Rising Up:
Collectivizing, Strategizing, and Forging Solidarities among Parents and Caregivers Leading for Racial Justice

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of 11 Black parents, one Latinx parent and one South Asian parent in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) in Ontario, Canada, who have challenged racial injustices and inequities in schools, districts, and the province. Drawing on composite counter-storytelling as a methodology of critical race theory, we reframe the activism of Black and racialized parents as the ultimate form of parent engagement and an important example of educational leadership. These strategies include: the energy of collectivizing, powering up, and building cross-racial and cross-community solidarity. We share implications for educational leaders in rethinking parent engagement and antiracist, educational leadership.

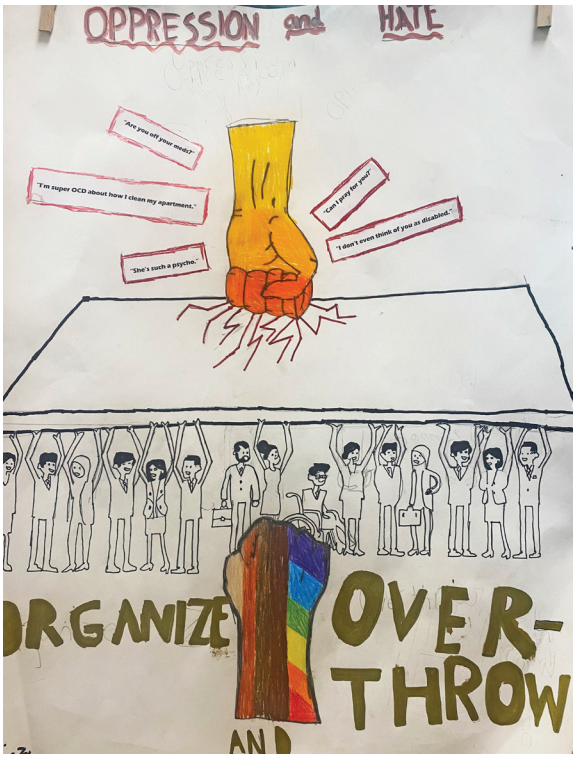
Este estudio explora las experiencias de 11 madres/padres negros, 1 madre latina y 1 madre surasiática del área metropolitana de Toronto y Hamilton en Ontario, Canadá, quienes han desafiado las injusticias y desigualdades raciales en las escuelas, los distritos y la provincia. Basándonos en la narración de historias como metodología de la teoría crítica de la raza, reformulamos el activismo de las/los madres/padres negros y racializados como la forma definitiva de participación de los padres y un ejemplo importante de liderazgo educativo. Estas estrategias incluyen: la energía de colectivizar, potenciar y construir la solidaridad entre razas y entre comunidades. Compartimos las implicaciones para los líderes educativos al repensar la participación de las/los madres/padres y el liderazgo educativo antirracista.

Keywords: Parent activism, community organizing, racial justice, educational leadership, parent engagement

Palabras Claves: Activismo, organización comunitaria, justicia racial, liderazgo educativo y participación de padres y madres.

The parallel pandemics of COVID-19 and white supremacy have exacerbated long-standing racial and intersecting injustices in schooling and society. The movement for Black lives, reignited by the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the United States, and Regis Korchinksi-Paquet, D'Andre Campbell, Jamal Francique, and others in Canada, are forcing us to reckon with historical and ongoing expressions of anti-Black racism, colonial violence, and other forms of racism worldwide. As a result, a global uprising in racial consciousness and solidarity with Black life met an uprising by largely White, middle- and upper-middle-class families fighting mask mandates and opposing antiracist and anti-oppressive approaches to schooling. Despite the enactments of antiracist leadership by select educational leaders in Ontario, Canada, there are pervasive systemic gaps in leadership preparation for racial justice and intersecting justices (Shah et al., 2022a).

