shared a human side of me COFI leaders and staff could connect with, which created mutual learning and growth.

I believe that as researchers, it is important to build relationships and trust with community members beyond the research goals. I also trust that conducting community-engaged research brings sociologists and other analysts one step closer to research that is not only relevant to academics and policy makers, but also to everyday community stakeholders. I continue my reflections on community-engaged methods in the concluding chapter.

My positionality. It became evident to me that my position as a woman of color (who looked whiter than most) and my higher level of education waged curiosity among leaders. But, I got the feeling right away that leaders wanted me to forget what I learned in textbooks and learn from them. They "had a lot to say," and recruitment was relatively easy because leaders wanted to share *their* experiences, so I wouldn't get the larger story wrong. This communicates a great deal about the COFI family-focused model and the power that leaders, most of whom are materially poor women of color, come to recognize as they organize through the model. I needed to learn *from them* and just as I later came to see was their stance with police, policy makers, and principals, I *worked for them*. I embraced the fact that parents agreed to "let me in" but they rightly expected some things in return from me. They expected me to participate and share, instead of being a disconnected observer. They expected me to attend their conversation-exchange meetings to help them practice their English. And they expected me to "get it right," which I hope I am getting closer to doing with this dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TRANFORMATIVE EFFECTS OF FACILIATED CROSS-COMMUNITY BUILDING

> *All of you have gone through [the leadership] training, phase one and phase two and this is phase three. We will learn from one another across-cultures, across-communities, and races. We are going to get to know each other and each other's experiences, to learn from each other...This has been an interesting week… there are other words I can use as well…There is a new president, a day after there was a march across the world. We had our own moms there. There were moms holding up signs about no deportations and childcare. There were signs about respecting women. COFI was marching with six million others on the same day. We are part of a movement happening all over the world."- Ellen, Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), January 2017*

In this epigraph, a long-time community organizer and executive director of COFI, Ellen Schumer mentions three overarching concerns, which mothers and grandmothers (leaders) in the room faced in their daily lives. One, the deportation of family members along with the increased fear surrounding the new Trump administration. Two, their struggle to afford safe and quality care for their children as childcare subsidies for working moms continued to deteriorate in Illinois. And three, the lack of respect and in many cases harassment they experienced as materially poor women of color. These leaders were part of a local and worldwide movement contesting social, racial, and economic justice. Through COFI, leaders from different communities, cultures, and races worked together to create policies to improve the experiences of their families and communities.

For women of color, grassroots collective action is often motivated by their lived experiences, unequal material conditions, and social location and identities (Naples 2003; Collins

1990). Marginalized women participate in collective action, including to gain social, economic, material, and symbolic justice, to be recognized in the eyes of the law and their peers, and to find strength in their own abilities (Eckstein 2001; Feldman and Stall 2004; Pardo 1998). Participants bring with them their lived experiences and intersecting identities, which continue to shape and be shaped by collective processes. For materially poor people of color especially, engagement in local politics magnifies their voices, and can, at times, yield powerful personal and other political transformations. As Kelly Moore (2008) suggests, "groups that are divided have a more difficult time fending off challengers, as analysts of organizations, social movements, and revolutions have shown" (201). Yet, scholars repeatedly ignore and understudy the fruitful grassroots efforts led by people, specifically women of color who work together to improve their communities (Mantler 2013; Pardo 1998).

Understanding how marginalized people bridge differences to work together for common goals is a major intellectual and political concern. Although recent research has begun to bring some of these collaborative cases to light (Carroll 2015; Mantler 2013; Pulido 2006; Rodriguez 2011; Zamora 2011), these studies say little about *how* political communities of color come to be formed. This process is critical for our understanding of the very nature of politics, and for understanding how the most marginalized groups are able to form political relationships that cross the racial divides that have allowed domination to persist. As W.E.B. DuBois (1935) wrote in *Black Reconstruction in America*, racial divides are not natural, but created. Some analysts have examined this process in union organizing, a process that seeks to level racial differences and experiences and subsume them under social class. Other studies have shown how faith-based organizing and religious progressive politics help to unite different groups towards social justice

(Braunstein, Fuist and Williams 2017; Diaz- Edelman 2017; Slessarev-Jamir 2011; Wood and Fulton 2015: Wood 2002;). The current study sheds light on an understudied family-focused model of community organizing, which I argue is intentional in nurturing instead of erasing difference as means of building trust among materially poor mothers.

This study examines the dialogic processes of Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), a highly successful cross-community organization of parents of color, largely Latina and African American mothers and grandmothers. The narratives and observations illuminate the dialogic strategies used to build bridges across differences. These processes of dialog advance social change in at least two ways: 1) through the sharing of stories of common struggles, leaders form meaningful bonds of solidarity and trust; and 2) with the support of COFI, leaders mobilize these cross-community relationships to work with each other toward common children-centered goals. Evidence indicates how COFI's intentional use of *race-conscious nudges*, encouragement of *stories about children and family* and shared narratives of *mutual discrimination* helped to bridge gaps between organizers of color from different neighborhoods. These organizing strategies cultivate respectful relationships, and shape participants' thoughts and actions towards people from different races and neighborhoods—changes that are important for breaking down social divides that serve to further marginalize groups of color. These findings are important because they provide evidence of how cross-community collective action among people of color has the ability to break down spatial, social, and interpersonal divisions among its participants.

Cross-Race Coalitions of Color

Prior scholarship has been attentive to cross-community collective action. Some have argued that communities of color have continuously worked on issues *separately*, even when the

issues at hand are very similar. For instance, Benita Roth (2004) shows that Black, Chicana, and White women took separate but similar paths during the Second Wave of Feminism. Barbara Ryan (1992, 1997) similarly shows that social movements have typically advanced through "separate organizing that represents particular interests" (1997:76). Ryan argues that people seek association with others most like themselves given their experiences of discrimination from dominant groups. But despite the tendency to separate certain group struggles from one another, there is growing recognition that people from different races, ethnicities, and political affiliations create inclusive alliances for social justice (Bevacqua 2001). This does not of course disregard the real experiences of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia within movements, nor does research claim that all movements have been inclusive (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Brown Ray, Summers and Fraistat 2017). What it suggests instead is that the focus on racially separate organizing is only one pattern of political mobilization.

These cross-racial coalitions have made substantial marks on our history of organizing; yet, most of what we know centers around the Civil Rights Movement, and labor movements. For instance, using oral histories and a review of underground newspapers and magazines, Gordon Mantler (2013) uncovered the high level of cooperation and collective action among materially poor African Americans and Mexican Americans who fought for economic justice during the mobilization of the poor in the 1960s and 1970s in the US. In *Power to the Poor*, Mantler argues that multiracial and identity politics reinforced each other in anti-poverty coalitions from mid 1960's through the 1970s. Examples include collaborations between Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, and African American Civil Rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality. Mantler also

shows substantial links between the Anti-Vietnam movement, the Chicano movement, and the Black power movement around anti-poverty efforts.

Other examples of cross-race coalitions include research that shows how Black, Chicanos, Puerto Rican and Japanese American activists collaborated through Third World Left coalitions comprised of groups like the Black Panther Party, East Wind, Young Lords and the Brown Berets (Pulido 2006). In *Forging Radical Alliances across Difference,* scholars show how groups organize across gender, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, age, and sexuality with the goal of changing unequal social structures (Bytstydzienski and Schacht 2001). For example, in the 1970s, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Mexican Americans forged a new Latino/a identity and worked together to resist employment discrimination in Chicago through a collective of 23 community organizations from neighborhoods across the city (Barvosa-Carter 2001). More recently, Rodriguez (2011) writes about the coalitions between Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican activists in Milwaukee who marched, picketed, and boycotted to protest employment discrimination during the War on Poverty era.

Cross-race and cross-community coalitions of women are also documented, albeit less frequently than those of men, given the exclusion of women of color from formal leadership positions and the often neglect of scholars in documenting the indispensability of women's organizing work (Robnett 1997). The evidence that does exist shows that African American, Latina, and white women worked together during the War on Poverty (Carroll 2015; Orleck and Hazirijian 2011; Naples 1998). Also, during the anti-rape movement in the 1970s and 1980s, alliances formed among white, black, radical and liberal feminists who built a coalition to raise public awareness, support survivors, and reform laws across the country (Bevacqua 2001).

During the 1980's and 1990's coalitions grew between feminists, lesbian, and gay men to support communities affected by AIDS, to fight for an end to homophobia, and to improve healthcare (Carrol 2015). In *Mobilizing New York*, Tamar Carroll (2015) uses oral histories, archival records, and newspapers to show how women of color and working-class white ethnic women in New York collaborated on feminist activist efforts through National Congress of Neighborhood Women.

Although we know less about the exclusive self-led efforts of women of color, evidence also indicates that poor women of color have organized against limited benefits and the stigmatization of public assistance (Solomon 1998). The Brooklyn Welfare Action Council (B-WAC) for instance, a group led by women of color who were recipients of public assistance, fought for higher monthly benefits, spread information, and offered training sessions to teach recipients about welfare rules, their legal rights, and how to organize through door knocking and other grassroots methods (Solomon 1998). B-WAC, Aid to Needy Children (ANC) Mothers Anonymous in Los Angeles, and the National Welfare Rights Organization, which was made up of more than 500 welfare rights groups across the nation, worked together despite social and cultural differences. Also, studies show how black women have been active within the environmental justice movement in Atlanta, Georgia (Gomez, Shafiei, and Johnson 2011).

In the late 1960's, African American and Puerto Rican mothers participated in boycotts, sit-ins, and organized to achieve quality education for their children who were graduating high school at a rate of about 50 percent and were being taught by mostly white teachers. Groups like Mobilization for Youth helped to organize Puerto Rican and African American mothers whose children were being disproportionately suspended and put into special education classes because

of so-called "behavioral problems" (Salomon 1998). As a result of their efforts, including their demands for decision-making power within the school, parents helped to create a new curriculum to teach students about Black and Latino history, culture, and contributions, which were missing from previously Euro-centered approaches (Salomon 1998). Still, we still need more research on recent women led movements including the #Black Lives Matters movement, the Dreamers movement and the #MeToo movement, and the local organizing that is essential within these movements.

As this review has outlined, a bulk of studies that examine cross-community coalitions focus on the strategies groups use during collective action to achieve mutual goals, and less on the mechanisms for bridging perceived and actual differences among groups as a goal in itself. One recent study, although also primarily focused on how cross-community bridging strategies advance group goals (instead of transforming race relations or highlighting other intimate effects) sheds important light on how cross-community groups can be intentional about creating trust and spaces for mutual collaboration. As Mia Diaz-Edelman (2017) argues, in her study of a multi-cultural immigrant rights movement in San Diego, certain rules or "etiquette" within cross-community mobilization builds trust, develop leaders, and creates safe spaces, which makes efficient use of participants' time and propels movement efforts forward.

Again, although many studies mentioned in this review highlight the benefits of cross-community coalitions among people of color, who have succeeded in achieving socio-political outcomes, it is important to recognize that all collaborations are not one-and-the-same in terms of bringing people together (beyond explicit organizing goals). Sofia Quintero (2001), an activist and writer from New York, differentiates between "traditional coalitions" and "radical

coalitions," where the former forges a seemingly united front towards a goal without taking into account the underlying systems of oppression. The latter, she argues, respects one another's uniqueness and interests and is careful not to reproduce systems of oppression (100-101). Importantly, a radical coalition is not content with only achieving a policy outcome but instead also seeks to build community with collaborators (Quintero 2001). A main base for building relationships rests in shared stories.

Storytelling, Identity Politics and Cross-community Relationship Building

Previous studies have shown the instrumentality of participant narratives or storytelling within collective action (Braunstein 2012; Taylor 1999; Wood and Fulton 2015), although less of this research is focused on narratives for building cross-community relationships as a goal in itself. Research instead indicates how narratives mobilize, and sustain collective action (Polletta 2006), how narratives can have ambiguous moral messages reaching a wide range of supporters (Polletta 2006; Mische 2003), how public narratives elicit emotional responses, which turn shared values into action (Ganz 2011; Wood and Fulton 2015), and how (gendered) narratives enact social frames that can help (Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Romero 2008; Taylor 1999) or stagnate mobilization (Marshall 1985). But these studies have tended to see storytelling as an overly "public" enterprise (Ganz 2011; Wood and Fulton 2015), and largely as a means to the end concerning explicit organizational collective action goals.

For the participants in my study, story-telling through one-on-one conversations was a process of cross-community building, a process that is largely absent from discussions of identity formation. Stuart Hall (1987) suggests that identity is an unstable process developed and learned culturally and politically in relation to others. Your identity as an immigrant or Black woman for

instance, is "a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found" he argues (Hall 1987: 45). Hall challenges the idea that identity is fixed and categorical. In contemporary political organizing, it is this kind of work—turning stories of discrimination and humiliation into bases for community building—that are increasing used by marginalized communities to organize political movements. Some scholars and activists describe this type of collective action as "identity politics." By this they mean the process by which people turn personal experience and identity into political efforts in reflective ways (Bernstein 2005; Naples 2003; Ryan 2001). Again, however the focus remains on how personal experience and storytelling helps to further collective and radical politics.

A key example of the use of identity towards collective action is found in the writings of the Combahee River Collective (1974), a group of Black feminist women whose collective action was inseparable from their identities, family, neighborhoods and other social contexts. In their Statement (1974), they wrote how:

> … focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

This quote emphasizes the power inherent in ending one's own oppression through action that reflects one's own identity and experience. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of "borderlands" highlights the ways that physical boundaries intersect with overlapping gender, sexual, and cultural identities. These overlaps, she argues, inevitably shape our biographies and collective efforts.

It is important to recognize that for people of color identity politics is often a necessity, not a choice. People of color experience continuous daily battles "waged on several fronts at once" and cannot separate themselves from these battles when they engage in collective action (Lusane 1996: 2). This does not mean that particular marginalized groups cannot work with other groups—similarly marginalized or not. In fact, recognizing that our identity is constantly in relation with others and articulating these connections with others allows for and encourages "unities-in-difference," which acknowledges that despite points of resistance other identities matter, even if they are distinct from our own. (Hall 1987: 45). The bridging of differences is an important process of coalitional politics, yet this does not mean one should be forced compartmentalize themselves to engage in collective action.

A common critique of identity politics relates to the homogenization and colonization of identity. Queer activists and scholars, for example, point to the often dichotomized and hierarchical categories within social movements that obscure gender fluidity. Instead, these and other analysts have recognized and championed a "multiracial, multigendered movement of people with diverse sexualities" (Seidman 1993; Epstein 1998; as cited in Bernstein 2005: 56). Feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1987) points out that notions of global sisterhood, where women are supposed to automatically identify and recognize one another, is a Western middle-class invention that does not take into account global and local power relations, class, and culture. Instead, she argues, any unity among women must be accomplished through actions and struggles, rather than understood "as a given, on the basis of a natural/psychological commonality" (Mohanty 2003: 116). Only through purposeful and meaningful interactions of collective struggle, and the recognition of "structures of domination," like structural racism,

(Baca Zinn and Dill 1996) can seemingly disparate groups discover and recognize commonalities and work towards social change.

Silvia Zamora's research provides an example of this process of commonality recognition, in a study of a non-profit organization's mobilization of African Americans and Latino youth (Zamora 2011). Zamora shows how leaders used racialized discourses to draw attention to the similarly marginalized situations of both groups. Through discussions of contemporary and historical examples of racial and economic inequality, youth members found connections with one another, and developed a collective identity as working-class Black and Latino South Los Angeles residents. Yet, in a related article, this class-based collaboration was overly emphasized by Zamora and Osuji (2014) as a framing strategy for mobilizing towards immigrant rights, not for building meaningful and sustainable relationships across communities. The authors argue that even though African Americans and Latinos worked together, there existed barriers to deeper relationship-building because of perceived competition for similar jobs (Zamora and Osuji 2014).

More broadly, building social justice coalitions should avoid trying to unite based on identity sameness or a singular identity, and instead should acknowledge and make room for difference (Young 1990) *and* commonality. Recently, feminist philosophers Allison Weir (2013) and Mariana Ortega (2016) have called for scholars to look at identities not as categories of sameness people fit into, but rather to focus on how people connect with one another through meaningful "desires, relationships, commitments, and ideals" (Weir 2008:111). Through what Weir calls "identification-with" (Weir 2008), people can develop a "coalitional politics" (Ortega 2016:155) that recognizes participants' social and material location as well as their many

intersecting identities. Ortega (2016) suggests that coalitional politics can lead to "becoming with," which involves understanding others, and "being transformed by them and with them" (155). The current study illuminates the process of "becoming-with" (Ortega 2016:155)—how participants of collective action organize across difference and how these experiences transform cross-community relationships.

The scholarship on political identity and on cross-group organizing has made it clear that these topics are important and that they exist, but it has less to say about the process of how these identities and relationships are built. To address these issues, we need to uncover the processes of building community across race and community. What does this process look like within a family-focused model of organizing? How do cross-race and cross- community coalitions shape the way participants see one another beyond their mutual organizing goals and policy achievements?

Through a family-focused community organizing model that recognizes the intersectionality of identities among Latino and African American parents from different communities across Chicago and Illinois, I hope to show how COFI begins the process of storytelling and cross-community relationship-building with the premise that identity and coalitional politics are not individual, but rather relational enterprises where historically situated contexts and experiences (i.e. family, race, gender, immigration) matter.

The following sections describe the mechanisms COFI used within a family-focused model, to help bridge differences among leaders. First are the children-centered goals of COFI leaders in Chicago and Illinois and its partners across the country, which were connected through the organization. Second, are the norms facilitated, but established by leaders to respect one

another's differences and build trust. And third, are what I call*, race-conscious nudges*, which COFI used to encourage storytelling among leaders from different races, cultures, and communities to bridge differences.

Bridging Cross-Community Differences

"I Have *Millions* of Children

COFI brought leaders together to work on children-centered goals through collective action to establish programs and policy changes to improve their families. Among their main campaigns were ending poverty, decreasing the criminalization of youth in Chicago Public Schools, and ensuring that small children had access to healthy food and early learning opportunities. Importantly, COFI helped parents to see their children-focused, local work as connected to other families beyond their own communities.

One example occurred at a meeting in Evanston, a northern suburb of Chicago, in April 2017. At this meeting, eight mothers and two COFI staff met with four foundation representatives and initiative leaders to discuss and brainstorm about possible new project: children's savings accounts, with incentives for matched savings. All of the COFI parent leaders who lived in Evanston had young children, some of whom were in preschool and others who were just starting elementary school. COFI parents set the agenda for the meeting, which started with introductions. "Say your name, number of children, and one hope or dream you have for your children," the agenda read. This introduction by design placed the focus on envisioning a better future for participants' children. The meeting in particular was fitting for this community group, Parents of Evanston Allied for Children's Education (PEACE), because one of their team goals was to take small steps towards financial security and savings. Thus, when Sonia, a COFI

organizer, shared with parents that several foundations were looking for parents to pilot a matched-savings program for children, the group was excited about this possibility and eagerly agreed to a meeting.

Corinne started us out at the meeting, which was held inside of a partner community organization in a district known for an educational gap between black and white students. "I'm Corinne. And my hope is that my daughter goes to school in the south at an HBCU, a historically black college or university." Mona introduced herself as a mother of two and said "My hope is that [my children] go to college and come out without debt like I did. Because I know that impacts life decisions and also what you decide to do career wise. So, I hope that by then there is universal college, free of tuition." "Yes, there will be!" said Jenna enthusiastically. Jenna, a more experienced Chicago leader (parent organizer), had joined the meeting to support newer Evanston leaders. Jenna introduced herself next. "I have *millions* of children whom I advocate for every day. I raised three nephews and have two daughters who are in college. I hope they go through school and continue their education as far as they want and have more than enough money to take care of me!" People in the room laughed, some nodding their heads. Jenna's matter-of-fact introduction explained how she advocated for far more than just her children, the children in her community, and the children in her state. She, like others at COFI, saw their work as having a large impact on all children.

Throughout my fieldwork, COFI staff and parents connected their local organizing with the struggles of people across the state, nation, and world. Leaders often chanted "worldwide" at meetings to remind themselves and others of their goal of spreading COFI to places all over the world. In part, this vision was slowly coming true given that COFI had within the past three

years expanded from working exclusively within Chicago to several other communities across Illinois. COFI was also leading a cross-country effort to unite at its inception around 12 organizations of similarly organized parents across the country via an umbrella organization called United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN). By December 2017, UPLAN had over 30 member-organizations from across the United States. The UPLAN website (unitedparentleaders.org) was translated into 15 languages and was narrated through the voices of parents. For instance, the website says: "UPLAN is our national network. A lot of us are parents of color; many of us are immigrants; a lot of us are grandparents, raising another generation. Some of us live in big cities, and some in small towns." The UPLAN website highlights how parents are "fired up about working together for a national impact," and "coming together to learn, connect, strategize and plan." The website also urges that: "The next administration, policymakers and political officials need to listen to the voice of those most affected as they make critical decisions about our families." COFI's address and phone number was listed as the UPLAN contact for questions. Informal chants and discussions about the worldwide relevance of COFI along with actual group connections to other parent organizations through UPLAN, are just a few ways COFI helped leaders to connect local struggles and people across different communities.

At the time of the research, COFI (staff and leaders) had met with other out of state parent groups across the country through the UPLAN collaboration. During these meetings, groups brainstormed their strategies, campaigns, and next steps. When they met, parents participated in ice breakers, they set the agenda, they worked on logistics, and they discussed their budget, rules, and administrative structure. Based on discussions with COFI staff and

parents who attended UPLAN meetings, all organizations agreed that the focus of the network was to fight for better opportunities for children, particularly small children. Notably however, the original 12 organizations disagreed about how to do this. Some groups wanted UPLAN to be a parent lobby group to advocate for national laws. COFI and other groups instead emphasized the group should be a source of networking for parents to share best practices and grow as leaders who were working on individual, family, and community goals. These discussions continued as more groups joined UPLAN's efforts. However, one thing seemed constant throughout—UPLAN was a network of parents working together to improve the lives of their children and therefore their communities, and families.

At a COFI meeting in Chicago, staff showed a short UPLAN video clip, which was later posted on the UPLAN website. The clip introduced some of the goals of the network and highlighted the inclusiveness of the group. The one-minute clip begins with an African American COFI leader:

> *What if every child had access to quality education? What if every child had food every day? What if every child had a sound safe place that they could play and create and grow? UPLAN is an organization that is, parents across the country that are coming together to make a national impact on issues that affect our families, such as immigration, economic security, early childhood education and childcare. We are collaborating together to make sure that our voice is heard across the country.*

After this, the video shows the UPLAN logo, shadow figures holding hands up in the air in front of a plain yellow map of the United States. These figures include three children, one of which is resting in the arms of one person, and another who is stretched out seemingly rejoicing above a wall of interlocked hands. The last 15 seconds of the video introduces separate clips of women ranging in age, skin tone, spoken language and accent, hair color, and dress. First, four consecutive clips of women said, "I am a parent" and in Spanish "Yo soy un padre." The first

woman had a darker complexion and was wearing a headscarf. The second woman had a light complexion with red hair. The third woman, the one who spoke in Spanish had a medium complexion. The fourth woman had black hair and a darker complexion. Next, a similar sequence occurred with different women, some with accents, all with different hairstyles and dress. They said the same phrase "I am a leader" and in Spanish "Soy un lider." Last, three women, two of whom were not featured before, said "We are UPLAN" and in Spanish "Nosotros somos UPLAN," followed by a final clip of a white woman and black man standing behind an older black woman who ended the video in unison saying, "We are UPLAN." This was the only group clip shown in the video. In under one minute, the video reflected the inclusive space that COFI and UPLAN attempted to create for parents. As Abby said during an interview,

> All of us are there [at COFI] because we want to do something for the community and for ourselves to create goals and set goals and do the goals, for ourselves, for our family, for our community. And that's what we have in common and we are all different races and nationalities.

Abby's comment reflects how diverse leaders at COFI and across the country were united by personal and group goals, which often revolved around their children and their families. The glue that connected these leaders was strengthened by the norms established by leaders, norms that guided their collaborative efforts to improve their communities.

"Don't Yuck My Yum" Respect

COFI leaders set and re-established mutual norms of respect and cooperation. I observed many instances of these norm setting processes. In one occasion, forty-five leaders from Chicago and several other communities (including East St. Louis, Elgin, and Evanston) attended the statewide meeting. By my count, there were 27 African American mothers and grandmothers, 12

Latina mothers and grandmothers, three white mothers, one African American father and two Latino fathers. Leaders met to update each other on their local organizing efforts and to vote on legislative campaign issues they would like to pursue in the upcoming year. However, it became evident throughout the day that a main focus would be getting to know each other across communities and across races. At the start of the meeting Ellen, the Executive Director, proclaimed: "We are part of a movement happening all over the world." She highlighted how parents' local organizing work was connected to a larger movement for gender and social justice that transcended race, borders, language, and residential status. I return to this meeting to give an account of how parents and grandparents from different walks of life shared and interacted with one another with the goal of getting to know one another and respecting each other's differences.

> *In Spanish (with an English translator), COFI staff asked us to participate in a musical chairs-inspired ice-breaker where we went around the room in search of someone we did not know with one goal in mind: getting to know someone from a different race. We were asked to walk around the room as music was playing. When the music paused, we were to talk to someone from a different race whom we did not already know, and discuss three things: First, "One place you'd like to visit other than your home country;"Second, "What language you would like to learn other than your own?"and Last,"What food do you like other than from your native country?" The music was paused when it was time to find someone else to share with. When the music started, participants didn't just walk but danced in a lively fashion, as they navigated the room. The music stopped after about a minute, and I looked around trying to find someone to talk to. Soon, a woman reached out and grabbed my hands; both of us sighed with relief. We began the activity. As I looked around the room I saw people smiling and laughing as they shared these three simple questions or listened to the person across from them. After about four minutes, the music interrupted these flowing conversations and we started again in our quest to talk to someone else we did not know. The activity took about 12 minutes, and I was able to talk to four African American parents, including one father. When we returned to our seats, Ayana, a black woman in her 30's, turned to me and said "That was fun! We are moving around. I thought we would be sitting for the whole day not moving around and I was worried." I smiled, and agreed it was a fun activity.*
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> *The next icebreaker required more group communication and less movement. The room was full of chatter as staff organizers arranged different-colored rope on the floor into*

three large ovals. We were asked to stand inside a different colored rope according to what kind of place we grew up in (our options were big city, medium-sized city, and small town). Many people gravitated to the big city and small town ovals, while the middle sized city—the group I joined--only had a handful of participants."Ok so in three minutes, I want you to talk and come up with one way you are similar,"said a COFI staff member. "GO!", she said, grinning from ear to ear. A Black woman in my group began asking the group many questions, including "Do you have kids?""Do you dance?" I helped to translate these questions to a couple of the Spanish-speaking moms. The small-town group finished first and they began dancing. Our time was up but the large city group kept talking. "We know this group is cheating!" the COFI staff member joked. "Ohhh cheaters! Big City!", said several small towners, as they pointed toward that group.

When it was our turn to share, my group said, "We are all mothers, we all drive, and we like to dance!" The small-town group said were "We are all advocates in our communities and we all love tacos." The big city group said, "We all have children and we like watching TV." After each response the staff member nodded and agreed as the groups cheered for one another. Next, the same COFI staff member said "OK now you are all going to figure out your divisions and come together because the mid-sized city group is getting cut in half and one is going to big city and the other to small town. You have one minute to come up with something you have in common. And you can't use something you've already used. GO!" I was funneled into the small-town group. Jenna, a Black woman in her 40's took the lead in asking people what they liked, what they did, and made suggestions for what we should say. When our time was up, everyone was instructed to get together inside one rope and discuss one thing we had in common. Side by side, arms touching, with little room to move, we took on the challenge of finding things we had in common. After some deliberation, Jenna suggested "love." She yelled out to the group, given our mobility restriction within the boundaries of the rope, "Love?" Do we agree?" After hearing nothing but affirmation she announced a count down, and said "Three, two, one!" The group almost instinctively yelled out "Love!" The room filled with clapping and we laughed and cheered all the way back to our seats. Again, Ayana turned to me and said "That was so nice. I like it, it was so nice."

Soon after, another COFI staff organizer came to the front of the room and explained the purpose of the day: "We are going to get to know each other's' experiences and learn what we have in common, to build trust. We are going to get personal and deep... What should be part of the ground rules for sharing," she asked, while holding a marker in her hand to write down suggestions on the whiteboard. Among the responses were "respect for others' feelings," "agree to disagree," "stay positive," "value everyone's opinions," and "Don't yuck my yum." Explaining her response, Jenna said, "so don't yuck at somebody and just realize that that's their thing, even if it's not what you prefer." (Fieldnotes)

To extend the process of trust and commonality, leaders established norms for sharing that included respecting differences. Leaders drew from stories of shared experiences of motherhood, their children, they rhythmically moved their bodies to music, and played games that helped them to get to know one another.

Before midday at this meeting, leaders had established three of the main foundations of COFI's family-focused cross-cultural and cross community organizing work among parents of color from different communities. First, how all COFI parents were bound together by their children and by their similar experiences of oppression, despite their many differences. Second, how parents, particularly mothers, were part of a larger movement against structural injustices happening all over the world. And third, how the group rejected bigotry by acknowledging that there would be disagreement; disagreement was acceptable and even expected as long as "don't yuck my yum" respect overcame all else.

Race-Conscious Nudges to Unite Parents of Color

COFI helped to build relationships between people by calling attention to similar experiences of discrimination, and by helping participants to imagine and work towards a better world for their children and families. Although many organizers affiliated with COFI shared similar experiences of class, race, and gender oppression, demographically, they varied widely by race, age, and immigration status. One of the most important strategies COFI used involved—what I call *race-conscious nudges*— guided or mediated discussions to share personal and relational stories and experiences concerning race and family. Although previously, Peter Rosenblatt and I (2018) have shown how policy nudges can incentivize low-income families to move to areas of higher opportunity, here I use COFI-practiced *race-conscious nudges* to show

how organizations can motivate leaders to connect on a more meaningful level. The use of these scripts is a clear example of how COFI purposefully supported the building of relationships across diverse communities. To show *race-conscious nudges* in practice, I return to the COFI statewide meeting introduced in the opening quote, which took place in late January 2017.

At this statewide COFI meeting, staff organizers asked us to hold a focused one-on-one conversation with another person from a different race. They did not explain how we would know someone was from a different race. We were asked to discuss the question "How has race has impacted you or your family?"

> *I joined Monique for this activity when we made eye contact and walked towards each other. Monique was a Black woman in her 50s from East St. Louis. I listened attentively as she spoke about the many ways she was involved in her community as part of a parent patrol that ensured children walked safely from school to home and vice versa. When it was my turn to share, I said "For me, race has impacted my family because strangers often come up to me and make comments about my daughter because her skin color is darker than mine." Monique's eyes grew wide and she said "Wow, I can't believe that happened to you. I can write a book about how racism has affected me. It happens when you enter an elevator and people grab on to their purses." Monique hugged her stomach as if she was holding something to her womb. "It happens when you're followed around at the store. It happens all the time, "she said nodding her head. (Fieldnotes)*

I realized that had I not been willing to sharing a personal story about how race has impacted my family, Monique might not have been eager to share her own experiences. Although she still did not connect how these experiences impacted her family, she nonetheless responded to me with more than simply a recital of her résumé of community involvement. This interaction provides one example of how these activities require that both parties be engaged and willing to talk about topics that in many contexts people try to avoid. I now return to the meeting to provide an example of how this activity led us to the next group task of brainstorming ways to work together on issues that impacted us all.

> *When we came back as a larger group, a COFI staff organizer admitted that "There are disagreements about what racism is exactly and who can be racist. But, instead of talking about the term, we are going to use our time to discuss the connections between one another." Andrea, a Black grandmother, raised her hand and said, "This country was built on racism and until those that built it knock it down themselves, there is this wall that divides us. Until we just can't take it anymore!" Her voice was drowned out by cheering and clapping across the room. The organizer nodded her head and asked Andrea to repeat what she said last. "Until we can't take it anymore! Said Andrea. YES! Exclaimed the organizer. "Who gains when we are divided?" she asked."The prison system! The one percent! Trump and his friends!" participants chimed in enthusiastically. "Who loses when we don't work together?" asked the organizer. "Our children! Someone yelled from the crowd." "Yes. We do." said the organizer. When we come together and see common goals and work together and fight, we can do powerful things!" (Fieldnotes)*

Another race-conscious nudge COFI used were mixed-community trips and transportation. These were notably more subtle than directly asking leaders to share personal stories about race and family experiences, but nonetheless were opportunities for meaningfully sharing and interacting. COFI staff organizers planned their larger group logistics in ways that encouraged relationship building between parent organizers from different communities and races. For instance, although it would be easier for each community to travel to Springfield within the local teams they knew well and had already been working with on local policy and program changes, COFI mixed-up groups that went to Springfield for their annual *Moms on a Mission* trip to lobby for children-friendly bills. Buses traveled across the city and state, making different stops to pick up parents from different communities. These buses all made a stop about an hour away from the state capitol, where leaders sat in an assigned, mixed-community table, marked with their group number, to share lunch together and to pitch their plan for convincing legislators to support the bills on their legislative agenda. During lunch, leaders also established the rotating roles each group member would play within these interactions with legislators and

their staffers. COFI staff organizers walked around translating discussions, facilitating conversations, and answering questions as needed.

The purposeful organization of mixed bus rides put people outside of their comfort zone, often pushing them to meet someone new from a different community and race. Cindy, a Black grandmother in her 60's reflects on these interactions during an interview with me: "During one of our last trips to Springfield, I was with a lot of Mexicans. I think it was just two of us [black women] on the bus." Cindy told me how she saw one of the leaders from a different community after the trip and waved energetically to them and said: "I seen you on the bus! I had so much fun with you on the bus and in Springfield, and you showed me-" Cindy interrupted this memory by explaining how "even though I don't speak Spanish, they understand me, and I understand them...cause most people talk with their hands or talk with the motion of their body." Through COFI's race conscious nudges, Cindy communicated and felt understood by leaders from a different community, who did not speak English, and whom she now recognized as people whom she had fun with despite their differences.

Focused interactions among COFI parents, along with unstructured conversations between people from different communities with similar goals had reverberating effects. In some cases, these interactions made parents eager to learn more about other's cultures and customs and encouraged the continued practice of "don't yuck my yum" respect. For instance, Zoe, a Latina and Native American woman said her community vision included:

> More awareness of diversity and cultures because sometimes we fear the unknown. And being involved, I found out that we have so many similarities. Just because we look different doesn't mean we don't have-- we're not the same. The way we dress, the way we eat, the way we think. Understand why they dress the way they do, understand why we eat the same dish but it has to be cooked differently. It helps you respect one another.

Here, Zoe emphasizes the need to interact with people from different cultures to reduce fear and dichotomization, but also to continue to build trust and practice respect.

Participation at COFI events and trainings allowed me to see the strategies the organization used to unite parents across race and community. During events and organizing activities, I observed how COFI facilitated creative icebreakers to uncover similarities, how leaders shared informal meals and conversations supported by the organization, and how the groups' agenda focused on children—all which were key strategies for uniting parents. Moreover, these and other race conscious nudges often meant that leaders had to face instead of ignore uncomfortable situations that revolved around race and prejudice. Leaders used similarly guided bridging strategies within their local community organizing and their everyday lives as parents and neighbors.

Challenging Prejudices through Discourse

In-depth interviews, in particular helped to uncover how leaders made sense of race-conscious nudges and how leaders used the foundations of their family-focused organizing work within other contexts. Interviews revealed how COFI leaders were transforming their race relations through their local collective action, and with the support of COFI.

One example is clearly articulated by Victoria, a Latina mother who said her favorite part of participating in a local Parent Leadership Training at her children's school was interacting with other parents, particularly with African American parents. In the following quote, Victoria discusses the process of challenging prejudices through community organizing:

> I have not been a bad person, but I have had, since I arrived [in the United States], I've had like a bad regard of African Americans [mal especto sobre los Afro Americanos]. But now that I am interacting with the moms from my [daughter's school], and even though I don't understand everything they say-- I can't speak well with them is all, but

> the little that I've been able to speak with them, I tell my husband I've been really surprised [to realize] that sometimes a language is a really big barrier because you can't get to know a person because of it.

Again, language is mentioned among respondents as a perceived, but not immutable barrier to cross-community interactions. Victoria went on to explain how her interactions with African American mothers at her daughters' school began to change. She first described how she had a difficult conversation with an African American mom named Latoya (with some help from a COFI organizer who translated), after several instances of feeling intentionally excluded for being Latina. Victoria's children went to a charter school in Chicago that was attended by predominantly African American students. She said:

> At one point, I told her 'Why, if you all fought for equality are you putting up a barrier for us when we don't have any ulterior motives. We send our kids here because I consider it a good school. I think it's a good school and my daughter is helping [the school] progress.' She said 'Really?' I said 'My children don't come here to take your children's place. Quite the contrary, you should feel proud that we are together, we are uniting. She said, 'you're right.' 'I said, there's been times when I arrive [to the school] and I say hi to you and you get up and leave... And because I was not going to transfer my resentment towards my daughter, I would tell my daughter 'I think she did not understand me' and I would follow along my path. 'She understood you,' my daughter would say.

Victoria recounted how she also told Latoya about a time she felt excluded from having a role in an after-school event where children were creating masks, explaining that she felt that Latoya participated in unequal treatment towards Latino children at the school by not calling on them to participate. "You shouldn't do that… the heart of my children are clean and they don't have resentment," said Victoria. Latoya reportedly apologized, and also mentioned something that had been bothering her: "We don't speak to you [Latina moms] because when we arrive to a parent reunion…we see that you all are always laughing ha, ha, ha. So, we take that offensively because of our skin color or because of the many things we have been through." Before this conversation,

the mutual disdain of Victoria and Latoya were increasing with each negative interaction. However, at the time of the interview, Victoria said that Latoya now said hello to her when she saw her. Victoria even recalled how Latoya had recently told her daughter to tell her how she "had never met a mom like me" Victoria said smiling. Victoria continued, "My daughters now feel really proud, really happy. They say "Mami, that mom really loves you."