Black, Indigenous, and racialized[1] families and communities have been leading racial justice efforts for decades, despite tremendous risks to themselves and their children. Against the backdrop of parallel pandemics, there has been a renewed rising up of parents, caregivers, and parent collectives leading antiracist transformations for Indigenous, Black, and racialized children and families in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). These collectives, both formal and informal, have led to increased parent activism and are leading to important changes in governance, policies, and



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schooling structures throughout the province. We join others in acknowledging the tremendous leadership of parents and parent collectives (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2014) and consider what educational leaders might learn about antiracist leadership from the activism, advocacy, and community engagement of Black and racialized parents, caregivers, and communities fighting for racial justice. Furthermore, we consider what educational leaders might learn about parent engagement from the very parents they have been socialized to construct as "problem parents" (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). We consider possibilities for conceptualizing parent engagement and leadership beyond individual, hierarchical, race-neutral, and apolitical aims to center collectivist, antiracist aims. This study uses composite counter-storytelling as a methodology to analyze the leadership and activism of 11 Black parents, one Latinx parent, and one South Asian parent in the GTHA. We begin by exploring the literature on parent activism and educational leadership for racial justice. We then offer three composite counter-stories that explore the nuances in Black and racialized parents' activism-leadership based on in-depth interviews, ongoing conversations, and the literature on community and racial justice leadership. Finally, we consider implications for educational leaders on rethinking both leadership and parent engagement for racial justice.

Parent Activism and Leadership in Communities

We draw on critical scholarship that explores how racism and intersecting systems of oppression mediate school-family-community relations in which Black, racialized, and immigrant communities are often viewed through a deficit lens (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). In these constructions, parent activists are often viewed as "problem parents" (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017) and experience a range of coercive tactics by educators and educational leaders who maintain the overarching power and control of schools over families (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022). As such, the experiences and activism of Black and racialized parents must be contextualized through critical, race-conscious discourses that promote collective and transformative agency (Ishimaru, 2020).

We also draw on scholarship that acknowledges community organizing with parents, community members, and youth as central to transformative schooling for historically oppressed populations,

and challenges power asymmetries in schooling by building collective power in nondominant communities (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). From this perspective, educators, families, and students are seen as experts on policies and decisions that affect them (Warren & Mapp, 2011; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Black and racialized communities have expertise and lived experiences, making them important leaders in education (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Hong, 2011; Welton & Freelon, 2018). In Ontario, parents who have challenged racism and called for greater transparency and accountability in school districts are now running for election as school board trustees (Javed, 2018), filing human rights complaints (Francis, 2020), and rallying to protest anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, and other forms of racism and exclusion experienced by educators, students, and families (Francis, 2020; Paradkar, 2020).

We draw on Ishimaru's (2014, 2019) equitable collaboration framework for family engagement that centers on reciprocal, collective, and relational strategies rather than traditional, deficit-oriented models (Baquedano-López et. al, 2013; Ishimaru, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Ishimaru (2019, p. 354) explains, "Equitable community–school collaborations entail (a) systemic change goals, (b) strategies that build capacity and relationships, (c) the role of lower-income parents and families of color as experts and fellow educational leaders, and (d) educational change as a context-specific political process." We also acknowledge that a growing body of antiracist educational strategies has emerged from the organizing work of Black families and community activists (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 5). Black mothers figured prominently in this study, as nine of the 13 participants identify as Black women. Central to Black mothering is the importance of protecting and affirming the child's racial identity (Mullings & Mullings-Lewis, 2013), childrearing as a shared responsibility, and the collective care and nurturance of Black children for the benefit and survival of Black communities (Collins, 2000).

Where Leading for Racial Justice Meets Leading for Activism

Over the past decade, a growing body of research on educational leadership for racial justice has emerged focusing on the importance of leaders unpacking their racial identities (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016), learning about race, racism, and Whiteness to advance dialogue and understandings about antiracism (Allen & Liou, 2019; Radd & Grosland, 2019), and developing a racial literacy (Horsford, 2014; Lewis, 2018). Rivera-McCutchen (2019) speaks to the importance of engaging antiracism with urgency to address persistent inequalities as an ethic of "armed love" (p. 237). Several studies focus on the importance of building relationships with families/communities and drawing on community cultural and linguistic wealth (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016).