Through difficult conversations, both Latoya and Victoria revealed aspects of their actions that created space between them—instances that might have never come to light had they not been working side by side in a parent leadership training that pushed them to talk about the things they needed to improve in their communities. However, with the help of a COFI staff organizer translating this and other conversations, these leaders began to set aside their anger to frankly discuss their feelings and move forward toward their mutual children-centered goals.

As mentioned at the start of her quote, Victoria admitted that since she had arrived in the US, she had held African Americans in low regard, simply because she had not interacted with them in any meaningful way. She blamed this lack of interaction on language, which she explained as a perceived barrier to getting to know someone. However, research indicates that beyond a language barrier, race relations are influenced by "policy debates and extremist views that color these debates" (Flores 2014: 9), which include anti-immigrant, and anti-black rhetoric. Often these debates and views turn into damaging policies. For instance, the "white racial backlash" of tough on crime policies and the war on drugs that disproportionately funneled African Americans and Latinos into prisons occurred in response to the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Movement (Flores 2014: 44).

The construction of race in the US and across the world, particularly used by employers to exploit workers' vulnerabilities (Bank Muñoz 2008), privileges white over non-white, pins groups against each other, and deeply impacts everyday race relations. Just as some scholarship has found that African Americans blame Latinos for "losing out" on employment opportunities (McDermott 2011), other research finds that recent Latino immigrants often hold negative views of African-Americans as well (McClain 2006). These views are the result of many factors, including Latino immigrants' experiences with segregation in their Latin American countries (McClain 2006), the criminalization of blackness (Alexander 2012; Walters 2003) and the portrayal of African Americans as gang members and criminals in the global media (Oliver 2003).

Other research hints at the importance of mixed-community interactions among Latinos and African Americans. In a survey of Latino immigrants, Paula McClain (2006) finds that the greater social contact Latinos have with African Americans and the more educated Latinos are, the less likely they are to hold broad negative stereotypes about African Americans. The experiences of Victoria and Latoya adds to these findings by showing that it is not solely social contact that helps people to look beyond stereotypes. It is a facilitated discovery of the construction of racial differences and common visions and goals focused on their children that plays an important role. Meaningful interaction among different groups is necessary to breakdown the constructed racial differences that often serve to reproduce the oppression of marginalized groups. Through cross-community collective action and the race conscious nudges COFI used within their family-focused model, leaders broke down the "fear of the unknown," as Zoe eloquently said earlier.

It is important to highlight that although some leaders said they built strong friendships and relationships with people from different communities over time, most leaders described having ongoing working relationships through their collective action for better policies and programs. In interviews, most leaders emphasized how they worked with people from different communities despite belonging to different communities.

As Lulu, a Latina mother described,

> It's like, I may not like you, but I'ma have to co-exist with you. But at the same time, we are working at the same thing to work for our children…. So even if I don't like you, I'm still going to work with you. Because I need to make sure that I'm doing something better for those kids. It doesn't matter what color or race or creed you are, what matters is the commonality that brings you together.

Similarly, Rosa explains how she believes that when people have similar problems, it is easier and necessary to work together. In the next quote Rosa explains why she has a good relationship with other COFI parents, regardless of their race or community.

> My relationship with them is good because I don't believe there can be an unstable relationship between people that have the same problems, things in common. Yes, all of us have things in common that unite us and we work together to lessen our problems. The only thing is differences in opinions. That's it, but if we find things, differences in opinion and things we have in common, we look for options for combining them. So, we work together. It does not matter if you want to be my friend or not. But yes, we have something to work on, let's forget what made us mad, whatever, and work the way we are supposed to.

Later, Rosa said she considers all parents at COFI as family and does not outcast anyone from her family simply because they don't respond to her. In the following quote, she explains her reasoning,

> I consider them [other leaders] my family and they consider me too because each time that I come to the reunions, well we give each other a hug, or they hug me, and I hug them, we say good morning. It's fine if you respond or don't respond, it's fine, maybe something is happening with that person that they don't want to respond… one never

> knows how they come from their house, it's fine. So, it's not a motive to say no, you are not part of my family, quite the contrary.

During fieldwork, I observed several instances where parents refused to talk during introductions and meetings, and later they explained that a personal trouble like a loss in the family or a health issue they were dealing with had caused them to be withdrawn from the group. Rosa knew, likely because it had happened to her, that COFI leaders were dealing with many overlapping issues that affected their mood and propensity to engage with others. Nevertheless, within the space COFI provided for parents to meet, interact, dream, and make their visions a reality, leaders looked past differences, and they focused on "what [really] matters," creating better communities together for their children.

Reflecting on the Transformative Effects of Facilitated Cross-Community Building

Rising inequality necessitates cross-community alliances for social change. COFI parents engage in a coalitional politics that transcends race and community, takes into account systems of oppression, and respects each other's opinions and interests (Ortega 2016; Quintero 2001). In contrast to critiques about how identity politics tends to divide groups, this chapter delineates how different groups are able to work together towards common goals focused on their children. The narratives of leaders in this study show how groups were connected largely by the need to improve the conditions of their communities for their children but with the support and *race conscious nudges* used by COFI, parents described working together with other parents as transformational experiences they enjoyed beyond the explicit goals of their collective action.

Borrowing from the work of scholars who point to the possibility of coalitional politics as a source of social transformation (Weir 2013; Ortega 2016), this chapter makes three contributions to literature on cross-community collective action among people of color. First, it

shows how participation in local politics leads parents of color to see themselves as connected to larger social justice movements occurring across the country and world. This is important given the often marginalization and isolation of people of color, particularly within culturally rich, but materially poor communities.

Second, findings show how parents unite across differences for their children and how they set norms of respect in order to build relationships across communities. This finding is valuable because it provides insight about the initial ways groups come together despite language, cultural, and geographic differences. And third, this study demonstrates how COFI used *race conscious nudges* to facilitate storytelling about mutual although disparate family experiences of discrimination and to enable meaningful interactions across communities. These organizational mechanisms helped groups to work together within organized events and trips, but they also translated into other settings, like schools. These findings show the process of coalitional politics as a source of social transformation. For leaders, the grassroots community organizing goals of improving the lives of their children and families powerfully transformed perceptions and relationships among people from different communities of color.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZING SYMBOLS ON FAMILY LIFE

I said [to my husband] look at what I received. I graduated! And you used to ask, "Why did I go?" Look at what I have!... I get something out of it. For me, it means a great deal to have this.... I didn't need to go to high school or elementary school to have this. (Virginia)

For Virginia, the symbols of a COFI Leadership Training graduation ceremony were paramount for how her and her family made sense of her collective action. As an immigrant Latina woman with little formal education, a diploma and a stole, mattered beyond the important organizing skills she learned for working with others to improve her community. Instead, these and other organizing symbols shaped the personal, group, and familial experiences and relationships of COFI leaders' collective action, which influenced how they made sense of their collective work. Organizing symbols gained meaning through collective action and were worn, carried, and discussed within other community contexts, particularly within leaders' family lives.

This chapter reveals how collective action symbols not only produce a sense of collective mattering, but also sprout changes in how families of collective action participants see their work in the community as important. Organizing symbols were worn, brought into the home, and shared through stories by collective action participants, which signify the affective significance and meaning of collective action to other family members. These symbols include their dress, the ceremony, and the accolade or what I call, *appareled swag*, *ceremonial relics*, and *civic kudos*. Findings presented in this chapter fill a gap in research on collective action,

which has failed to substantively examine the interplay of family, collective action participation, and the external and symbolic mechanisms that shape these relationships.

Family and Collective Action

Family shapes the scope and experience of collective action, yet, this relationship has been highly understudied and has largely examined how family motivates or is used as a tactic to frame collective action. For example, scholars find that participants of collective action, and largely mothers, engage civically around issues to improve the life of their families and children (Eliasoph 1998; Law and Martens 2012; Pardo 1998; Perry 2016). Analysts also conclude that agents of social change often become politicized towards collectivities through their families (Arditti 1999; Lobao 1990; Feldman and Stall 2004; Parraguez-Sanchez 2016). Other researchers who study a wide range of social movements—from progressive to nativist movements—emphasize how family or "family values," arguably help to fuel collective action participation (Ganz 2011; Johnson 2015; Romero 2008). It is important here to notice how, although undertheorized, race, gender, and class intimately shape the interconnections of collective action and family life.

Another way family is discussed within the context of collective action research involves how family can either support or critique collective action participation. For instance, in *Cultures of Solidarity*, Rick Fantasia (1988) shows how families encouraged collective action by attending related social events, dances, and catfish fries where spouses and children of aggrieved workers interacted and helped to ease the "sense of isolation and despondency" caused by a long strike (193). Likewise, writing on the experiences of Zapatista women activists in Mexico, Victoria Law (2012) delineates how the husbands of movement participants either encouraged the involvement of their wives and supported their community work or they questioned their

participation and complained about their so-called neglect of their household. However, even this and other scholarship, which documents how family can lend or withdraw support for collective action, tends to treat these processes as static and one directional.

In particular, studies have stopped short of addressing three important processes related to family responses and collective action participation. First, is simply but importantly, how participants of collective action explain the importance of their community engagement to their family members (sometimes using organizing symbols). Second, beyond establishing whether or not family members are supportive of the collective action of their relative and what this support looks like, we know very little about how participants mitigate any negative family responses as a result of their civic engagement (i.e. the strategies they use). And third, we are at a scholarly void concerning how organizing symbols help to co-produce meanings and spark changes in the responses of family members of participants of collective action. Studying the relationship between collective action and family life, particularly looking at how family responds to the collective action of participants, necessitates a closer look at the external mechanisms (i.e. symbols) that influence these meaning-making processes. Shedding light on these unanswered questions will more adequately illustrate the relationship between collective action participants and family life as an interaction, that is not fixed, but malleable.

This chapter documents how participants of collective action explain the importance of their community involvement to their families, how their family responses varied and sometimes changed, and how these responses were influenced by collective action symbols that gained meaning through collectivities and were deployed in other community and family settings.

Symbols, Collective Action, and Meaning

Symbols are important social component of collective action. A gesture or object gains significance and becomes a symbol when it yields a particular response from another person (Mead 1922). Symbols only take on meanings through social interactions and represent ambiguity and concreteness that communicate social meanings, depending on who is doing the interpretation, for what purposes, and in what situations. Symbols reinforce social norms and they are effective because of their "multivocality," or the way one symbol represents many different things and actions (Turner 1967 as cited in Coleman 2010). Within social movements, symbols form meanings through "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 2001[1912]: 268), a type of reinvigoration that happens when groups come together and reaffirm social bonds (Law 2012). Collective effervescence can make participants feel "energized and powerful," showing also the affective and emotional components of collective action (Law 2011: 53). Also, through symbols, people express visions of who they are and what kind of world they hope to create collectively (Hart 2001).

Social movement studies have concentrated on the functions of symbols, although they have missed how symbols are important beyond the explicit goals of social movement groups. For example, social movement symbols can represent discontent and or power such as fists in the air, or recent record-breaking marches across the world. Everyday resistance can also be symbolic of dissatisfaction, such as foot dragging and micro-acts of defiance (Scott 1987). Movement leaders can be symbols of movements too, as is the case for Jane Addams, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Cesar Chavez. Olesen (2015) suggests that "social movements are both consumers and producers of injustice symbols…We create [symbols] as recipients and carriers of shared moral and political meanings and visions and use them to make sense of and

contextualize the present" (1). I agree that symbols can be resources and outcomes of political action, but we must also examine how symbols matter *within meaning-making processes* of participants of social movements and in relation to family contexts. Material objects and artifacts, but also formal events like ceremonies, or informal interactions like a one-on-one conversation can be important symbols that influence the collective action of participants and their family lives.

Symbols, along with identities and stories, also shape what Rhys Williams (1995) calls the "internal" dimensions of movement culture. That is, they serve to construct solidarity, motivate participants, and maintain collective action participation—all of which comprise the "fertile soil of social movements" (Williams 2004:100). In short, social movement scholars gain a greater understanding of cultural change and social meaning through the study the public displays of symbols, stories, and rituals (Williams 2004). Similarly, although symbols have been a key component of understanding *internal* collective action processes, again most related social movement scholarship has overlooked the importance of symbols for shaping the experiences and responses of collective action participants and their families, particularly for lower-income women of color. Given the intersection of identities and oppressions women of color experience, organizing symbols take on different meanings for them (recall Virginia's experience with graduation symbols) than they would for others (i.e. white men with higher levels of education).

In a recent article, Daniel Winchester (2017) argues that material objects or what he calls "plot devices" have symbolic meaning and play a critical role in the formation of religious converts' identity narratives (religious stories of everyday experiences) (85). Extending his rationale, which points to the importance of material objects for telling stories about one's scared and collective experiences, I argue that organizing symbols play a critical role in influencing

meaning-making processes among participants of collective action and their families. To show this, I focus on three symbols that were important for participants in this study: dress, the ceremony, and the accolade or what I call *appareled swag*, *ceremonial relics*, and *civic kudos.*

Collective Action Symbols

Activists and scholars have delineated the significance of style and dress as a form of collective expression within social movements and political action (Mahmood 2005; McCormick 2008; Miller 2005; Ford 2015). For instance, Mahatma Ghandi, an Indian activist and world known leader of the Indian Independence Movement, wore simple garments, even when meeting foreign dignitaries signifying a rejection of British textiles and imperialism and as a symbol of solidarity with materially poor people of India. Also, Tanisha Ford (2015) attests that black women used fashion (including hair) as a tool for resistance from the Civil Rights era, to anti-apartheid collective action and beyond. Ford shows the critical importance of soul-style for collective action participants, styles that helped them define liberation on their own terms. Moreover, Joshua Miller (2005) suggests that fashion affects people's political bonds, has the propensity to form solidarities, and can spark political conversations around explicit messages found in clothing, tattoos, haircuts, or political buttons. These and other studies show the importance of style and dress to communicate and literately wear discontent and to strengthen solidarity, yet, they say little about how wearing particular group symbols influence the perceptions of the families of collective action participants concerning their mobilization. I describe a broader, and family-related importance of dress, through what I call *appareled swag.*

Another symbol of focus in this chapter is the ceremony, specifically the artifacts that derive from ceremonies (i.e. stoles, patches, graduation diplomas). Ceremonies are often tied to rituals. Within collective action these can include chants, songs, marches, testimonials or other

group activities. These rituals, like other experiences, are shaped by gender, race, class, sexuality, and immigration experiences (White 1999). Rituals institutionalize the use of symbols and create emotional responses and the collective effervescence (Durkheim 2001; Flores 2018) necessary to sustain the existence of collective action groups. For instance, Aronette White (1999) describes how collective action meetings around ending violence against black women provided spaces where women participated in "liberation ceremonies" (90) where they paid homage to their women ancestors who provided longstanding wisdom and vision. These ceremonies thus marked the intergenerational importance of their collective action and created emotional spaces, which motivated and pushed their action forward. Less studied, however, are how artifacts of ceremonies themselves are used in other contexts. Artifacts travel across social spaces and allow participants and others to form meanings around them—meanings that link the collective action project to other forms of social life, including families. I discuss the relevance of ceremonies for my respondents through what I call *ceremonial relics*.

Finally, I trace the importance of the accolade, particularly as a form of social recognition that like ceremonial artifacts, allows the meanings of collective action to move across settings, and gives participants a sense of pride and power. Although recognition can be part of ceremonies, they are not exclusive to ceremonies. Recognition is a vital component of the construction of one's identity and collective action participation (Taylor 1994). Taylor's (1994) discussion of the politics of recognition is important here because he outlines how our identity is shaped by the recognition or the absence of recognition, particularly from intimate ties. He argues that "on the intimate level, we can see how much an original identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others...relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-affirmation" (36). Cultural recognition, which includes

respect for gender, race, and sexual identity and the practices associated with subordinated groups, is also important because its absence often leads to "gross social discrimination" (Habermas 1994:110). The accolade, as a symbol of social recognition, which I call *civic kudos*, comprised another important influence on respondents meaning-making processes.

Before explaining the importance of *appareled swag, ceremonial relics,* and *civic kudos* for the participants in my study and their families, I briefly highlight how COFI integrates (heterogeneous senses of) family into organizing, and the strategies parent leaders use to mitigate negative family responses.

"Don't Leave the Family Out" of Organizing

Defining Family and its Significance

Recognizing that the definition of family is a social construct that excludes groups who do not fall within normative definitions is an important starting point (Smith 1993). To avoid the reproduction of narrow definitions of family imposed on research participants, in this study, respondents themselves defined family based on their personal lived experiences.

Although these definitions varied, the majority of respondents described family as kin and non-kin who lived in and outside of their households, and whom they interacted with daily (Stack 1974) or intermittently, and also encompassed their transnational relatives. Thus, family included children (including foster children), spouses, parents, nieces and nephews, aunts, and siblings, both locally and abroad, and also neighbors, friends, and in some cases, community organizing colleagues.

Leaders described communicating with their family about their community work in person, at gatherings, and through social media and phone calls. They shared the importance of their family responses to their participation, even from afar. For instance, Carla, a Latina mother,

told me it was gratifying for her family to message her on Facebook after she posted something about her organizing work. She said she felt "recognized" for the hard work. The organizing work Carla referred to required her to be up early and arrive home late—work that was unpaid but rewarding and important.

The title of this section, "Don't Leave the Family Out," comes from some unsolicited (but extremely welcomed) advice I received from Red, a black woman, in my study. She told me that she knew a woman that "worked so hard for so long that she missed out on her kids growing up." She told me I was going to have so many things to "juggle in one hand," and then she said something I'll never forget: "Do this, and do it from the heart, for the right reasons, but don't leave the family out." Red did not elaborate on what she meant by "do this," but I believe she meant do my research and pursue my academic career through my family, not aside from family. As I think back to this conversation, I can't help but to reflect on how a family-focused model, like the one practiced through COFI, allowed parent leaders to avoid leaving the family out of their collective action participation. For COFI leaders, family was their greatest inspiration, but was also a profound source of care and meaning, which undoubtedly shaped their experiences and the intimate effects of collective action.

COFI intentionally kept family at the center of organizing. They partially achieved this by encouraging the development and pursuit of personal, family, and team goals and by decreasing participation barriers that often keeps lower-income mothers of color from engaging in politics (i.e. transportation, language translation, childcare). Beyond motivating parent leaders' participation, family shapes organizing at COFI in several interconnected ways. First, family is physically and rhetorically welcomed in organizing activities, events, and meetings. Second, organizing meetings, when possible, are arranged around family schedules, not the other

way around. And third, organizing agendas and group goals are constructed with a focus on creating and supporting family-friendly social policies and programs.

That family is welcomed at all organizing activities at COFI does not mean that everyone's family consistently attends organizing meetings or events. It simply but profoundly means that family is welcome to attend, no questions asked. From my observations of COFI staff and organizers, a crying toddler is not an interruption to business as usual. Although childcare is available at most meetings, sometimes children do not cooperate, and they want to instead stay with their parent (usually the case with younger children). When instances like these occurred, organizers often had something to keep kids busy, or they went on as usual—often it meant having colorful scribbles on the poster board presentation for that day. Conversations about family were also welcomed and encouraged within organizing activities. At the start of every meeting, time was dedicated for check-ins, where leaders gave updates on their children and families. Within these spaces, parent leaders openly shared stories about their family milestones, birthdays, and troubles, which were usually followed by warm congratulations, encouragement, and hugs.

At COFI, organizing activities were scheduled so that they did not interfere with overarching family routines. This included but was not limited to children's school pickup, drop-off, and dinner. Parent leaders set the time for their meetings, usually in the morning, after dropping off their children at school. If parent leaders preferred evening meetings, COFI provided dinner for leaders *and* their children (instead of a light snack and refreshments) so that the children's eating schedules were not interrupted. During the summer months, when school-aged youth were home from school, much of the organizing slowed down, and was expected to slow down so parents cold spend time with their children. Organizers stress "taking a break" as a

way to prevent burn out and regain energy, but arguably it was also a time for leaders to focus and strengthen family ties (as discussed further in Chapter 5).

The main legislative agendas of COFI leaders pressingly involved school-aged children. Although COFI did support other types of legislation that unequivocally impacted their families (i.e. increasing the minimum wage), their main focus was on improving early and elementary learning systems. For instance, as I explain more in Chapter 5, COFI parents were deeply involved in implementing a restorative justice disciplinary code (instead of "zero tolerance") in their children's schools and many of them participated as Peace Leaders, or mediators within these schools. Parent leaders shaped the disciplinary code within Chicago Public Schools, they spread awareness about the benefits of restorative justice, they advocated for funding for "Peace Hubs," and they also participated in the daily practice of conflict resolution within schools. Thus, the involvement of leaders in impacting and implementing policies that directly and immediately influenced their children was a clear focus. (i.e. preventing their kids from getting expelled from school for minor infractions).

Mitigating Negative Family Responses

Despite the family-friendly environment engendered by COFI, the responses of leaders' family regarding their participation varied. Many leaders invested a considerable amount of time and energy working in their communities, most often without any pay. When funding was available, there were opportunities for temporary work (receiving $10 to $15 per hour) for leaders to participate as "ambassadors" spreading information or enrolling young kids in preschool or as Peace Keepers. However, the majority of leaders said most of their work was volunteer and although they appreciated and needed the extra income, they did not participate in ambassador positions "for the money."

In most cases, leaders[14] reported positive responses from their family regarding their participation in community organizing. For example, in the next quote, Letika, a Latina mother, describes how she felt supported:

> My husband has never told me, "Don't do this, don't do that." He always also motivates me to get involved in the community, in the school, or in COFI… the fact that he does not tell me "Don't go to such and such place, or what are you going to do there" or something, is a big support.

Also, Elena shares in the next quote how she felt supported by her partner and children:

> My husband and my children have never limited me like "you are not going to do it because you have the responsibility of the house or--". Normally, in fact reunions, the meetings we always do them in the morning… But even so, my husband has supported me with the care of the kids, sometimes when we have to go to some other place. If he can, he helps me with the kids, "okay go, I will take care of them for you. (Elena)

Many leaders also depicted family as supportive because through their organizing, they became, as Factotum said, "answers to the world's problems," as sources of information. This was particularly true for COFI parent leaders who had been involved for many years.

However, as I mentioned, all family responses were not uniformly positive.

Sixteen (15 women[15], 1 man) of the 40 parent leaders I interviewed experienced some form of tension from partners (8), other family (8), or both (5) as a result of their organizing participation. Negative family responses ranged from telling leaders they were wasting their time, to shaming mothers for supposedly neglecting their husband and children, to hiding respondents' car keys to prevent them from attending their community meetings. Often these negative responses overlapped and sometimes changed with time. In the next quote Abby shares her experience, which also describes why she feels her community organizing is valuable:

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[14] This analysis excludes full time staff and organizers. It does however include responses from affiliate leaders (who did not participate in COFI training), including those who organized through other non-COFI models in the 80's and 90's.

[15] Nine of the 15 women were Latina (6 were first generation immigrants).

> It was rough in the beginning when I first became a parent volunteer in the school, when I went to the meetings and stuff and then more when we had to travel to a conference or reunions. It was a struggle for him to accept it and accept what I was doing…Yeah, I don't get paid but what I've noticed is that I've gained more knowledge and I've gained friendships and I've known of resources to help myself, my family or others... I try to get him to understand that it's not just me wasting my time. No, it's me learning something new that will help me for [our son] to have a better future.

For Abby, participating in organizing created tension at home with her partner, who said she was not showing him enough attention because of her community involvement. Although Abby said tension was decreasing with time, she described how this process involved her receiving a community award (ceremonial relic), and continuously explaining why her organizing was important.

Motherleaders, as I have called COFI mothers elsewhere (Cossyleon 2018), were more likely than men to experience family tensions as a result of their organizing experience. The Latina women in my study, particularly those who were first generation immigrants, experienced family tension because of their organizing more often than black or the few white women. Notably, both of the leaders I interviewed who had organized in the 80's and 90's, who had not organized through the COFI model, reported substantial issues with family concerning their organizing participation, mainly around schedule conflicts or their family's dismissal of their organizing work.

I now describe the strategies leaders used to mitigate negative family responses. For clarity, I split family into two groups 1) partners 2) other family (which includes everyone else leaders refer to as family). For partners and other family alike, leaders used *emotionally invested explanatory strategies* to mitigate negative responses to their organizing participation. That is, they often explained the importance of their work, and how this work made them happy and was gratifying. Leaders described to their family in detail why they went to meetings and organizing

events. They explained that they went "to learn," "to get out," "to share information," and for "a better future." For example, Elena explains how she responded to relatives (both close by and out of the country): "It's not the pay that I want, what I'm looking for right now… But the satisfaction of being with other people, I tell them, that fills me, makes me happy." In another example, Star, a black woman, explains what she said to her brother who had a "forget politics" attitude about the importance of her work: "If the Alderman say, now, y'all are getting your garbage picked up once a month, guess what's gonna happen? Your garbage gonna be picked up once a month.... I think not doing nothing at all is the worst thing. And I learned that from COFI." And last, three leaders responded to family tension by modifying their participation in collective action activities by either decreasing the duration or frequency of their engagement. As Ms. J, a black woman, said, "I'm not out to saving the world like I used to. I'm still passionate about what I do but I need to have balance and I learned to relax."

To alleviate tensions with their partners specifically, leaders (all women for this category) tried several strategies. First, respondents usually confronted gendered tensions directly, asserting that times had changed, and they were not for instance, in the "*año del caldo,"* which roughly translates into the year when stew was invented-- so long ago no one remembers. Then, many defended their participation in community organizing, stating facts about their ability to do their volunteer and paid work *and* cook and clean (notably adhering to normative gendered responsibilities). Leaders communicated with partners in advance about what they were doing, even if their participation in organizing activities challenged their partners wishes. Respondents most often ensured food was prepared and their home were clean, or they made arrangements in advance about splitting these obligations with their partner and children. Other strategies included inviting their partner to meetings and events to ease their curiosity about these

gatherings. A less often used strategy was not telling their partners about their organizing activities or gently ignoring them. For instance, Estrella, a Latina woman, explains how she uses skills she learned through her organizing to diffuse family confrontations:

> So, with everything that I've learned with COFI… with my husband, when he reprimands me, when my daughters tell me things, I respond in manner that is softer… How do I respond? I don't act the same way he does. I say if he throws me hate, he throws me fire, I throw him water with my silence.

Also, in one case, Victoria reassured her husband she was not earning money through community organizing affirming he was still the main breadwinner of the house (reaffirming normative gendered expectations). During our interview, Victoria explained how her husband told her how he noticed she began to "get ideas" that went beyond her household. For instance, she said "I thought that life only depended on these things [taking kids to school, cooking, ironing, cleaning the house]," but she learned to *desenvolverse,* or unwind, through collective action. Yet, to avoid further tension, Victoria reassured her husband he was still the "leader" because he brought in money, while she also eased into conversations about how he could not "dictate" in the household and described to me more of a partnership than a hierarchy.

To alleviate tensions with other family members besides their partners, parent leaders used an additional strategy. In a few cases, respondents decreased their contact with other family, including adult children, to avoid continuing tensions. As Jan, a white woman who was an affiliate leader said, "I don't know how to say it, but in my family, I created a distance." Jan who actively participated in lettuce and grape strikes, and anti-apartheid activism, described how her family did not understand her involvement, working on things that did not directly involve her, often in "dangerous" neighborhoods. In another example Henry, a black man explained how in some ways he felt his life was "harder" since he became involved in organizing:

> "I don't have the support. Uh, um, my family. My sisters, my brothers, my aunties, I don't have that support. Only because when I started doing uh, when you start organizing… when you start telling [adult] children and families what they disapprove of, they kind of get hard on that, so uh, I say my life is harder because I don't have nobody I can turn to. That's it. If I can't work it out myself, it ain't going to be worked out. (Henry).

As a result of their organizing participation and their attenuated family ties, leaders at times, reduced the possible support they were able to receive for everyday economic and children-related issues.

How Organizing Symbols Shape Family Responses

Over half of the parent leaders who experienced tension from family due to their organizing involvement, described the importance of organizing symbols, and in some cases how they alleviated negative family responses.

Appareled swag. During community outreach, COFI parent leaders wore matching t-shirts, unique logos, and bright colors. As Walking School Bus Conductors, they wore yellow neon vests with reflectors, which helped them to safely walk toddlers to preschool hand-in-hand. During their work at Peace Centers within local schools and when they spoke at community forums about restorative justice, parent leaders wore royal blue collared shirts with an embroidered logo that read "Peace Keeper" above a simple peace sign. Food Ambassadors wore bright red t-shirts which invitingly read "Ask me about FREE SUMMER MEALS." To Springfield and quarterly meetings, parent leaders used their blue and purple POWER-PAC t-shirts with a distinct purple and white circular logo. The logo had the painted shadows of two full figured women with windblown hair—one with textured hair and the other with straight hair –who seemed to be racing towards one another as one woman held an electric plug and the other an electric socket. In this image, the women create vertical

thunderbolts just before connecting. The words "POWER*PAC" and "Plug into the power of parents" adorned the logo's periphery. At face value, these items of dress attract attention during community outreach and door knocking, increasing their likelihood that someone might answer the door. But, further exploration shows how *appareled swag* mean much more.

Parent leaders wore *appareled swag* during organizing activities that did not require them, hinting at the social importance beyond organizing goals. I often saw parents wearing COFI t-shirts for programs that no longer existed, and, on several occasions, I noticed how parent leaders personalized their own blouses or t-shirts by adding meaningful titles that they embroidered or ironed on, such as "POWER-PAC Mom." Parent leaders wore these symbols first, because their short-term jobs through COFI required it, but also because these symbols were meaningful to them and others. *Appareled swag* signaled to others that they were school mediators, had information about meals for children, or they were part of an organizing community. But, these symbols also shaped how they experienced and made sense of their community participation through their relationships with family and leaders connected their work to their mothering and their other identities.

In the next quote, Virginia recalls how family recognized her from afar at a Puerto Rican Day festival where she was handing out informational flyers. She said her daughter told her, "When we were over at the festival with my aunt, I said 'Tia! There is my mother!' She said 'where?' I said, 'over there… Tia, here come all of my mom's colleagues because they use the same shirt!'" Her daughter, who often reproached Virginia for "wasting her time," excitedly recognized her in a large group of women because she was wearing a particular t-shirt. At the time, Virginia said she wasn't even there, she was walking around the festival. But, she giggled

at how her daughter recognized her with her "colleagues" thanks to her *appareled swag*. As an immigrant mother with a second-grade education, who for years worked in a factory peeling the skin off of frozen chicken until her hands gave out, her community work was enjoyable, visible, and important. *Appareled swag* symbolized that leaders' efforts were significant, communal, and recognizable in the eyes of family. Although initially Virginia's daughter and other family members questioned her work, with time and arguably with the help of *appareled swag,* her family began to see the social value of her efforts. Virginia proudly described to me how her in-laws tell her that through her organizing she is representing people who "can't be there," but who are experiencing similar injustices she is working to improve.

Ceremonial relics. During my fieldwork, I observed several ceremonies that invoked what Durkheim calls collective effervescence. At a POWER-PAC quarterly meeting, I participated in chants that spelled out and rhythmically shouted "P-O-W-E-R-P-A-C, who are we? POWER-PAC!" followed by the repetition of "uni-ty! uni-ty! uni-ty, uni-ty!" and clapping and cheering. I participated in graduation ceremonies where leaders received diplomas and gave speeches following the end of the first phase of the Parent Leadership Training called "Self, Family, and Team." Through my experience with these and other ceremonies, I came to realize how important they were for my respondents, and for me. These ceremonies helped me differentiate these experiences from any other daily interaction and created memories. In particular, the ceremonial relics that remind us of these ceremonies are meaningful because they symbolize emotion, togetherness, and accomplishment that not only produced meanings and a sense of pride, but also were used to navigate the relationship between family life and political participation.

Respondents saved ceremonial relics, including graduation stoles, patches, diplomas and pictures, to commemorate ceremonies that were significant to them. In the next quote, Star describes how she feels when she sees photos on Facebook and on the COFI website, or when she receives a certificate, "It makes me feel like I accomplished something and I'm steady, I'm steady learning and accomplishing things in life, you know." As a single mom who a decade earlier felt forced by her father to go to a Rainbow PUSH event to hear then-Senate-candidate Barack Obama speak, Star reflects on her "growth." She said,

> And so now like, so fast forward like 12 years, 13 years later, I'm going to Springfield. Now I'm driving. And now, you know, I'm getting excited when I go hear people speak, and I know they're about the communities. Now I'm hoping that my future, next five, ten years, I'm able to run for alderman or something like that… Now I'm getting my children involved in it. I want them everywhere I go doing things like this, I want them to be a part of it 'cause I want them to grow up in it so that they will know.

For Star, *ceremonial relics* bring her one step closer to her goal of representing the community through public office because these symbols make her feel like she accomplished something and is able to accomplish more. In contrast to the dismissive comments of her brother (mentioned earlier) regarding the uselessness of politics for creating social betterment, for Star and others in my study, *ceremonial relics* were symbolic of the importance of their participation in politics, progress and accomplishment.

Receiving *ceremonial relics* can be an emotional experience. Rosalia, a Latina mother, describes the day she received her graduation diploma for finishing the first phase of training in the next quote:

> I remember. It was very emotional...emotional for us, my husband at that time took the course, my husband and I together, the leadership course. And well since he doesn't have a set schedule, he sometimes went, sometimes not, but we finished it, both of us… I remember that it was very emotional, I have my pictures. It was emotional to see my kids that day and to do something together, with my husband, because normally school things, he doesn't… well the Mexican man doesn't participate much… my husband works as a

> gardener, it's really difficult… so well, almost always the woman has to be more attentive [*al pendiente*].

Rosalia, kept *ceremonial relics*, including her diploma, her pictures, and her written goals, near her bed, to remind her of a memory of accomplishing something together with her husband, with her children, and for her children. These were constant reminders for her (and her husband) of how organizing activities are meaningful and important despite being time consuming. They also represented a time when Rosalia's husband was involved in their kids' school, even if he was not able or willing to participate on a regular basis, because of work conflicts or because socially, as Rosalia explained, a man he is not expected to participate. Rosalia recalls how she responds to her husband when he tells her to limit her community involvement: "Even though one would like to be in the house, believe it that there are better and important things over there, outside." Beyond being imperative work, Rosalia said she enjoyed her community involvement, even if the combination of community organizing, cleaning homes full time, and caring for her children left her exhausted most days.

Civic Kudos. The number of accolades that are provided as part of COFI organizing activities stand out in my field notes. These accolades, or what I call *civic kudos*, come in the form of affirming compliments, clapping, audible "yes"-es, head nods, double finger snaps, and the like. They happened often. They happened at COFI staff meetings as organizers shared the accomplishments of their teams and campaigns. They occurred at Parent Leadership Trainings, at community forums where parents shared results of their outreach and community surveys, and at prep and reflection meetings the start and end of meetings with policy makers. In interviews, parent leaders described feelings of encouragement as a result of these accolades that recognized their work within and for their communities.

Diane, a black woman, recalls a seemingly ordinary day that has since become one of her most prized memories. This was the day when a COFI organizer offered Diane much needed *civic kudos*. Diane explains,

> She recognized me and she just she just spoke highly of me that day and that made me feel good because I never really felt like no one had really appreciated me as much… She told me you know how much she appreciated me and she wanna see me do more things and got me more involved with COFI. So that was one of my memorable moments.

I asked Diane if she remembers what the organizer said to her, and she responded,

> She said "[Diane], I just want to recognize you" … She just said she just wanna say how much she *appreciate* me cause whenever she came I was always here to help her set up the food or whatever we had. And she just said she wanted to say thank you and she appreciate all the help I'm giving her... she recognized the fact that, she let me know she appreciated me and that felt good to know.

Diane went on to explain how she had been involved in her neighborhood school for 13 years caring for her children, her neighbors' children and helping teachers every day. Yet, she remembers *this* interaction with a COFI organizer as one of her most memorable moments where she was recognized by someone else and evaluated highly for her contributions. A directed and purposeful "thank you" from a COFI organizer for doing so much and always being willing to help showed that her work mattered, that someone noticed, and this made her feel good about herself.

Maria, a black woman, also offered an example of how her hard work payed off when she was often recognized through COFI social events. Every June, COFI hosts an annual Celebration of Hope, where leaders are invited to bring food to share, invite family and friends, dance and enjoy each other's' company across communities, races, languages, and ages. "We don't just do hard work, we get the chance to celebrate," said Maria. I attended this annual event several months after talking with Maria. I witnessed parents dance and sing along to a then popular song

called Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae) by Silentó, only they modified the lyrics as they laughed and moved their hands and bodies with each phrase. In unison they sang:

> Watch me work
> Watch me *advocate*
> Watch me win
> Watch me *advocate*

The song was energizing and relevant, captivating the crowd both older and younger while highlighting their hard work and wins as community advocates and parents. Thus, with the help of warm weather, a dance floor with music, a jumping castle, a t-ball set, a volleyball net, and souvenir gifts for young children, I saw families enjoying the company of others, taking breaks to eat the food they had each brought, and enjoying iced popsicles and entertainment, which COFI provided to recognize their achievements and to facilitate community-building.

At the end of the Celebration of Hope, parent leaders along with their families, wrote down goals and hopes for the year, taped them to a helium filled balloon, and together with a group of over 100 people arranged in a circle released their aspirations up into the wind. Through this symbolic activity, I felt the positive energy as families looked up at their goals and hopes, which colorfully decorated the sky. In many ways, releasing these balloons in unison highlighted we were not alone in a collective struggle for better communities. Parents clapped, cheered, and embraced each other. My two-year old at the time, however, missed the power of this moment as she was visibly and audibly distraught when her balloon flew away. Much to my surprise and through an incredible act of kindness, an older child offered my daughter a balloon that to my liking was not floating. Abby smiled and told me, “don’t worry, that happened to me last year!” I felt relief through her comment and we both laughed and shrugged our shoulders. Beyond offering a sense of solidarity and fellowship, community organizing activities and the *civic kudos*

that follow within a model that is cognizant of the importance of recognition, parent leaders receive a slice of gratitude they have deserved all along as mothers and as leaders within their own families and communities.