In considering community organizing as a form of educational leadership, school administrators engage in the public sphere by speaking to media outlets and in academic spaces to advocate for the needs of Black and racialized communities and students (Johnson, 2014; Welton & Freelon, 2018), by bridging community and educational institutions (Johnson, 2014), and by intentionally engaging in antiracist advocacy within schools and communities (Diem et al., 2019; Johnson, 2014; Rivera-McCutchen, 2019; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Horsford et al. (2019) use the conceptualization of political race as a framework to understand cross-racial coalitions between Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities and educational leaders as part of a shared struggle for educational justice. We also consider studies that explore conceptions of leadership beyond formal roles and individuals (Ishimaru, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Like Rodela & Bertrand (2018, p. 4), we wonder, "if we expand the margins of who gets to be an educational leader to include youth, parents, and community members, what does this mean for how we prepare formal educational administrators to work collaboratively for social justice?" Ishimaru (2013) invites us to see youth, families, and communities as educational leaders, and invites educational leaders to lead *with* them, rather than *for* them.

Counter-Storytelling as Methodology

Counter-storytelling is a foundational tenet and methodology of critical race theory. Solórzano & Yosso (2002, p. 26) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people

whose experiences are not often told," stories that both challenge dominant discourses and open the space for alternative narratives (Ikemoto, 1997). As such, knowledge is understood to be subjective and contextual (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ikemoto (1997, p. 136) reminds us, "By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse." Instead, counter-storytelling intentionally highlights the stories that are silenced, erased, and ignored to perpetuate systems of power. Counter-stories also serve to "facilitate social, political, and cultural cohesion, as well as survival and resistance among marginalized groups" (Merriweather-Hunn et al., 2006, p. 45). Through "personal stories," "other people's stories," or "composite stories or narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 32-33), voices from the margins become "places of transformative resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37) and a counter to narratives based on deficit models. We use composite counter-storytelling to challenge the dominant discourse of educational leadership being the sole domain of administrators and district leaders in kindergarten to grade 12 schooling and extend this discourse to include parents and community activists. We also aim to reframe the activism of Black and racialized parents fighting for racial justice as antiracist leadership and the ultimate example of parent engagement.

Contexts and Participants

This study is situated in urban and suburban settings within the GTHA in Ontario, Canada. While these local settings are distinct, they also share certain characteristics: high levels of diversity and the reproduction of social inequalities based on race, language, accent, religion and spiritual worldview, migration status, social class, gender and sexuality, disability, and more. Participants in this study come from five urban and suburban school districts in the GTHA, including four English school boards, one French Catholic school board, and one independent school board. To protect participant identities, we offer important details of the anonymized participant profiles in Table 1.

TABLE 1.
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT IDENTITIES

Race	**Immigration**
• 10 identified as Black • 1 mixed race (Black & White) • 1 Latinx • 1 South Asian	• 3 of the Black parents identified as African • 2 of the Black parents identified as immigrants • 2 of the non-Black parents identified as immigrants
Educational Background	**Religion Educational Background**
• 5 parents attended or completed college • 5 parents hold bachelor's degrees • 1 holds a master's degree • 2 hold PhDs	• 2 identified as Muslim • 4 identified as Catholic or Christian

Gender

12 identified as cisgender female (9 Black, 1 South Asian, 1 Latinx, 1 mixed Black and White) and 1 identified as a Black, cisgender male

This table speaks to the intersections of religion, migration status, gender, and race, offering important insights into the GTHA context. Importantly, all Black parents in this study experienced harmful and racist interactions in their children's school communities regardless of their educational attainment, dispelling the myth that social class mitigates against racism.

Researcher Positionality

Vidya Shah is a second-generation South Asian, cisgender woman on the stolen lands of T'karonto[2] in Dish With One Spoon territory. As a scholar-practitioner-activist, she is committed to antiracist approaches to leadership and school district transformation and continues to engage in initiatives, both formally and informally, to support parent and community activism as a necessary aspect of this work. Importantly, she is not a parent, which presents both limits and opportunities to engage in research on parent activism.

Diana Grimaldos is an immigrant Latina, cisgender woman mothering two first-generation, biracial, school-aged children in Toronto. She is committed to decolonizing her parenting, and with it, the public system that problematizes her activism. As a scholar, community advocate and mother, her anti-oppressive and antiracist approaches to education are reflected in her activism in parent engagement. She intentionally enacts resistance to racial injustice in both formal and informal spaces as co-chair of the school advisory council of her children's school and through coalition-building and conducting community-based participatory research in Ontario.