For Diane, Maria, and others like her, community organizing and *civic kudos* through informal conversations or annual celebrations made visible the caring activities that often went unnoticed and unappreciated. Although for low-income women, mothering may provide purpose and unconditional love (Edin and Kefalas 2005), seldom are mothers or caregivers recognized for their labor. When parent leaders described their work, they spoke of caring and fighting for the whole community, not just their own children. Indeed, community organizing was an act of mothering or what Naples (1988) calls "activist mothering." Through community organizing, leaders participated in mothering activities as form of contestation, not as a set of natural set of practices. Leaders' organizing work extended their mothering outside of the household and helped to change structures that deeply affect many families, while *civic kudos* were symbolic of recognition and continuity towards social change. Through informal one-one-one conversations, or through elaborate celebrations, *civic kudos* were important markers of appreciation that arguably fueled the often-tolling work of community organizing for better policies and programs within their communities.

Family Lives, Organizing Symbols, and Recognition

In prior research, family has often been deemed as a motivator (Eliasoph 1998; Law and Martens 2012; Pardo 1998; Perry 2016), as a hub of politicalization (Arditti 1999; Lobao 1990; Feldman and Stall 2004; Parraguez-Sanchez 2016), or as a framing technique within collective action (Ganz 2011; Johnson 2015; Romero 2008). Furthermore, research that documents how family may support or disagree with community organizing activities (i.e. Fantasia 1988; Law

2012) is missing an analysis of how these processes are formed through interaction and how they are fluid and potentially influenced by organizing symbols. This chapter contributes to collective action literature in three main ways.

First, I highlight the interplay of family lives and collective action experiences, particularly how the responses of family members of participants of local mobilization are shaped by gender, race, class, and other intersecting identities, how they are varied, and how they are a process of interaction, not a one-sided event. Although most family members' responses to the collective action of leaders were positive and supportive, negative family responses disproportionately occurred for women, particularly immigrant Latina women. In some cases, the negative responses of family members caused leaders to reduce their time participating in collective action activities, but in most instances, leaders continuously contested or intentionally ignored family disapprovals.

Second, this chapter documents the interactive strategies leaders used to mitigate negative family responses, as a result of their community organizing. Despite leaders' valuable work of improving their communities and maintaining safer and more welcoming environments for their children, 40 percent of leaders in the study said their work created family tension. Leaders repeatedly elaborated to their families how their organizing was bettering communities *and* making them happy through the company of others. I describe these processes as *emotionally invested explanatory strategies*, where leaders emphasized how community organizing helped to uplift communities, but also, how it helped to uplift them, making leaders feel valued, useful, and accomplished. Notably, these strategies reveal the amount and emotional justification leaders presented to family to explain their community involvement. Leaders continuously had to defend

their meaningful work, which was often measured by family-created calculations of significance that overly emphasized status, material achievement, and policy impacts.

Third, this chapter highlights the importance of organizing symbols in shaping leaders' family responses to their community organizing participation. I show how organizing symbols, what I call *appareled swag, ceremonial relics, and civic kudos*, are important components of how leaders and their families make sense of leaders' collective action participation. Although symbols have been a key component of study of the internal and cultural experiences within social movement research (White 1999; Williams 2004; Olesen 2015), this chapter indicates how symbols are evocative within the family lives of participants of collective action. Findings show how symbols, which become meaningful through collective action, are worn, displayed, and experienced within family contexts. Leaders wear *appareled swag*, display *ceremonial relics*, and interpret and vividly remember *civic kudos* –all of which arguably influence notions of social recognition.

Organizing symbols materialize the often-invisible labor of organizers, primarily materially poor mothers, who are rarely recognized for their difficult and tolling work in and outside of the household. Community organizing experiences and the symbols that arose and became meaningful from these experiences, offered leaders encouragement, momentum, and boosted them forward to keep working to improve their communities and their families. Without substantial amounts of income or occupational status, leaders' participation in community organizing provided them with legitimation and a sense of personal and collective worth.

Unlike middle class groups or academic, who may be recognized often at work, at school, with publications, with entire buildings named after them, the parents, particularly the moms in my study were seldom recognized by anyone. Through community organizing participation

within a model that clearly sees recognition as a vital component of selfhood, leaders were intentionally thanked for their contributions and as a result, they felt motivated and valuable contributors of a larger group. Particularly, for materially poor and immigrant women, the recognition they received through community organizing arguably helped them to fight for the things they could change and bear the things they still had not changed.

On a practical note, given how this chapter highlights the multi-faceted importance of organizing symbols, it is critical to note that although these symbols might be costly or time-consuming, they arguably comprise a substantial amount of meaning for collective action participants and their families. It is my hope that COFI continues (and other groups start) to see the value in taking extra steps to incorporate diplomas, stoles, patches, celebrations, one-on-one acknowledgements, and other forms of recognition within collective action activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESTORATIVE KINSHIP

I think it's just going through the COFI trainings, the peacekeepers trainings and things like that, you just learn to be more peaceful and, you know, you just give people their respect. And so that -- within my family and everything, it has shown me that I can make a difference in how to talk to people. (Star)

Leaders like Star, collectively organize against school systems, policies, and practices that act as pipelines to prison for their children. They contest the suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of school-aged children for minor school conflicts. Through their work within their children's schools and their communities, leaders are part of broader restorative and social justice movements happening worldwide. Their efforts have brought constructive local solutions to students' interpersonal conflicts, which are often tied to community-wide experiences of trauma and poverty (Buitrago, Rynell, and Tuttle 2017).

Through POWER-PAC's Elementary Justice Campaign and as "Peace Keepers," leaders advocate for restorative justice practices within Chicago Public Schools, they facilitate one-on-one and group conversations with students, and they listen and support youth as they confront underlying issues that have caused them to be in conflict with others[16]. But, beyond *imagining the justice* they wish to see as they engage in restorative justice efforts within their communities,

[16] http://www.cofionline.org/cofi-reports/parent-to-parent-guide-restorative-justice/

leaders in this study describe how their collective action experiences simultaneously transform their families.

Although scholarship highlights the propensity of restorative justice to shape programs, policies and even family court cases (Braithwaite 2002; Green, Johnstone and Lambert 2013; Van Ness and Strong 2014), few of this research has centered on the parallels between restorative justice and the everyday family lives of participants of who organize collectively for restorative justice in their communities. The affective familial effects of collective action remain ripe areas for an analysis rooted in the experiences of people who engage in these forms of social contestation and action.

This chapter documents how leaders describe changes within their family relationships as influenced by their collective action, and with the support of COFI. I show how leaders extend community organizing strategies and practices within their intimate family relationships. Through community organizing, leaders learn and practice community-building skills, or as COFI calls it, they gain a life toolkit, which includes *active listening, relationship building, and a web of support.* This chapter shows how a family-focused organizing model not only bases social change in participants' desires to improve the collective, community-based aspects of their family lives, but that it also strengthens family life.

Restorative Justice and Family Life

The Roots of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice stems from ancient peace building processes that stand as an alternative to our punitive US system of punishment. Restorative justice is "a constructive, forward-looking way of handling situations where one person has harmed another" (Green, Johnstone and Lambert 2013: 445). Braithwaite (2001) suggests restorative justice involves

processes that heal "because crime (or any other kind of injustice) hurts" (4). A key component of restorative justice involves mediated circles, which are rooted in ancient methods of conflict resolution (Weitekamp 1999; Harris 2001; Malan 1997) and involves what some have called the management of shame, which is essential for forgiveness (Harris and Maruna 2006).

Since the 1970's, collective action around restorative justice has notably influenced the criminal justice system. There has been an increase in dialog-based programs within the criminal justice system (Umbreit and Armour 2010). Also, the movement has influenced prosecutorial diversion programs, which move cases away from traditional adjudication, offer offenders reduced punishment, or involve mediation services to help with mutual healing processes (Cossyleon, Orwat, George, and Key 2017; Daly 2015; See Umbreit et al. 2005 for a review). Other restorative justice programs involve the families of homicide victims and the person who is convicted of the crime (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, and Lightfoot 2005). These restorative justice efforts aim to reduce the stigmatization and social exclusion of people who have been convicted of crimes and involve the community instead of solely the state to restore community relationships (Green, Johnstone and Lambert 2013; Van Ness and Strong 2014). Although restorative justice efforts have helped local jurisdictions to divert thousands of cases each year, our criminal justice system remains largely punitive instead of restorative.

Restorative justice in the community. Restorative justice practices are also increasingly being used in other areas to include in neighborhoods, schools, the workplace, sports, civil court cases, and international conflict (Braithwaite 2002; Greene, Johnstone, and Lambert 2013; Johnstone 2011). At the neighborhood level, restorative justice can be seen in action through peace-circles where volunteer, community-based, or court appointed facilitators mediate conversations between people who are engaged in some form of conflict. Sometimes these

activities include the family and friends of the parties involved (Sawin and Zahr 2006; Braithwaite 2002). Typically, these meetings discuss what was done, the consequences for everyone present, and the actions that need to happen to repair harm (Braithwaite 2002: 66). Researchers have examined the benefits of restorative justice within court mediation, family law procedures, school settings, and other types of structured environments (Daicoff 2015; Bush and Folger 2004; see Braithwaite 2002 for a review). Yet, despite the expansion of restorative justice methods in these and other settings, there is virtually no scholarship on how restorative justice practices are used in family life, (unless such action is required by a court).

Two main scholars who study restorative justice have suggested the pertinence of restorative justice within family lives. First, John Braithwaite (2002) argues that "restorative justice is not simply a way of reforming the criminal justice system, it is a way of transforming the entire legal system, our family lives, our conduct in the workplace, our practice of politics" (1). Also, Gerry Johnstone (2008) concurs that restorative justice practices aim to reorganize the ways we respond to conflict within our institutions, profoundly impacting the way we understand selfhood in relation to others. Yet, despite these suggestions of the value of restorative justice for family life, there is little systematic study of how this works, and in particular, how it works from a voluntary rather than a mandated starting point.

The increasing need to strengthen family relationships. For long, family has been depicted as a source of social support essential for the survival of materially poor communities of color (Dubois 1908; Edin and Lein 1997; Stack 1974; Martin and Martin 1978; McAdoo 2007). However, recent research traces how social policies have fractured the support families are able to provide to one another. For instance, personal responsibility welfare reform in 1996 ended entitlement to cash assistance for needy families. Since then, the number of people in extreme

poverty has doubled, deeply fracturing the safety net of families who now have to survive on little to no cash income (Edin and Shaefer 2016; Morgen, Acker, and Weigt 2010). Work requirements attached to receiving assistance also created a large pool of disposable and often exploited workers, lowering the quality of the average low wage job in the US— all while housing assistance programs have not kept pace (and continue to exclude people with drug records) (Edin and Luke Shaefer 2016; Hays 2004; Newman 1999; PRI 2017). For Latino families, anti-immigration policies and increased deportation efforts exacerbate the economic difficulties of "the undocumented, documented, and native alike," limiting job opportunities, even within the informal employment market (Quiroga, Glick, and Medina 2016; (34). Thus, the back and forth assistance from family and extended social ties that at previously acted as safety nets of survival for materially poor families, are increasingly precarious, at best.

As a result of the lessened abilities of people to consistently reciprocate the support they receive through family, people with most the need often become socially isolated (Mazelis 2017; Menjivar 2000; Nelson 2000; Roschelle 1997), unless they connect to neighborhood institutions that offer access to resources and opportunities (Small 2006; Mazelis 2017). Some of these institutions include childcare centers, churches, service providers, and collective action groups (Small 2006; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Mazelis 2017). Recently, Joan Mazelis' (2017) study showed how a collective organizing group like the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU), a self-led organization that fights for rights to affordable housing, offered mainly low-income women material and social support (Mazelis 2017). Beyond providing spaces where isolated people could contest their social exclusion through collective action and connect with people who found themselves in similar social and economic situations, Mazelis (2017) finds that these collective action groups also offer necessary housing and other survival resources.

KWRU acted as "substitute family" given the absence of support through family or other ties (Mazelis 2017:147). However, instead of *replacing* family through community groups, this chapter shows how participation in family-focused collective action helps leaders to strengthen their often-strained family relationships.

Toolkits for Organizing Communities and Families

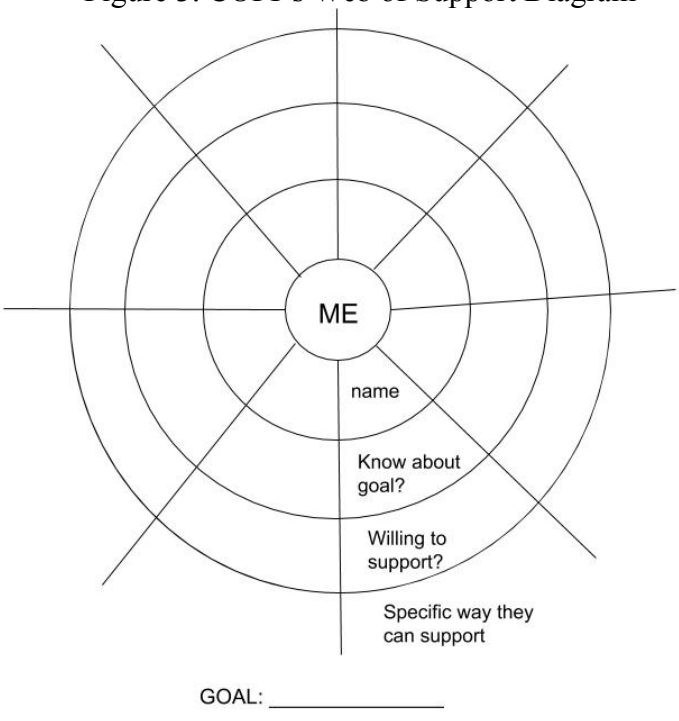
Within COFI's Leadership Trainings and organizing activities, leaders gained and used many community organizing tools or techniques for social change, similar to what some scholars have called repertoires of contention (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Leaders used these tools to get to know themselves and one another as whole beings, to brainstorm methods for changing harmful policies, and to map out support systems for achieving personal, family, team and POWER-PAC campaign goals. During interviews, leaders spoke of these techniques in depth, yet, overwhelmingly they described them in terms of their family relationships.

In this chapter, I describe three main themes that developed as leaders described how they used organizing skills within their family lives. I argue that through collective action, leaders practiced what I call *restorative kinship*, a process that recognizes the worth and dignity of each member of the family through the use of community organizing tools. It is a process of conflict resolution and healing, which parent leaders used to envision, practice, and continue to work on bettering their family lives. It relies on three techniques that are derived from involvement in COFI's projects: *active listening, relationship building,* and a *web of support*. In each of the following sections, I briefly introduce the techniques leaders used within their community organizing, before showing how leaders intricately used these same techniques to strengthen their family relationships.

Web of Support

Within community organizing, COFI leaders utilized what they called the "web of support." Leaders learned of the web of support through Leadership Trainings where they used a template "web" to chart out a support network, starting with leaders writing down their goal. Then, using a simple diagram made up of rings and perpendicular lines, they wrote down the names of people who were closest to them on a template piece of paper (Figure 3). On the next outer rings, leaders wrote down whether these important people in their lives knew about their set goal and whether they would support the goal (yes, no, maybe). In the outermost ring, leaders wrote down specific ways each person could support them to achieve their goal. This diagram established a visual map of possible contributors along with the concrete ways each person could lend assistance. Peer trainers explained how this exercise could be used for personal, family, and larger campaign goals to map out support networks.

Figure 3. COFI's Web of Support Diagram



(Modified from COFI's Family-Focused Organizing Phase One Training Manual 2012, 103)

During a Leadership Training, Komala, a parent peer-trainer, grabbed a metal folding chair to help explain the web of support.

If you were taking a trip to St. Louis, would you go without a spare? Asked Komala

No, said Lisa

Why not? asked Komala

Because you could get a flat, said Lisa

Ok so if you have this chair in the way on the road, what would you do to get by?

Move it, said Corine

Go around it, suggested Lisa

Jump it, I added

Right. There are multiple ways of reaching our goal of moving past the chair, said Komala.

Komala went on to explain how a web of support was like spare tires that you could reach for in case of a flat. Along the path of life there would be obstacles; having your spare tires to help you on the road could mean the difference between achieving and not achieving a goal. There was no right way to overcome obstacles, but planning for them in advance, with the help of a web of support was essential.

Of the 40 leaders I interviewed, 22 said they had used the web of support organizing tool to map out family support networks or to plan a family-related event[17]. The web of support often allowed parent leaders to see the reinforcement they had around them or needed to create, even if some family was unable or unwilling to be a part of that support system. Through various adaptations of a simple planning and brainstorming tool, parent leaders described a greater sense

[17] The use of the web of support within family relationships was not discussed by any affiliate COFI leader, meaning people who had not participated in the COFI Parent Leadership Training.

of foundation and structure in their lives. In the following paragraphs, I show how leaders exercised restorative kinship by using a web of support for creating strategic plans, asking for help with daily tasks, and seeing themselves no longer as individuals acting alone, but as members of a larger group.

Acquiring support. Asking for support may seem like a simple task. However, throughout this study, I have learned that asking for help is a complicated process that involves confronting other issues and insecurities. Parent leaders often made remarks such as "Why can't I do it alone?" "Am I not good enough? All the other moms seem to manage just fine." These questions and statements illustrate the emotional complexity involved in asking for help. For parent leaders in my study, their web of support provided a plan for asking for help, and even some peer coaching around this task (recall the exchange between the peer-facilitators and Lisa around her goal to write in her journal). The web of support rationalized the need to have a support system to assist with specific needs and helped leaders to make other plans if people important to them were not able or willing to support their goal. In the next quote Rosita explains:

> For me, the most memorable times, the most proud times with COFI is that I learned a lot of things. I learned to… give my grandkids advice, to talk to them. And the web of support, this was the one that helped us a lot. The workshops helped us a lot, to see who could support me, with whom I had the most trust for them to support me, if I thought they were going to help me or not. But thank God, all the people that I put on there gave me a lot of help.

Rosita's goal was to speak to people in public and to rid herself of the fear that engulfed this scary endeavor.

Yet, for other parent leaders like Virginia, using the web of support was often related to being able to continue her community organizing participation along with other tasks and jobs

she needed to accomplish. In advance, Virginia would ask her adult daughter, “I am going to get out at this time. If I don’t make it to pick up the girl [I babysit], can you go get her?” As a result, Virginia’s daughter would be on call to help if she needed it, which allowed Virginia to keep going to her community meetings knowing she had a plan to turn to just in case she required support. But besides using a web of support to accomplish meaningful personal goals and everyday tasks, parent leaders described using this tool to face more severe family struggles.

Carla’s story providers one example of how a parent leader used a web of support to confront a difficult family situation. When Carla’s husband needed to have a surgery on a painful hernia, he was told by a provider of medical services for very low-income residents, at very low or no cost that he would be placed on a long waiting list. Carla reached out to friends from her church and found out about a hospital downtown that accepted applications for financial assistance. Given their limited income, Carla’s husband received 100 percent coverage on his surgery. As her husband was recovering, her landlord forgave her rent for three months after she explained he could not work during this time, and neighbors helped by bringing food to support her family. Carla said, “Thank God now my husband recovered his job and now he is well.” Through her web of support, Carla overcame this physically, emotionally, and financially difficult family situation.