We consider the political, social, and ethical implications of engaging in this research as non-Black, racialized people, given that 11 of the 13 participants shared their experiences as Black parents. We have reflected on this tension throughout our research, shared initial ideas with participants for feedback, continued to follow and learn from participants beyond the initial interview, and turned to scholarly literature and the analysis of antiracist colleagues to hold us accountable. We are cognizant of communities of color being over-researched and under-supported, community knowledge being devalued, and researchers using community knowledge for professional advancement with limited action to change the very conditions about which they theorize. We have committed to sharing our research in public venues and making it accessible to a wide variety of audiences, including parents. For example, we have developed a webinar series and parent engagement guide (Grimaldos & Lara-Villanueva, 2021) on antiracist approaches to parent engagement for educators, parents, and caregivers. We continue to reflect on how we might engage in active resistance to change the structures of schooling that make the activism of Black and racialized parents an unfair additional burden and necessity.

Data Collection

We used snowball sampling techniques to invite into dialogue participants who have resisted racial injustice in schools, districts, and/or provincially for at least five years in the GTHA. Participants are all part of informal and/or formal parent networks committed to racial and intersectional justice in schooling. Most of the participants have relationships with one or both of us through personal relationships, community activism, or parent and caregiver collectives. Of the 13 participants, three were referred to us by known participants. Table 2 demonstrates the breadth of parent activism among participants.

TABLE 2.
SPECTRUM OF PARTICIPANT ACTIVISM

- 7 of the 13 parents started or are members of parent coalitions or organizations
- 5 parents are/were actively involved with school councils
- 5 parents are/were actively involved at the school district level
- 4 parents have run for elected office as school board trustees, or plan to do so
- All 13 are informally participating in parent engagement groups via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram
- 6 parents learned about activism from their own parents/families
- Participant activism spanned classrooms, school advisory councils/school councils, district advisory councils and committees, the Ontario Ministry of Education, teachers' unions, and professional associations

In building on these relationships, we naturally moved from semistructured to unstructured interviews to disrupt the normative power dynamics between researchers and participants. We were also aware that we were being researched by participants as we were involved in the research process to assess our authenticity and commitment. We interviewed participants over Zoom to abide by COVID-19 protocols. The interviews lasted between 1.5–2 hours and became spaces where participants shared their experiences, emoted, questioned practices and structures, and celebrated their tremendous power as parents and caregivers. The interviews were recorded to develop transcripts and stored on a secure cloud-based service.

As part of a larger study, participants were asked about the incidents of racism that they and their children experienced that precipitated their activism, as well as their journeys towards activism and advocacy to lead change for racial justice. The former findings are shared and analyzed in our first publication (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022), with the latter findings shared and analyzed in this paper. In this study, we asked participants to share stories of their activism and advocacy, how their approaches have changed over time, and what they have learned. Transcripts were shared with participants, and they were invited to edit or add ideas. In some cases, participants shared thoughts that emerged after the interview on the phone or in written form.

Data Analysis

We engaged in co-reflection of the thoughts, hunches, questions, and reactions we noted individually during the live interviews and how we were reading and responding to the narratives of Black participants as non-Black researchers, in particular. We talked about the complexities of cross-racial solidarity that both center our shared experiences in a system of white supremacy and acknowledge the ways we are differentially racialized.

We triangulated interview responses with news reports and social media campaigns about parents fighting for racial justice in the GTHA, and ongoing conversations with participants. We used Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases of analytic procedures (organizing the data, generating categories, coding the data, testing the emergent understandings, searching for alternative explanations, writing the report) to co-create meaning from the data. Over a period of six months, we communicated two to three times per week about ideas that were emerging in these six phases, such as connections and contradictions between and across interviews.

Like Solórzano and Yosso (2002), we created composite counter-stories using this triangulated data, returning to the existing literature at multiple stages, and drawing on our own professional and personal experiences with parent and community activism. Below we outline three researcher-constructed composite counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), each representative of themes we identified from the collective voices of participants. We chose to employ composite characters to protect the anonymity of participants (Cook & Dixson, 2013), while attentive to how we might be speaking for, attempting to save, or minimizing the expertise and experiences of parents, especially Black parents. We share these composite counter-stories below and conclude with comments on the importance of reframing parent activism *as* parent engagement and antiracist leadership.