For leaders in my study, economic, language, and other resource barriers hindered but did not stall them from moving forward. Their experiences show that the American individualistic, pick-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality (Mazelis 2017) is at odds with the lives of people who not only lack material resources, but do not have the social ties and skills to achieve what they want. The web of support organizing tool helped parent leaders to realize they were stronger when they used support networks around them. Simply, but profoundly, figuring out who was

part of this support network proved to be a very useful exercise for dealing with crisis and accomplishing personal and family goals. This exercise also helped parent leaders to recognize that they were not alone, and that they could rely on others. Because they saw others using the same tools, there was no stigma associated with relying on this tool.

More powerful together. Parent leaders described utilizing a web of support to visualize how they were more powerful in a group than alone. Parent leaders described common economic and social struggles that they were able to see in a slightly different light knowing that they had a web of support around them. For example, Rosa, a Latina woman, said she was concerned about finding a place to live. Her landlord was selling the house she rented, and she knew that she would not be able to find a place to accommodate her family, given the rising rents in the area. Even with four families living in just three bedrooms, including her husband, children and grandchildren, the money did not stretch enough to afford staying in the same neighborhood. In the next quote, Rosa describes her thought process,

> So, we have to start looking for where to go and to find a place that is accessible to our needs, that we need like transportation, stores, a space that is big and cheap, inexpensive. So what do we do? We work together, each one communicates or looks for ways with their friends, asking around and we all see what it is we have found. What's the area or also when we have economic problems, when we have economic problems, we say, "we have this problem." or "I can't help you with the rent" and we come to an agreement. That's like an example that we follow. Because when we had the COFI training, we talked about how to work together, how to resolve things together, not just only one alone.

Rosa emphasized group thinking and the process of working together with family to reach agreements and find solutions.

Although mapping out a web of support sometimes meant realizing that some family members were unable or unwilling to support them, parent leaders shared being able to count on other people to complete their web too, including their community organizing networks. As

Vanessa said about how she feels since gaining support through community organizing, "I'm more relaxed. I'm more, you know, content." Vanessa went on to describe family who supported her and to point out, "if you don't have the support thing you don't have really anything, and I have that great support from people in the community, family-friends." For parent leaders, their web of support helped them to continue pursuing their goals and visions. For instance, in the next quote, Estrella recalls a stressful conversation concerning her community involvement and how she refused to give up her dreams of advocacy and social change,

> My husband said, "You have to change." I said "You know what no, I *am* going to change but to be a better person, to build my dreams. Now, no one and nothing is going to stop me. Not you or anyone" ... I told my husband, "I am not going to change. I am sorry. This is how I am and if you love me, here I am." But, I said, "All of this comes to me with what I learn. Because I am not alone, I am not alone, there is a group, there is support."

Knowing that there existed a supportive group of COFI-backed leaders Estrella and other parents to approach personal, family, and community challenges with confidence. Through these supportive teams of parents who listened, lent advice, and cheered each other on, leaders practiced planning and achieving their goals and they built intimate relationships with one another and their families.

Strategic plans. For parent leaders, the web of support proved to be a useful tool for everyday tasks and plans. From figuring out who would help with picking up the kids, to how families would save to make small purchases, to planning road trips, the web of support was part of leaders' community and family organizing "toolkit." In the next quote Factotum explains the versatility of the web of support:

> The web of support, that is like my web of support for [going to] the drug store, web of support for a family trip, web of support…anything! And you can change it and adapt it to whatever it needs to look like for you. Five columns, 25 columns, a goal, a purpose, whatever. You know adapt it to whatever works for you, but the premise behind it helps

> you to organize your thoughts, and helps you visualize what you're going to do and actually accomplish the goal.

Zoe described using the web of support as a planning tool, which she recently had used to plan a vacation on a tight budget. Zoe described the importance of a family summer road trip because "it was the first summer in my kids' life that I was off," she said. After recently landing a job as a parent liaison and translator in several schools in her kids' school district, she was happy to be able to have an extended trip with her kids. Zoe told me how she planned for this important trip as she talked about using community organizing within her daily life. She said,

> I use [COFI's] tools a lot. I always think of, okay, if I'm in a situation, who's my web of support? And every time I'm trying to plan something as small as my vacation, even something that simple, okay, what's *realizable*? Where can we stay the first night? When do I have to leave? At what time would I be there? Research the hotel. Okay. Where are we going to eat here? How many miles to the next gas station? Do I really have enough gas? Even though it's a lot of small details, because it was just me and my girls, just us three, no one else. I had to think to the smallest detail. Wow...What's realizable? What are my finances? Where do we need to eat? Buy a cooler. Where is the nearest gas station? Where I can stock up on snacks and all of that?

During this exercise, Zoe referred back to the "clear, specific, and realizable" guidelines of goal setting I introduced earlier in this chapter, and she used the web of support to help her achieve this important road trip with her daughters. For another parent, Spontaneous, the web of support meant having people "check on my house" when she was out of town and having an established phone tree to plan for family events like block parties. Parent leaders described the web of support as practical and motivational for continued civic engagement. As Letika said:

> I started to put in practice a part of the training that is called the web of support. I started to put it in practice. First it was to lose weight and I was not able to lose many pounds, but I did lose enough. Then, we started to make plans with the family, to obtain little things that we had not been able to have. Then I saw that this web of support was a very good tool like, for using it on everything. And from there on, I fell in love with COFI. So, I am always involved in things to support my community and overall the girls' schools.

Intimate Relationship-Building

Relationship building is a well-known component of community organizing and social movements (Clemens 1993; Robnett 1997; Stall and Stoecker 1998; Warren et. al 2015). As one parent leader said during a POWER-PAC restorative justice campaign meeting, "We need to develop relationships with police, so we can give them our recommendations." Establishing a relationship with community stakeholders, like policy makers, policy enforcers, and everyday residents was an important step towards establishing a support base for social change efforts. However, through relationship building activities (such as the ones presented in Chapter 3 and here), leaders also engaged in rituals that generated collective effervescence (Durkheim 2001) around caring and nurturing behavior, including the building of a sense of self-worth and community belonging. They recreated these rituals and emotions within their families by telling them they loved them and by showing them they were worthy of their undivided attention.

Relationship building is the second most commonly used community organizing strategy parent leaders report using within their families. Of the 40 leaders I interviewed, 30 described building and improving relationships with family since they became involved in community organizing with COFI. Building relationships encompassed a process of establishing trust and bonds. Just as COFI nudged leaders to interact with one another during community organizing events (see Chapter 3), leaders encouraged their own families to interact meaningfully and they started by first making changes in how they approached their family relationships. Leaders practiced the relationship-building skills they learned through their community organizing with their families by verbalizing emotions of affect (i.e. "I love you"), actively engaging with family, and last, they asked family about their goals and visions (showing they mattered), while sharing their own goals.

Expressing affect. Leaders described how expressing affect became a part of the process of building family relationships, with the help of supportive networks established through COFI. The most common verbal expression of affect was by telling family "I love you." Within organizing activities, parent leaders often brought up family issues and received informal and more structured advice from peers. Parent leaders said they encouraged one another to tell family how they felt, starting by telling them they loved them. At times, COFI organizers planned out workshops that covered parenting topics. At other times, leaders shared informal tips with one another on taking full advantage of the short amount of time one has with children before they become adults. Nonetheless, parent leaders described the importance of saying I love you to their family and how organizing gave them the space to think and reflect on these and other expressions they needed to share with family.

Diane, a black woman, shared with me a story of how she was struggling with her teenage daughter. She approached a COFI organizer for advice. "Misbehaving in school... she starting to act a little bit funny and different and doing stuff she normally wouldn't do" Diane recalled. The organizer suggested sitting down with her daughter to talk to her. But, the organizer took this a step further by collaborating with another community program called Be Proud. According to Diane, this program gave her "a lot of insight on how to deal with teenagers." Diane learned of different websites she could visit to see her daughter's grades and reports on her behavior, so she could stay informed of her daughter's progress. This topic also came up at an informal conversation at a Leadership Training. Diane recalled how one woman suggested that she: "tell your children you love them every day. Sit down and talk to them. Even if it's at McDonalds, just sit down with them and ask them how their day went." So, Diane followed their advice and as a result her daughter "started opening up" to her, telling Diane about things that

were important in the eyes of a 14-year-old girl. For instance, Diane's daughter told her that her class was looking for ideas on where to celebrate 8th grade graduation. "Where do you think we should go, you got some ideas? Diane's daughter asked. Diane said the class ended up going to Dave and Busters, after she suggested it. Reflecting on this memory Diane continued,

> Yeah you know, I put some insight in there. Sometimes, I don't find myself-- I don't really say to my kids "I love you all" like I should, which they know I do, but it's nice to be heard sometimes. And I found myself, I wasn't saying it all the time to her. So now I say it all the time. Yeah, they kind of brought that to my attention.

This is example of how COFI organizers attempted to keep organizing workshops relevant to the lives of leaders and how they collaborated with other community groups to accomplish this.

Fabio, a Latino father, said he felt "liberated from a lot of resentment" through his involvement with COFI supported community organizing. He said:

> With COFI, I also learned to forgive. First to forgive myself, the mistakes I had made, forgive myself. Then I forgave my dad, all of that resentment that I felt with my dad for everything we lived… I forgave him. And when I learned to say "Dad I love you very much. Mom, I love you very much… To my brothers, "I love you very much." Those words did not exist in my vocabulary. So, COFI helped me feel so sure of saying it, and I started with my family.

Fabio's said his father, a military man, "visited once a year" and would treat him like he was also in the military—stern, and without emotion. Giving up on his dream to be a doctor, Fabio supported his mother and seven brothers and sisters by selling auto parts, which he is proud of to this day. However, for Fabio, forgiving his father and saying "I love you" was a big part of moving forward and ensuring he would "be a better father" for his own children. During an interview, Fabio repeatedly expressed gratitude for programs like the Leadership Training, which helped him to "be a better person." Here and through other examples, leaders denounced notions of former selves that needed improvement.

Red, an African American woman, also shared what she learned through her involvement with COFI.

> My family life has changed. [Organizing] teaches me more to tell the children I love you. To be more engaged in school and like they say, IEP (individualized education program), if the child needs that service. I know what to ask for… Yeah telling them that I love them. Sometimes we just gotta be patient with the children. Lot of times we're up in rage or overwhelmed with things or our day didn't go so good and stressful. You need to start your day off by telling them you love 'em and keeping the smile 'cause you don't know if that child may go to school with that on their mind. Like "my mom barely even talks."

As Red continued to describe the importance of telling her children she loved them every day despite often feeling stressed and overwhelmed, she shared a story of a mother at COFI who told their small group, "If you have your children you never know what's gonna go. Love them now while they still here or in your presence," she recalled. The chances of losing a child were ever present for COFI leaders. Several of the mothers I interviewed said they had lost a child; one due to gun violence, one due to a domestic violence-related miscarriage, one due to a car accident. Another did not share how. In fact, for Felicia, a black woman, her ten-year vision was that her "kids will still be alive," dodging the prevalent gun violence in her neighborhood. Nonetheless, these and other mothers uttered their heartfelt advice with their organizing peers, influencing them, it seems to be mindful of their interactions with family.

Actively engaging. Beyond verbally expressing affect, leaders also described showing them affect by actively engaging with family. Instead of passively being in each other's presence in front of the TV or behind a smartphone, leaders described engaging in more proactive, bonding activities. Respondents described how they wanted to spend more quality time with their family and their goal-setting practices often reflected this desire. Quality time with children meant bringing them along on organizing activities, planning family trips outside of their

neighborhoods, talking with their kids about everyday events, or simply checking in with them about their homework.

Leaders explained the importance of exposing their children to as many positive experiences as they could. Although they did not have the power to end the violence, poverty, and injustice their kids were subjected to, they did have the power to show their kids how through community organizing they were working improve their communities. In the next quote, Nikki, a black woman, explains why she brings her daughter to important community meetings:

> I take [my daughter] with me when I go and see the congressmen. I let her hear what I do and see what I do. So, when she grows up she knows her fight. She also knows her fight now. She knows that my mommy goes out and fights for this. My mommy will come in and fight for me and you as well. I've walked up on her telling her friends about what I do. It feels good when your kid is proud of what you do.

For Nikki and many other parent leaders, letting their children hear and see firsthand what they were doing to improve their community was greater than anything they could ever tell them alone. It also felt good for leaders to know their children were proud of their work. Engaging with their children and including them in their community work showed children their daily "fight," which also encouraged their kids to dream big. Jose, a Latino man, for instance, retold a story of when his son met the then-Governor of Illinois, Pat Quinn at a bill signing event at COFI. "My son asked the governor, 'how did you do it to become governor?' Quinn responded, 'Well I studied really hard, in math and science and I read.' Then the governor asked him 'why?' My son said, 'when I'm older, I want to be governor like you.'" Children interacted with policy makers, asking them straightforward questions and telling them their goals, which illuminates how the inclusion of children in collective action also has the power to transform children's visions and aspirations.

In the next quote, Letika, a Latina woman, shares how taking her very young daughter to Springfield has shaped her daughter's aspirations:

> One of the times we took [our daughter] to Springfield, when she was really little, we got to the office of Obama, but he was not there because he was already the president. I think it was his first year as president and my daughter asked, "My teacher told me that Obama used to work here." "Yes, come" said the secretary. "Come, I'm going to take you to his office." And since then she has always had the motivation to say she wants to be president, she wants to be president. And each year, she knows that all the times we go to Springfield it's in May, and she says, "It's almost May, time for us to go to Springfield!" So, it's not only me that's changed in visiting Springfield, but also my kids, and my family, and my husband too.

Also, for Spontaneous, a black woman, spending quality time with her grandkids meant taking them to experience different organizing activities, to include going to Springfield. Spontaneous explains how caring for her family does not only include nurturing them or presenting them with material items, but rather it's about "rebuilding, networking, connecting, giving your kids a sense of history so when they grow up they can be the next president, the next mayor, the next leader in the community," she said.

Similarly, Ms. J. described how through community organizing, she set goals focused on spending engaged time with her children-- which also offered opportunities to take more children and their parents out of their neighborhood. She said children in her community had a lot of "pressures," to join gangs at a young age. "My two boys was in a gang and I didn't even know it. And I'm the good parent you know, but they was pressured," said Ms. J. In the next quote Ms. J explains further,

> After I start working with COFI I learned how to set the goals. And then… I just realize that getting [kids] out of their environment is important. So, I would always take them different places after I got some money. Cause first – literally when I had the five children and my husband wasn't working, we couldn't do a lot of things. But what I would do is I would take advantage of a lot of free stuff. I would get those passes from the Chicago Public Library, I would…. anything that was going on at the school, me as a parent I would take advantage of. And I would tell parents – there's so much stuff to offer

> at the schools, and then I got on the local school council and then I learned that NCLB (No Child Left Behind)... I learned that parents had funding, and so started getting parents involved. I would take them to plays and you know do trips like that... We would go try to do a scavenger hunt at the museum, we would go down to Navy Pier, do scavenger hunts, and stuff like that. Just do local stuff and just get people out of their comfort zone. And so, we start doing that, taking parents and families outside of the neighborhood. Not only could the children not get out, the parents couldn't get out.

Along with other parents, Ms. J was also able to apply for and secure funding to take kids in her neighborhood on an extended field trip.

> I took 36 children to camp in southern Illinois for three days. To me that was so rewarding because I took the—I'm not gonna say the worst kids. But I took the children I knew were challenged. And a lot of people didn't want to go. I recruited one person from the school but all the rest of them were parents in the community and we took 36 children out to southern Illinois to this camp called a Touch of Nature and it was so empowering because those children to this day a lot of them have never got out the neighborhood and so I showed them a different side of just living in urban life.

Ms. J said people thought she had money because she was always out and about with her kids. But, the truth was that she did not. "We ain't rich we struggle like everybody else," said Ms. J highlighting how she could still have quality time without spending large amounts of money.

Through small and big changes leaders modified how they purposefully engaged with family. Blanca said her family goals were "to spend more time as a family," doing new things. She excitedly shared that the weekend prior, she had gone to Starved Rock State Park with her family. After driving two hours, Blanca's family walked, enjoyed water cascades, fresh air, and each other's company. Victoria, similarly said, "My goals were to have a little bit more time with the kids, because sometimes it's not the time it's the quality, that I one can give them," said Victoria. When I asked Jose about the goals he set during the Leadership Training, he responded, "I had to read a number of predetermined books with [my kids]." Sometimes engaging with their children meant simply checking in with them to make sure they were completing assignments and were not in need of assistance. For instance, when I asked Claudia, a Latina woman, about

her goals, she said, “School, education, focus on making sure [my kids] are doing their homework, that they are doing well in school and with their teachers and if they need help… I have to find help for them.”

As part of their personal goals, parent leaders worked on engaging with their family. But, beyond working towards these objectives, parent leaders also shared with their families the goals they were setting, and they encouraged their families to set their own goals as well. The mutual sharing of goals proved be an important component of relationship building, which I discuss next.

Sharing goals. Apart from telling and showing family how much they meant, parent leaders also described asking questions, particularly surrounding their family’s goals. Through my field observations, I learned that setting goals was among the most important parts of COFI’s organizing model. “Be clear, specific, realizable” said Komala, a black woman, during a training session where she asked leaders to write down their goals. Write down something that “honors your values… something you can accomplish, something personal. As moms we are always thinking about our children. For this, think about you,” said Komala (Fieldnotes Spring 2016). This was the first step in setting goals during the Leadership Training, but the steps that followed included setting family goals, and mutually sharing these goals.

Parent leaders described how they motivated their family to think about and share their personal goals and visions. This process arguably helped to build relationships and deepen bonds. Knowing the personal goals of their family members also enabled parent leaders to support family the way many felt supported by their organizing teams. And last, knowing the goals of family helped them to have difficult but often necessary discussions about shared priorities.

Henry, a black man, said, "I want [my family] to have they goals, and we do talk about goals, so there's part of COFI. We talk about goals." Henry said he learned that his son first wanted to be a drummer, then a preacher, then an FBI agent, then police, and finally his son said, "When I grow up I wanna be someone that help people, [someone that helps] kids find a home." Henry sighed and told me "and they got it right in the neighborhood I live in, and that right there makes you think that you are doing something right." For Henry, the goals that his children were setting validated he was doing something right as a parent, regardless of the poverty and injustice that surrounded them.

Similarly, Butterfly, a white woman, said she motivates her daughter to set goals, the way she was encouraged to do so within organizing trainings. In the next quote, Butterfly discusses the detail that goes into her daughter's goal-setting exercises,

> I try to tell my daughter to have like a goal because [COFI] told me to have a goal. So, she makes her own goal… Like I said, she is somewhat of a perfectionist, so she has it down, structured, like college, how much, what she wants in her dorm, what she's going to do, how she is going to do things.

Butterfly explains how she supports her daughter's goal to go to college by helping her fundraise to attend educational trips and by making sure she doesn't break her perfect attendance record.

Carla, a Latina woman, had a different experience with sharing goals. In her case, with her husband. In the following quote she explains:

> My goal is to be happy, have my family. But, the goal... for my husband is to have his house, have his things, have his family taken care of. Sometimes I try to understand him, but sometimes I tell him "That is not the priority, because if we are going to focus on having money and having money, we are going to lose focus on the family and it is not worth it."

Family goals at times conflicted with one another. Carla's goal to return to her hometown in Central America to take care of her aging mother, was opposite of her husband's. He said that if

he went back, he would want to return to *his* hometown, where they spoke a different dialect, which was foreign to Carla. Carla expressed to her husband what others must think of her, "This bad daughter went to the United States and is living a happy life, and the mother is here abandoned," she said. As a compromise, her husband agreed to help support Carla's mother when she could no longer work. This example shows the importance of discussing goals with family, despite the possibility that goals may conflict with one another. It also shows how respondent's goals are inseparable from their raced and gendered identities as daughters, women, and immigrants.

Another important reason parent leaders shared their personal goals with family was to recruit various forms of support. For example, as Rosita, a Latina woman, spoke about her goal to "speak in public with people." She said her family goal was for her family to "support her in the goal she had thought of." Rosita explained that she felt "a lot of fear to speak to people, to talk with them," so she worked on this goal during the first phase of COFI's Leadership Training.

During Leadership Trainings, two main rationales for sharing goals with family emerged. First, sharing goals meant "holding each other accountable and celebrating when goals are met," said Shana, a black woman, who was co-leading a Leadership Training. Second, "In order to achieve goals, you need a network of support" she continued. We went on to share a personal goal and the people close to us who would support those goals. For Lisa, her personal goal was to write in a journal once a week. With the help of peer-trainers, Lisa made plans to share her personal goal with her family. After Lisa volunteered, two peer-trainers asked her questions and gave suggestions on soliciting the support of family to support her goal,

Does your daughter know about your goal? Asked Shana

No, said Lisa laughing slightly

Ok, you should sit down and talk with her about it, said Shana

How old is your daughter? Asked Mona, another peer-trainer

She's four and a half, Lisa responded

You'd be surprised at how much they understand. Explain it to her. Or buy her her own journal and she can write in it too. It can be something you do together, suggested Mona

Oh, I hadn't thought of that, good idea, said Lisa as she scribbled in her notebook

Does your brother know about your goal?

No, but he can't do much from Montana. Said Lisa

He can hold you accountable, can't he? Can you talk to him? Persisted Shana

Yes, I'll talk to him and you're right I guess he can hold me accountable, said Lisa

Your mom? Asked Shana

She is helping this week with Sam (her daughter), but she can hold me accountable, she does know I want to journal more and so does my best friend. And I can talk to my neighbor to see if we can set up a more regular time for Sam and Nina to play, said Lisa adding to her goal setting to-do-list. (Field notes Spring 2016).

Through this detailed exercise, Lisa and other leaders worked through the different ways she could proactively garner support for her personal goal. They also practiced actively listening to other leaders in their teams and their families, a technique I describe next.

Active Listening

Active listening is the practice of paying attention to someone else as they are speaking, without interrupting them until they are finished. Active listening is an important component of one-on-one conversations within community organizing. Through one-on-ones, participants of

collective action connect with one another and facilitate the growth of momentum and coalition building towards common goals and visions of change (Warren et. al 2015; Wood 2002). As Shana, a peer-trainer said during a Leadership Training, "One-on-ones is where we use our active listening. So, you talk for five minutes straight without interruptions and it's a good technique to get to know people." These purposeful conversations help everyday people to discover commonalities, build relationships, and also help organizers to recruit support for organizing campaigns. Notably, these interactions build up a sense that what leaders and others have to say is important, and in need of attention.

In the context of their families, respondents often depicted active listening as carefully hearing, reflecting, and acting on the perspectives of people that were important in their lives, largely focused on their children. Factotum, an African American woman, said "communication" and "active listening" were among of the most helpful parenting tips she learned at COFI. "What does that mean?" I asked her. "Valuing children, but I guess it goes for everybody. Valuing their feelings and respecting their feelings, even if you disagree. That opens so many doors," responded Factotum.

Active listening is the most common community organizing strategy that parent leaders reported using within their families. Of the 40 parent leaders I interviewed, 31 described improved communication with family since the start of their community organizing participation that was the result of active listening. Active listening helped them to mediate conflict, decrease their yelling, and hear and advocate for their children.

Less yelling. The practice of active listening for respondents also often meant a reduction in one-way communication through yelling. As Abby, a Latina woman, said concerning her partner, "We just let the anger build up and not communicate with each other. And it has

improved." Abby described the "need to sit down and talk about it… and make sure that we listen," as a large part of improving her relationship with her partner. Similarly, after attending a leadership training where leaders talked about domestic violence as a community issue, Blanca, a Latina woman, said she was doing her best at raising her three daughters without yelling at them. She said the training made her realize that domestic violence not only included physical harm, but it also involved yelling, economic threats, and other forms of harm. Providing another example, Letika, a Latina woman, said "If at one point plates were flying, they fly no more." Letika describes how before her community engagement, she was "combative." Because of this, when COFI Peace Keepers (restorative justice mediators) were needed at her daughters' school, Letika did not see herself as a suitable candidate. Luckily, she said, another parent leader convinced her that she "had everything in her" to be a Peace Keeper and she would actually be better at it because she could relate to kids who have problems with anger. So, together with the kids she was helping in the Peace Center, she actively used the peace- keeping tools she learned as a parent mediator in her family.

Similarly, Sharon, a black woman, recalled how she used one-on-ones to reduce yelling in times of distress, and to improve family relationships. Sharon said:

> Well, so, the relationships with my sisters, it improved, because we learned... how to talk to each other besides always hollering at each other... We be sure to give the chance to talk. Because usually it's like everybody hollerin' over each other, and nobody understand what happened after we together to talk.

I asked Sharon if she could recall an example and she responded:

> Yeah, that actually was last week, that was last week at my sister house...It was kind of rough because we had a situation with the kids at school, and we all was trying to come together like, "What do we do about this?" but she was like "I have to do it this way!" and I was like "No, calm down, you have to think about the choices you makin"... Then I remember the COFI model, the one-on-one.

Sharon said she listened to her sister's viewpoint, then after she was finished talking, she shared her viewpoint and they came to an agreement to get all of their facts together and report the incident to the school. Apparently one of their children had been kicked out of an afterschool Girl Scout graduation for not being "on the registration list," even though she had sold over $200 worth of cookies. Sharon said in disbelief "She wanted to send a seven-year-old, just put her out of school, without calling us or, you know, this baby's seven years old." Sharon said she was afraid her daughter could have been raped or killed in her neighborhood walking home alone. In the end, Sharon told me how this issue was resolved. "Yeah, so I found out that they did fire her from the school because I reported it. And I found out that somebody had to take a stand. If nothing get reported, nothing get done." Through active listening, Sharon and her sister established a plan of action that eventually brought about justice for her daughter and prevented this from occurring to another child.

Mediating conflict. Fabio, a Latino man, shared an incident that happened during a recent trip to visit his family in his home country where he practiced active listening to resolve a conflict. He recalled how his mother, brother, and sister were arguing over a misunderstanding that escalated to yelling. Fabio went over to his family and acted as a "mediator." "Let's separate, we need a mediator, it's like a referee," he said. He asked each person what was wrong, what happened, and asked them to speak one by one. "The difference is the capacity to understand the problem and to begin to resolve it in that moment, a problem that can become much greater. So, when it was about to turn into a physical fight, I said 'But look, give me a second, what happened here?'" Fabio said that since his brothers respected him, they listened and talked through the facts and their feelings, after which he made a suggestion.

> "The reason [my sister] is yelling is because she doesn't feel listened to and the more she raises her voice, she feels she can be heard and listened to." So, I explained to my mom. "Look, be calm mom… She raised her voice because she does not have the tools to realize this. So, when she realizes this, she is not going to do it again and you are going to communicate better. Love is always going to exist, only right now it doesn't because there is no control of emotions." "Good heavens, how do you know that?" "Because I learned it, I've been developing it in the United States."

Fabio continued to describe what this experience meant for him, and attributed his skills to his involvement with COFI:

> So, I felt so proud after fixing this situation because it was out of control. And the fact that COFI gave me those tools to identify each thing that was happening….and I've gone through the same thing, not having these tools to adequately release my feelings in that moment and through a positive path, and not a path of aggression and violence...that's why it's so important, the programs like COFI. And I want to share with you because it has had the most impact in my life.

Fabio went on to explain how stress was rampant in communities, particularly in poor communities of color that often struggle for basic necessities. Culminating stress often gets displaced onto loved ones, he explained, notably by men who are taught by society that aggression is an adequate display of masculinity (Messner 1997). However, through what he described as organizing "tools," Fabio, and other parent leaders shared how they felt better equipped to mediate family conflict and to express their feelings in a productive, forward-looking manner.

In the next quote, Star shares an experience that highlights the importance of using mediation practices within her family. She said:

> We started having like family meetings...We was in the car one day. My children was--they were arguing. And it was normally the two little ones, the youngest. Not the oldest. And I had pulled over, and I said, we gonna have a family meeting. But our family meetings -- I call them family meetings, but they're more of like peace meetings. My oldest, he got -- and when I say he had all of us in there crying, 'cause he's pretty quiet. He's like the good one. He doesn't do all the arguing and stuff... And he said -- he said, "I'm very sad." And he said, "I'm sad a lot because my brother and sister always gets in

> trouble." And he said, "when they get in trouble, they can't watch TV or play games with me, so I have to do this by myself and sometimes I feel like I'm the only child."

Star describes the emotional response that followed:

> Oh, my God. Like I started crying. My daughter, my baby boy started crying. And, I mean, because he just -- it just came out, like his -- it was just a real emotional moment. And I never even knew he was gonna say something like that. And so, you know, the other two, the two youngest, they started, "We sorry. We don't want you feeling that way...we so sorry," you know. And they was hugging… And I was like -- and so I ended like out of the circle, our family meeting, with, you know, a little speech. And I was telling them, I said, so a lot of times when we arguing, you know, sometimes you argue... because you're just probably upset about something. You know, that's okay. I said, but you never know what somebody else is going through. Or you never know what the other person is feeling. So, you know, we just got to be mindful of each other. I was saying all that good stuff. And I—you know, that was one of the moments I took what I learned in a training into my own life and family.

During this and other family circles, Star and other leaders transformed instances of conflict into learning moments where families listened to one another, which arguably brought families closer together.

Listening and advocating for their children. Active listening enabled parent leaders to also earn the trust of their school-aged children, who often turned to them when they had a problem. For example, Victoria, a Latina mother, recounts how her seven-year-old daughter came to her crying, saying she didn't want to go to school anymore:

> She said, "Mami what I feel most bad about is that between us *paisas*[18] we mistreat each other mami. The girl told me that I looked like an animal from the water." And I told [my daughter] don't worry tomorrow I am going to go to talk to the teacher. Then I arrived, and I told the teacher, I am not going to talk to you, quick I want to talk to the director [principal]. Not with her representative, I want to talk to the director. I know who the director is and I want to talk to her. And I'm not leaving until I talk to her. I got there at 7:00am and the director didn't see me until 9:00am. I thought she wasn't going to see me since I did not have an appointment. But, you see I am constantly there, there. I said, if you don't see me I'm going to stay here. And the secretary laughed and said "Mmmh well you're going to have to stay here." "Well I'll stay here." I said because I have my rights and I come here to fix a problem. So, when the director saw me, I said "I want to come

[18] Slang for "paisano" which means someone from your home country.

> tomorrow and I want the mom of the girl and the girl here. I want all four of us to talk and I want you to be a witness of this talk. This is the situation. The girl told this to my daughter. Did my daughter disrespect her? Or why is there that spitefulness?" I said, "These are maltreatments. They don't have to be physical hits," I said, "to hurt." I said, "It's also bullying." And the [director] said "Here there is no bullying."

Beyond attending to her daughter's issue at school, Victoria also listened to her daughter's feelings of rejection by someone from a similar racial-ethnic background. She advised her daughter to ignore the person and be kind in return. This was not the first time Victoria's daughter had come to her with a complaint. Previously, Victoria had talked to the teacher about classmates calling her daughter a "witch." However, recognizing that the talks with the teacher and the principal were not helping, the last time I spoke with Victoria, she was beginning an organizing campaign to combat bullying in her daughters' school, demanding that staff and teachers recognize and do something about it. Importantly, she was also showing her daughter that her complaints did not fall on deaf ears.

Abby mentioned similar issues concerning bullying at her son's school. She said that during a Leadership Training, leaders talked about how school staff "weren't listening" and how they had to make sure that "teachers were listening to our needs and our children's needs." Leaders brainstormed ways to bring up these issues to the principal and teachers. Abby reflects on how this impacted active listening with her son,

> And to me, I thought maybe I can try that listening with my son when he has something going on in his school...and I would try to listen to what he was telling me, and I would talk to the teacher about what's going on and stuff like that. So once his speech started getting better I was able to communicate with him and listen to what he was telling me and then communicate with other teachers or other parents.

Abby, like other leaders, recognized the importance of listening to their own children, which shed light on concerns that were pertinent in their children's lives and education.

Jada, a black woman, shared a critical example of how her community organizing pushed her to actively listen to her daughter. She reflects on this with other COFI leaders,

> You know we always speaking about parents' voices, parents being included. [Organizing] changed me as a parent as well because my daughter-- she just had prom last week. Two weeks before prom...I was telling my daughter I was like, I'm gonna get you prom dress... Not asking her what is it that she's going to wear to prom, not asking her what color she wearing, not including her in anything at all. So, after… we had just had a meeting… right there at that moment I had a change of heart as far as a parent and my kids. So, my daughter came home and I was like, "What is it that you plan on wearing to prom? So, she was like, "Well mom, I was thinking about wearing a suit." So I was like, "Wearing a suit?"... So she was like, "Mom you asked me what is it that I was planning on wearing."... So I was like, "Yea, I did ask." So I was like, "But for what?" She was like, "Well, my friend just came out to me." … So she was like, "Instead of coming out to everybody individually, she's going to come out at the prom, and let everybody know that this is me, this is what I feel comfortable with." So, my daughter was like, "Since that's my best friend, I'm going to support her and wear the suit too." I was like, oh, well are you wearing dress shoes or tennis shoes?"... And so, I was like, baby if that makes you happy, then I'm game for it. So with that being said, like, as far as my kids, I always make decisions that, you know, I feel, that that's what's best for them. Whether than asking them, is that what you want?... So, you know, like I said, [organizing] inspired me to have a change of heart. (Field notes, June 2017)

Here, Jada recognized how for her daughter, standing next to her friend in a suit, was an important and meaningful act of solidarity—something she would not have known had she not asked and listened. In response to her comment, other leaders shared similar stories how they too were listening to their kids more as a result of their involvement in community organizing. Kerry, a black woman, for instance said she listened when her eight-year-old daughter asked her to not cancel her plans to chaperone a field trip for a last-minute work function. "So, May 31st, yes y'all I'm' going with my baby. I gotta take that break like she said 'cuz I'm always busy" said Kerry smiling from ear to ear as claps and supportive cheers filled the room.

Building Stronger Families through Restorative Kinship

In this chapter, I have contributed to collective action literature by highlighting the interplay of collective action repertoires (i.e. tools, activities, practices) and family life. This adds

to research on the social effects of collective action (Giugni 2004; Perry 2016; Warren, Mapp and Kuttner 2015), which has yet to seriously consider the interplay of collective action processes and family life. These findings also add to emerging research on the broad impacts of restorative justice on society (Braithwaite 2002; Green, Johnstone and Lambert 2013; Van Ness and Strong 2014), by concentrating attention on the leaders of these local restorative justice movements who fight for policy changes to end the criminalization of their children.

The chapter offers three major ways that collective action feeds into family life through restorative justice practices. Parent leaders in my study strengthened their families by using overlapping community organizing techniques from their "toolkits" within a process that I call *restorative kinship*, or the reflective and purposeful process of improving the social and emotional health of family relationships. Although these activities are presented separately, they often overlapped and mutually reinforced one another.

First, the chapter demonstrates how parent leaders used the *web of support* within their family lives to make strategic plans, to acquire support from people that are close to them, and to visualize a group-centered process of overcoming barriers and achieving goals and visions. Parent leaders used the web of support to accomplish tasks from everyday childcare responsibilities to planning a cross-country road trip on a budget. They also used the web of support to acquire help from people close to them. Asking for help was not always easy, particularly for leaders who did not feel support from family for their collective action participation. Nonetheless, parent leaders used the web of support to map out the people around them that could support them, immediately or in the future, towards achieving their goals and visions. These visual maps in the form of webs of support, materialized a community organizing

lesson that is prominent among diverse models of collective action: there exists power in numbers.

Second, this chapter highlights how parent leaders practiced *relationship building* with family through purposeful verbal and interactive exercises learned or reinforced through community organizing. For instance, parent leaders reported their newfound necessity to tell their children they loved them more frequently. They shared how meaningfully engaging with family was important and they sought to get to know their family on a more intimate level. Leaders explored new and familiar settings enjoying the company of people close to them. Leaders also shared their goals with family and encouraged them to set their own goals as well. Thus, using community organizing tools of relationship building, leaders built stronger relationships with their families.

And third, this chapter illustrates how *active listening* was an important part of strengthening leaders' families and helped to resolve, respond to, and prevent conflict. Parent leaders described a conscious decrease in yelling at people they cared about, instead opting for communication techniques that built-up instead of further strained their relationships. Leaders explained how they mediated conflict through family circles that resembled the work they did in their communities through restorative justice Peace Centers. Notably, parent leaders talked about how using these tools and activities made them feel proud of being able to resolve interpersonal problems. Parent leaders also shared how they responded to the complaints of their children (i.e. bullying) in a manner that would bring about a favorable outcome and some form of change, through calculated steps instead of anger alone. Last, respondents stressed the importance of hearing and supporting the development of voice within their family, particularly concerning their children.

I argue that collective action participation can be a vehicle for strengthening family relationships, particularly within a family-focused model that supports instead of ignores participants' family lives. Through their narratives of improving themselves as people and parents, leaders also distance themselves from former lacking selves, showing a process of identity conversion achieved through re-affirming interactions with others, particularly from their children who thought highly of them.

The community organizing tools that participants reported using within their families (web of support, relationship building, and active listening) are not especially unique to the COFI model of organizing, per say. COFI is not the only organizing institution that uses these organizing techniques to help everyday people achieve policy changes—however, COFI *is very intentional* in highlighting how these tools can be used within leaders' family lives. Thus, leaders who have been trained (formally or not) through other models of collective action, could be practicing similar activities within their families as a result of their community organizing participation. Nonetheless, as scholars of collective action, it is important for us to ask questions that elicit responses from agents of social change that reveal the interplay of family life and collective action. Doing so, will give us a broader picture of how community organizing participation and other forms of civic engagement shape self-perceptions and interpersonal relationships, which is particularly important not only for understanding, but also for supporting the full and political lives of materially poor mothers and families of color.

CHAPTER SIX

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

This community-engaged study has shed light on three overlapping processes within the cross-community organizing of mainly materially poor mothers and grandmothers in Chicago. First, is how collective action and family life are mutually shaped. Second, is how groups that are often divided come together to organize collectively. And third, is how the co-production of family life and collective action, along with the bridging of differences among leaders, shapes their mutual relationships. Based on the narratives of leaders affiliated with Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI), the participant observations of local and family-focused collective action, and a content analysis of organizing materials, I argue that collective action has a strong propensity to meaningfully transform intimate family and cross-community relationships. Beyond explicit organizational goals and wins, family-focused collective action uplifts the power, dignity, and multi-dimensional family and social lives of participants.