Findings

In response to guiding research questions, we present the findings as the following composite counternarratives:

1. The Power of Collectivizing: "When the *I* Became *We*" as a counter-story to the individual leader and individualized understandings of racial injustice,

2. Strategies for Powering Up: "We Don't Want to Be Fighting Like This in 10 Years" as a counter-narrative to hierarchical leadership models that aim to contain and reduce the power of others

3. Cross-Community and Cross-Racial Solidarities: "They're Standing in Front of Us, not Just Beside Us" as a counter-story to siloed and disconnected efforts towards justice

The Power of Collectivizing: "When the *I* Became *We*"

Collectivizing, moving from I to we, necessitates the sharing of stories, the sharing of power, and the sharing of wisdom. Collectivizing situates disconnected, individual experiences within a larger socio-political and historical analysis.

Charmaine's Story

I sat at the kitchen table poring over a news article about Black parents. They were fighting for their children's right to be seen, to be heard, to be believed. It was like I was reading a story about me and my son. I exhaled. Tears were rolling down my face. I picked up the phone and called Arlene.

"Did you see the article? It's not just James. It's not just us!"

"I've been telling you this," said Arlene. "This is the same nonsense that happened to me and my brothers when we were in school."

"I know, you've been telling me that. It's so hard because you don't hear about it in the news, and when your own son is treated like a criminal, you really feel at fault. It plays with your head."

"Look, Charmaine, systems are really afraid of a critical mass of people. They try to isolate you. They try to corner you so that they can then silence you and shut you down. So, we need to do the opposite."

"I can't believe we're still having these conversations. I can't believe we *still* have to fight for our children like this. Your mother had to fight for you. I have to fight for James. How much longer will we have to fight for our kids? It's exhausting. Do you see what it has done to James? His anxiety is getting worse."

"And what it's done to you and your health. Now you're working part-time just to deal with the school stuff. But, you know, as parents, we have so much power in the system. I wish more parents knew they have a voice and that their voice is power… And I know it's scary. Like the first few times you do it, it's like, 'Should I stand up to them? Are they going to hate me? Are they going to harm my kid?' … What about Amira? She doesn't speak English. How can she advocate confidently for her son?"

"You're right. You're so right," I said. "This can't keep happening to our children! It makes me so angry! You know, I feel like when we speak out to protect ourselves and our rights, we pay the price for it. We lose our jobs, or our kids face consequences at school. And nothing happens to the teacher or the principal! Nothing! They try to convince us that they're 'nice people' that don't deserve consequences. So, I'm not a nice person? Nobody cares if I'm nice or not. I just get fired. How's that fair? Where's the accountability here?"

"Exactly. It's not," said Arlene. "And it can't be an empty apology. So, if you are in a position of power and you did something racist, you either step down or you cut me a cheque because I'm going to sue you for it. I'm holding everyone accountable. I am reporting. And we have to educate and teach and empower others to do the same because that's the only way they will learn."

"That's it. We need to come together and share our stories so that we know we're not alone. And we have to be there for each other and show up for each other and each other's children. I'm going to reach out to the reporter to see if she can put me in touch with these parents."

"Good," said Arlene. "How can I help?"

Strategies for Powering Up: "We Don't Want to Be Fighting Like This in 10 Years"

In contrast to hierarchical organizations oriented to power hoarding and power over, *powering up* is a political and civic strategic approach that builds collective power by flattening hierarchies and connecting individual goals to larger visions for justice.

Jennifer's Story

That evening, I decided to attend a local parent meeting. It was filled with Black and racialized parents from schools across the district and maybe even other districts. Off to the right, one parent was translating a brochure to another parent in Urdu. In the corner, a parent volunteer was explaining the rights of parents in the special education process and offering to attend meetings with parents as a support and witness. "We'll be gathering in a few minutes, everyone," said one of the organizers. As I made my way to the front, there was a sign-up sheet for a variety of workshops, from deputations to how to launch a social media campaign.