Community-Engaged Research Reflections

When I first began seriously thinking about my dissertation methods, I reached out to a recent Ph.D. graduate for advice, which to my surprise yielded a list of reasons why *not* to conduct a community-engaged project. This former student had been involved in numerous community-based and engaged projects, but the dissertation process was distinct. You would be

judged on several fronts; your mastery of the literature, your contributions to the field of study, the "validity" of your findings. Based on their own dissertation experiences and setbacks, which ranged from IRB amendments and time-consuming check-ins with study participants, to added layers of complexity around publishing, these reasons where admittedly compelling and frightening.

Community-engaged research would ensure the important questions of respondents would be incorporated, the study strategies from recruitment to dissemination would be a joint effort, and the project overall would be informed by respondents telling me what they envisioned my presence to encompass, not the other way around. I knew that my dissertation committee was encouraging of community-engaged research, I had a strong support system at Loyola's Center for Urban Research and Learning, I had already begun forming relationships with the leaders whose narratives today make-up the core of this project, and most importantly, I wanted this study to have an impact beyond the "ivory towers." It was these main reasons that influenced me to begin a study that involved leaders, not as research "subjects," but as the coaches, teachers, and rule-setters for how I would engage with them. I believe doing so encouraged a partnership, trust, and yielded richer evidence and more just and fruitful findings.

I write these reflections to encourage future students to not shy away from community-engaged methods, which include research participants at each stage of the research. I also write these words to urge advisors, IRB committees, and academic systems to support research that seeks to meaningfully and ethically include and give back to the communities that for centuries have informed what we know, or think we know, about social life.

Main Findings and Implications

This dissertation begins in conversation with three substantive areas of research within the study of collective action and social movements. First, are writings that uncover the collective action of women of color whose participation is inseparable from their intersectional identities (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 2015; Crenshaw 1991; Law 2012; Pardo 1998; Robnett 1997). Second, are studies that recognize collective action as a gendered and gender-shaping process (Einwohner, Hollander, and Olson 2000; Romero 2008; Taylor 1999; Whittier 2013). And third, is research that highlights the social effects of collective action, including shifts in biographies, the life-course, and power (Flores and Cossyleon 2017; McAdam 1999; Warren, Mapp, and Kuttner 2015). The narratives shared by my participants (leaders) elicited vital meaning-making processes for understanding the effects of their engagement beyond the explicit goals of organizations (Moore 2008; Polletta 2006; Jasper 2014). Fifteen moxfnths of participant observations of community organizing activities allowed me to immerse myself into the collective action of leaders and to learn about and share their everyday realizations, tactics, triumphs, and struggles (Blee and Taylor 2002). As such, this study documents the lived experiences, perceptions, organizational mechanisms, and importantly, the intimate social effects of collective action participation. This dissertation extends some of my previous work, which documents how a family-focused model supports *motherleaders* to "come out of their shell," by nurturing their intersectional and social identities given that their selfhood as mothers and women of color are inseparable from their community leadership (Cossyleon 2018).

Evidence in chapter three illuminates the mechanisms COFI used to bridge differences among women of color from different communities through an understudied family-focused model of community organizing. For long, collective action scholars have overlooked the family-

focused model of grassroots mobilization. Instead writers have primarily examined how male dominated and Alinsky-inspired, faith-based and race-based progressive organizing bridge differences in participants' social locations (Braunstein, Fuist, and Williams 2017; Wood and Fulton 2015: Wood 2002; Slessarev-Jamir 2011). Chapter three documents how COFI guided and mediated cross-community interactions through layered processes that facilitated meaningful interaction among agents of social change. *Race-conscious nudges* were the main mechanism COFI used to bridge differences across communities. These nudges included locally-based leadership trainings with language translation, prompts for relevant discussions about race and family across communities, and the facilitation of mixed-community transportation and social events. Thus, within the process of improving their communities and especially the lives of their children, leaders agreed to uphold "*don't yuck my yum*" respect with one another and they engaged in guided storytelling about race and family oppression. I argue that together, these experiences shaped leaders' perceptions and actions towards one another, which may have implications for the improvement of cross-community relations more broadly. In today's increasingly polarized society, even groups who have been similarly marginalized and who experience injustice at every turn in their lives often refuse to look past constructed group differences. It is meaningful conversations like the ones presented in this chapter that can bring groups together that have for far too long been separated, serving the interest of oppressors who are rooting for this continued dichotomization.

In chapter four, I document how COFI's organizing model is inclusive and supportive of family. For leaders, this support largely decreases but does not eliminate family barriers to their collective action. In the chapter, I highlight the family responses and attitudes towards leaders' grassroots mobilization and how organizing symbols mattered within these processes. The

exploration of organizing symbols in this chapter is distinctive from other studies because I focus less on symbols "of the movement" or as tactics to construct solidarity for achieving explicit liberation or organizational goals (Ford 2015; Olesen 2015; Williams 2004). Instead, I emphasize symbols as important components of social recognition outside of movements too. I show how organizing symbols travel across space, linking collective action to other social experiences, including family life (White 1999; Taylor 1994). Findings also highlight the emotionally invested strategies leaders used to explain the material and social importance of their organizing to their families. Moreover, evidence reveals how symbols not only gain meanings through collective action, but they are also consequential for family relationships, at times, mitigating negative family responses and validating leaders' organizing efforts. These findings are insightful because they show how organizing symbols can be re-deployed outside of organizing, within other contexts, to improve family responses, build trust, and develop a sense of collective efficacy. However, these findings are simultaneously problematic because they elucidate how leaders, particularly recent immigrant Latina mothers, continuously had to defend their meaningful work against family and societal measures of significance that overly emphasized status, achievement, and policy impacts.

Throughout chapter five, I move from studying family responses and the effects of organizing symbols, to studying how leaders extended their community organizing activities, largely related to their Elementary Justice organizing, to strengthen their family relationships. With the backdrop of recent scholarship that highlights increasing individualism and the growing fragility of family as a source of social support for the materially poor (Mazelis 2017; Menjivar 2000), the chapter shows how collective action can help leaders to reinforce family relationships. The chapter adds different dimensions to the research of mainly criminologists who study

restorative justice (Braithwaite 2001; Harris and Maruna 2006; Weitekamp 1999), but who have yet to document the parallels between restorative justice and community organizing participation. The Elementary Justice organizing of POWER-PAC leaders has effectively replaced a zero-tolerance stance within Chicago Public Schools with a restorative approach—efforts that continue to reduce the expulsion and criminalization of school-aged youth. As an alternative to punitive school responses, leaders engage within their schools as Peace Keepers or mediators who use intimate community circles to resolve and prevent future conflict. Although not every leader in my study was involved in the implementation of these practices within schools, there were notable transformations within each of their family relationships, which strikingly resembled the forward-looking and healing activities found in restorative justice practices. Thus, I argue that through their community organizing training and experiences, leaders engaged in *restorative kinship*, a reflective and purposeful process of improving the social and emotional health of their family relationships. These findings have implications for the mending and strengthening of family relationships that have often been strained by (criminal justice, welfare, housing, and other) policies that do more to tear down instead of uplift families, particularly materially poor families of color.

Practical Suggestions for COFI and Other Organizing Institutions

Reflecting on this study, I would like to impart some practical suggestions for COFI and other organizing institutions to consider, revolving around: the definition of family; established outlets for communicating and discussing family and other barriers to collective action participation; and language translation.

First, I consider it important for any organization that engages with families to have an explicit working definition of family. Evidence collected in this dissertation shows how COFI

was proactively inclusive of grandparents, neighbors, and other community members as caregivers and acknowledged kin-ties expanding beyond the household. COFI also overtly expressed the organizing of COFI leaders as led by mothers and grandmothers of color and immigrants—important acknowledgements that were appropriately highlighted. Similarly, COFI organizers and leaders discussed family as integral to their participation and as a main focus within legislative reform and community organizing efforts. Yet, throughout this study, I struggled to find an explicit and comprehensive definition of family within COFI's organizing materials, social media sites, and website.

The definition of family within society is often contested given that it shapes rights, support eligibility, and benefits and many other aspects of how we organize our lives. But also, an expansive definition of family is important for purposes of inclusivity and belonging. COFI and other community organizing groups would benefit from a working statement that highlights how family is socially and historically situated and constantly changing in composition and form. Ideally, this statement would confront the fact that family is socially gendered, raced, sexed, and classed and no two families are identical. But also, how the use of family as a unifying term that many participants of collective action can identify with, in some form or another, is inclusive of all family forms. This includes but is not limited to: mixed-race families; same-sex families; foster families; transnational families; undocumented or mixed immigration status families; and families with members who are transgender and or who do not conform to normative gender categories or expressions. This suggested family inclusivity statement is one of many ways organizations can ensure that all family forms are promoted, and no family or person feels invisible. Additionally, organizations could more overtly work towards expanding the definition of family in society through legislative reform agendas, school-based efforts, and within

community organizing practice to match the social, cultural, and family realities of actual communities.

Second, I suggest recognizing and addressing family barriers to collective action and offering an anonymous outlet for leaders to provide necessary comments or suggestions to organizers and staff. As mentioned in chapter four, the majority of leaders had at least one family member who was supportive of their participation in community organizing. However, 40 percent of leaders in the study expressed experiencing family tension as a result of their organizing. This finding suggests the need to explicitly address family barriers to collective action within organizing trainings or meetings. I observed some leaders speaking out about the organizational supports they needed to continue their organizing enthusiasm (i.e. more constructive activities for children while leaders had community meetings). I heard stories about how leaders gave each other advice on how to "convince" family of the utility of their work or offered suggestions on how to navigate family obligations *and* community organizing. Yet, this was not explicitly discussed within the organizing trainings or meetings I attended, other than when it was brought up by a leader participating in the training. Leaders, particularly newer leaders, might be hesitant to initiate a conversation about how their community organizing meets resistance with family or how they require more support in order to continue engaging in collective action, as they desire. I recognize the need to find a balance between the topics presented by organizing institutions and the discussions that emerge organically from leaders. Yet, an anonymous method for leaders to express their suggestions could ensure more people are heard, particularly leaders who may be hesitant to overtly voice their needs or concerns.

And last, I believe it would be helpful for organizations to designate someone on staff who is hired specifically to translate meetings and other organizing events. This would ensure

greater accuracy and fluidity in language translation and would move the translation responsibility away from organizers and parent leaders engaged in these organizing activities. Moreover, a closer look at the languages spoken within target participant communities (i.e. Chicago Public School families), besides English and Spanish, might be helpful when considering the future expansion of language translation.

I hope these suggestions are helpful in some way to COFI and other organizations as they continue to expand and develop their support of community leaders. These ideas are not indicators of organizational weaknesses, but rather are starting points for institutions to continue to promote and support leaders and their families.

Future Empirical Directions and Concluding Remarks

As is expected, this study produced many other questions besides the ones I hoped to answer at its inception. Questions about how the experiences of community organizing leaders shape (and are shaped by) their social encounters in other contexts: at work, in school, in their neighborhood, in church, and in virtual online spaces come to mind. But, one of the major future directions inspired by this dissertation is the need to examine more closely how collective action has intergenerational effects on relationships and visions. With this need in mind, in the future, I would like to further analyze the in-depth interviews from participants in my study to better understand how COFI leaders became involved in collective action, and how this process was influenced by previous family generations. The fact that leaders engaged collectively within their communities today despite the reality that the collective action of their ancestors did not yield the policy progress they envisioned (i.e. stopping gentrification and the displacement of families in public and private housing), is telling. It indicates perhaps, how regardless of explicit collective action goals, the process and experience of collective action is meaningful and necessary for the

sustenance of communities of color. It suggests that collective envisioning has survived generations of subjugation and marginalization, showing an impressive and unyielding amount of agency, drive, and hope.

Second, this study indicates the need to further examine the intergenerational effects of collective action through the eyes of leaders who grew up within these collective spaces. I would like to conduct a follow-up study of the children of the leaders who participated in my study, to uncover from their perspective how the collective action of their parents has been influential in their own lives. The stories that leaders shared of how their children's dreams expanded with their exposure to collective action, community leaders, and journeys outside of their neighborhoods are inspiring to say the least. Leaders consistently described their children as being social-justice oriented, open to meeting people different from them, and even how adult children were actively involved in their own children's schools and communities. It would be interesting and enlightening to hear these and other stories from the perspective of the young leaders who rode buses to Springfield, attended community organizing meetings, and mingled with other children from different communities, some before they could even speak.

Another lingering question concerns the role of organizations within sustained collective action. Early scholarship on "poor people's movements" argues that formal organizations hold people back, that the true power of the poor is to disrupt instead of to improve the systems and policies that shape their lives (Piven and Cloward 1979). This dissertation shows the important role of COFI, an organization whose mission is to support the collective action of parents from communities across Illinois. Through their involvement with COFI, parents come to see themselves as leaders within their communities and families and they fight for the rights of their families and children.

In many ways, the story told in this dissertation is one of success and positive social transformation. The cross-community relationships built through the family-focused collective action of leaders intimately shaped leaders' family and community relationships. These accomplishments, along with COFI and POWER-PACs policy wins are important and merit celebration and continued philanthropic support. I recognize that this dissertation focused less, due to its research questions and methodological limits, on the people and families who for varying reasons dropped out of collective action participation altogether. As such, evidence did not uncover the narratives of leaders whose family circumstances were so severe that they could not continue to participate in community organizing. Future research could more explicitly look to better understand what happens when someone begins to engage in collective action and does not return or why people avoid participation in collective action altogether. Again, understanding the additional support necessary for leaders to overcome social, economic, or family barriers to collective action participation remains a worthy and necessary inquiry.

It is my hope that collective action scholarship continues to explore not only how organizations can or cannot be a part of revolutionary movements, but also how participants of movements, their families, and their communities, are transformed by the very process of collectivities. The question about the utility and role of organizations within movements, also make me wonder how the findings presented in this dissertation would be different if there were no COFI and no institution to provide: leadership trainings; food and refreshments; information; childcare; transportation to Springfield and other rallies; links between leaders from inner city Chicago to southern Illinois, support for publications that share leaders' community surveys and policy change recommendations.. It is chilling to think that an organization like COFI could disappear if private philanthropist, who comprise most of the funding COFI receives, decide to

invest “elsewhere.” I have some solace from knowing that what has been etched in the hearts and minds of leaders through their family-focused community organizing experiences, no one can take from them. Yet, I hope the financial support meets the enormous need of organizations like COFI.

Learning about the stories and histories of leaders through this study has forever changed me as a person and scholar and has shaped my own family relationships to be more intentional and proactive. I am optimistic this study shares a piece of the powerful transformation that is possible through grassroots collective action, along with seeds of encouragement, vision, and hope.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH STUDY AND RECRUITMENT FLYERS

Are YOU a COFI Parent?

Share your story!

Hi! I'm Jennifer Coss y Leon, a doctoral student at Loyola University. I am conducting a study of family-focused community organizing at COFI. I am talking to parents one-on-one through 1-2 hour interviews and observing everyday COFI activities to learn about the ways organizing shapes the lives of COFI parents and their families. Participation is completely voluntary and please let me know if you have any questions!

Please contact me if you are interested in participating in an interview at a location convenient for you!

$20 gift card for participating in interview

To schedule an interview call Jennifer (773) 417-9505 before July 31, 2016

Es USTED una Madre o Padre de COFI?

Comparta su historia!

Hola! Me llamo Jennifer Coss y Leon, una estudiante doctoral en Loyola University. Estoy conduciendo una búsqueda sobre la organización de la comunidad enfocada en familias en COFI. Estoy hablando con padres uno-a-uno en entrevistas de 1 a 2 horas y observando actividades diarias de COFI para aprender como la organización de la comunidad forma las vidas de padres de COFI y sus familias. Su participación es completamente voluntaria. Por favor avíseme si tiene cualquier pregunta!

Por favor contáctame si le gustaría participar en una entrevista en un lugar conveniente para usted!

$20 tarjeta de regalo por participar en una entrevista

Para programar una entrevista llame a Jennifer (773) 417-9505 antes de Julio 31, 2016

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE- 4-21-16

I: ICEBREAKER [Develop Rapport]

1. If we were meeting for the first time during a COFI training, what would you share about yourself during the introductory "story of your life" one-on-one?

Siblings? Kin?	Marriage/partner?
How much schooling?	Early jobs?
How long have you lived here?	Tell me about your community.
Kids? Ages?	How are kids doing? In school?

FOLLOW-UP

II: COFI [How is COFI a part of your life?] SPECIFICS, TELL ME ABOUT THE LAST TIME X HAPPENED

2. How did you become involved with COFI? (Who, what, when, where).

a. What is your most memorable/proudest moment at COFI? Emotions?

b. Tell me one way your life has improved since you started with COFI?

c. Tell me about a time at COFI when things didn't go the way you would have liked.

What surprised you the most about COFI?	Tell me about a time you wanted to do something at COFI but were unable to do it.
Tell me about one of the SFT goals you have set with COFI.	How do you get to COFI activities?
What do you like doing most at COFI?	In the last month, what are some other activities you have you done with COFI?
Tell me about the people you've met at COFI that you really connect with. How?	Tell me about your favorite people at COFI? Other parents/staff?

FOLLOW-UP

III: COFI AND KIN [How is family/kin involved in organizing experiences]

3. I want to better understand what family means to different people. I can imagine that it's not always only the people you live with or who have your same last name right? Tell me about the people you are closest to. (Would it be fair to call them your family?)

a. Tell me about your relationships with your [family/partner/children] before joining COFI.

b. Tell me about your relationships with your [family/partner/children] since joining COFI.

c. To get an idea of a day in your life, walk me through what you did yesterday.

Does family know you're involved with COFI?	What do your kids think about your participation in COFI?
What do they think about COFI?	Most helpful parenting tip you learned at COFI?
One way your **family** life has improved because of COFI?	A time when COFI helped your family out?
One way your family life has gotten harder because of COFI?	How often does family come to COFI events?

FOLLOW-UP

IV: FUTURE {Exiting the field]

4. During Self, Family, Team training—one of the things COFI asks you to do is to describe your ten year vision. Tell me about your vision for 2026. Let's start with your personal vision.

a. Family vision

b. Community vision

c. If you could change one thing about your community, what would it be?

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Jennifer Elena Cossyleon graduated from Marquette University with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Welfare and Justice and Criminology and Law Studies, with a minor in Political Science. She has published in peer-reviewed academic journals including: *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World; City & Community; The Sociological Quarterly; Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion; the Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice; and Teaching Sociology (book review)*. Jennifer has also co-authored policy relevant reports and articles published by the *Poverty and Race Research Action Council*, *Poverty and Race,* and by the *Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.* She has forthcoming publications entitled, "Gender and Collective Action," in the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Gender Studies* edited by Nancy Naples and "Community Policing" in the *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies*, edited by Anthony M. Orum. Jennifer also has two forthcoming co-authored chapters in Edward O. Flores' book, *Jesus Saved an Ex-Con: Political Activism and Redemption after Incarceration,* scheduled to be released in October 2018. These chapters focus on the incorporation of faith-based organizations into criminal justice reform and the process of returning citizenship. Beginning June 2018, Jennifer accepted a Post-Doctoral Research Associate appointment in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University.