"Welcome, welcome. What a turnout! We are especially glad to see so many new faces tonight. My name is Kendra, and this is Colleen and Jasmine. We are here because, like many of you, our children have experienced a lot of harm at school simply because of the color of their skin. This group has been supporting families for the past three years, families just like yours! We are committed to fighting racial injustice in schools and holding schools and educators accountable for their behaviors. We don't want to be fighting like this in 10 years and we definitely don't want our children to have to continue this fight. We have launched social media campaigns, we have met with school principals and the Minister of Education, and we have made deputations at school boards on behalf of Black and racialized parents. But we are also committed to listening to you, to hearing your stories, and to supporting you in whatever ways you need—whether that's providing a shoulder to cry on or helping you prepare for a meeting with the school principal, filing a human rights complaint, or whatever might support our fight for racial justice."

"Is this for real?" I asked the person sitting next to me.

"I know," he said. "It seems unreal at first. And it gets even better the more you get to know everyone. Kendra, Colleen, and Jasmine are amazing! They're not here for themselves. They're here for the work." I smiled and raised my hand.

"This all sounds wonderful, but I have to be honest. I don't really want to get involved politically. I just want to protect my child from harm at school and make sure she is happy and learning," I said.

"I didn't either at first," said Jasmine. "I had no intention of getting involved politically, but I'll tell you, I realized that it was a necessity. I had to understand the system, the policies, and the players to protect my child. I had to reach out to other parents in the same situation to ask them how they dealt with it. I needed these relationships to survive. I need these relationships to strategize my next steps. And trust me, that's all political."

"Black and racialized parents like me, from lower-income neighborhoods where school zones are not great, we survive because of our village," said Jasmine. "Aunties, grandmothers, neighbors, friends, all caring for each other's children. We care for all children; they are all ours and that is a political act." I smiled. I could feel the excitement and the nervousness well up in me. I felt the power of that village!

Cross-Community and Cross-Racial Solidarities: "They're Standing in Front of Us, not Just Beside Us."

Cross-community and cross-solidarity efforts invite organizers to see both the interconnections and power asymmetries between communities and to balance large-scale visions with local needs.

Shauna, Amira, and Isabela's Story

"I couldn't believe it. We had Muslim, White, Asian, Latinx, and all kinds of parents and caregivers standing up for us and with us. I never thought I would see the day," said Shauna.

"It really was beautiful, especially after all the conversations I've had about anti-Blackness in the Latinx community. I have to explain that whatever we do for us, others will benefit. And we will benefit from what they do," said Isabela.

"It's the same in South Asian communities. There's a lot of anti-Blackness," said Amira.

"Other racialized communities often gravitate to Whiteness and defend it and that is a disservice for not only Black kids, but for other racialized kids as well… My focus is Black kids, but what we know is that doing this work and changing the system will benefit Black children, but it will benefit all children in the long run," said Shauna.

"When we really think about it, like when we really understand the larger problem of white supremacy, we don't work for our community alone. We go where the need is greatest. We have to see it as a burden we all share," said Amira.

"Yeah, but we need to make sure that we acknowledge the differences within communities. There are so many differences and issues within each community, and we can't ignore that either. Social class is a huge one, and of course immigration and religion," said Isabela.

"It's true. And I think about some of the White folks that have come out to support us. They're standing in front of us, not just beside us. They're standing in front of us to shield us from some of the backlash or some of the daggers that are coming our way. That's true solidarity," said Shauna.

"We need to do that for each other. Communities need to be able to count on each other," said Isabela.

"We have to find ways to work together, across races. When that Islamophobic incident happened last week in Lexington, it spread like wildfire throughout networks of Muslim parents across the province. We need to organize so that we can learn from each other's struggles in different schools and districts and then think about how it applies to our local communities," said Amira.

"And back to the point about us experiencing racism differently," said Shauna. "It's also true that Black parents, and Black mothers in particular, have been leading the fight for racial justice for decades and our labour is often invisible. And we're often treated the worst and have the least protection in activism work. Black motherhood is inherently political. You know, the fact that we're able to keep and raise our own children and send them to school is an act of resistance, right? Because in slavery, we couldn't. We weren't afforded that. And so, I think as Black mothers, you have to be advocates for your kids. You cannot get through, particularly when you're raising boys, without some level of advocacy for your children."

"I'm so glad we can talk about this. We have to be able to talk about this. It's the only way we can move forward, together," said Isabela.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

This study positions the activism of Black and racialized parents fighting for racial justice as the ultimate form of parent engagement and an important example of educational leadership. In this section, we explore what educational leaders might learn from this activism about antiracist approaches to parent engagement and educational leadership.

Implications for Parent Engagement

As educational leaders continue to unpack how they frame parent engagement through hegemonic discourses of Whiteness, they might:

- Undo deficit-oriented institutional scripts (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017) and logics (Shah and Grimaldos, 2022) about Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and recognize and value local knowledge. This positions families and communities as experts of their own experiences *and* the education system (Ishimaru, 2014; Welton & Freelon, 2018).
- Challenge parent and caregiver entitlement in White, wealthy communities.
- Reconcile the financial/emotional/psychic burdens of Black and racialized parents as another aspect of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006).
- Disrupt racist notions of parent and family engagement that continue to position parental activism and advocacy as dangerous acts that need to be quelled to protect the same racist system that has harmed historically oppressed populations. Reframe fighting to protect your child as the ultimate form of parent engagement.
- Acknowledge that Black and racialized families *are* heavily engaged in their children's schooling (Ishimaru, 2020), often outside of formal schooling and often unacknowledged and silenced because they challenge racism in schools. These forms of engagement are born of necessity to protect children and support their learning, drawing on a tremendous breadth of intergenerational organizing strategies.
- Support the development of broader notions of parent engagement that account for multiple caregivers (family members, neighbors, and friends), caregiving structures (communal approaches to childrearing), and networks (across communities of identity and geography) that many Black, racialized, low-income, and immigrant families rely on for survival and wellness.
- Recognize their own role in creating the conditions for parents, caregivers, and families from various communities to come together, share individual and intergenerational experiences, heal, connect, and build networks, which often includes stepping back and allowing parents the space to engage in their own collective mobilization.
- Meet parents where they are (e.g., needs, interests, spaces), support them in navigating the school system and learning about their rights, and ensure the responsibility to families and communities is built into the school/district culture and every structure of schooling (Ishimaru, 2020).
- Co-create a transformative vision of schooling in which families, especially families from historically oppressed communities, inform every aspect of decision-making (Ishimaru, 2020; Shah et al, 2022b).
- Commit to a presence in the public sphere (e.g., writing, media) that works alongside parent and community activists to shift public discourse (Welton & Freelon, 2018) and raise collective critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Implications for Antiracist Educational Leadership

What might antiracist leadership learn from the organizing of Black and racialized parents and community activism?

- Broader notions of *who* can be a leader and *what* constitutes leadership (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018) and the importance of inviting parents and community members to lead alongside "formal" educational leadership.
- Understandings of leadership as a flattened network of reciprocal relationships and interchangeable roles, influenced by policy, discourse, and demographic realities.

- Ways to foster communities of care across identities (Horsford et al., 2019) and geographies through strong relationships and commitments to justice.
- The limits of their abilities to engage in antiracist leadership within colonial, racist institutions (Ishimaru, 2013) that often punish these efforts (Shah et al., 2022a) and the necessity of collaborations between leaders in schools, families, and communities to further educational equity (Ishimaru, 2020; Shah et al., 2022a).
- Their responsibility as paid leaders with often more stable work and institutional protection to share the burden by taking personal and professional risks for the collective goal of racial justice.
- The importance of engaging in organizing efforts with parents, caregivers, and communities to strengthen their socio-political consciousness and connect efforts between schools and communities.

Educational leaders have much to learn about parent engagement and educational leadership from the activism of Black, Indigenous, and racialized parent activists challenging the very systems that were designed to exclude them. We are grateful to the tremendous expertise, leadership, and labor of parent and community activists and organizers who take tremendous risks in their personal and professional lives to fight for more humane worlds and for schools that all children deserve.

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Endnotes

[1] We use the term racialized to speak to people who are non-Indigenous, non-Black, and non-White. In the context of this study, we are speaking to South Asian and Latinx parents and communities.

[2] Toronto originates from T'karonto, a Mohawk word that means the place in the water where the trees are standing.

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