

# **The Double Jeopardy of Equity Director Leadership:**

*Race, Gender & Oppression at Work*

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<https://leadforequity.com/>

**Black, Indigenous, Latina, Asian American & Pacific Islander women have always led justice work . . . .**

***Survivance:***

“an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories . . . renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.” -Gerald Vizenor

***Fugitive pedagogy:***

“African Americans’ acts that explicitly challenged their experiences of domination in American schools.” -Jarvis Givens



“Aye-Aye-Esh Girl” painted by Toma Villa and Roger Fernandes 2018



**Gaman**



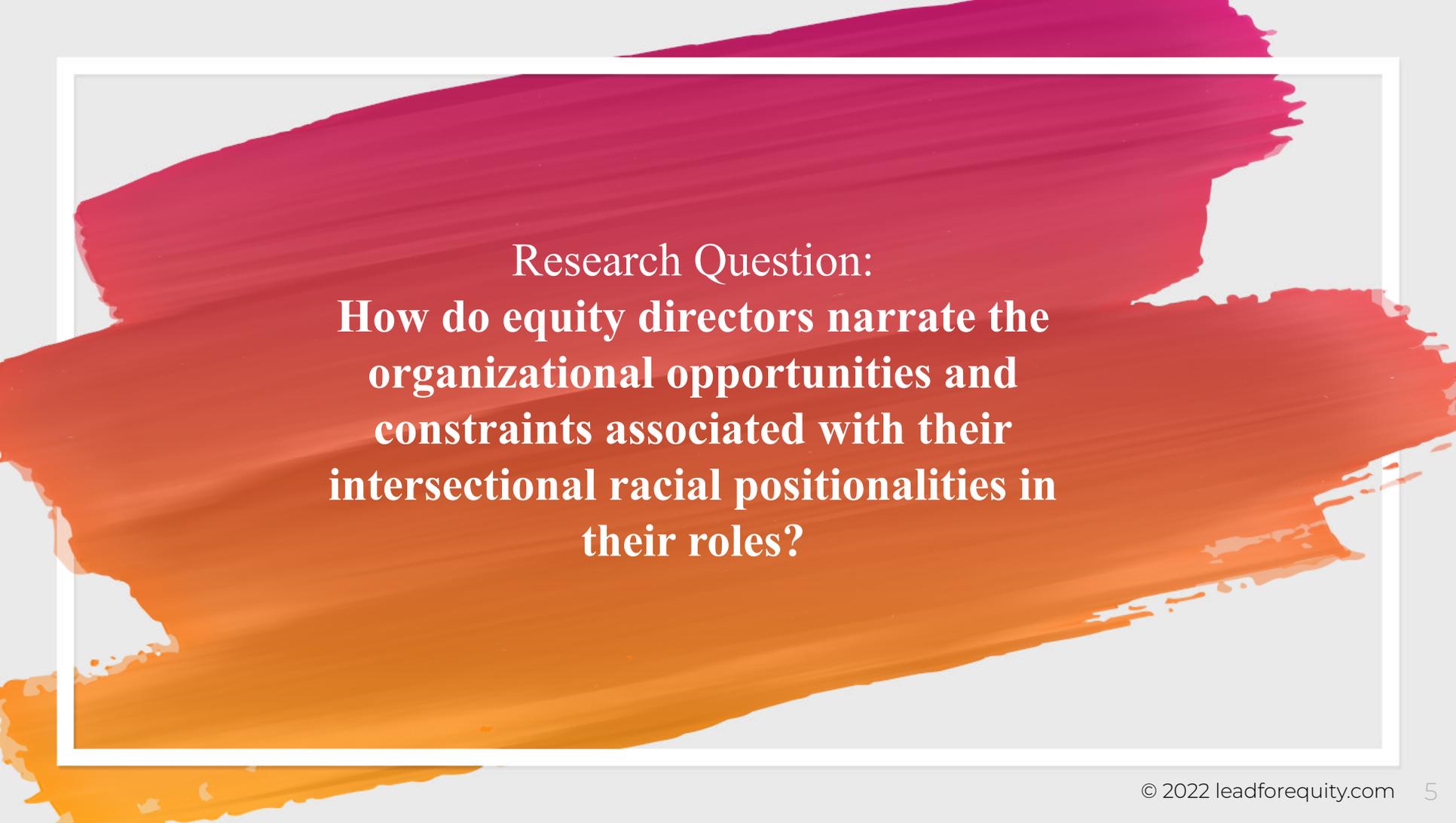
# AIMS

- Understand our findings about **intersectionally race-gendered dynamics** experienced by many equity directors
- Reflect on these dynamics **in your own context**
- Move beyond individualistic coping/support approaches to tend to the **organizational conditions** within which equity leadership unfolds



# Educational Institutions as Paradoxes

- Schools built on stolen lands through stolen labor;  
Yet aspire to equitably educate all students.
- Equity directors are charged with disrupting systems;  
Yet are employed & evaluated by those systems.



**Research Question:  
How do equity directors narrate the  
organizational opportunities and  
constraints associated with their  
intersectional racial positionalities in  
their roles?**



## Research Context

- Research literature: Predominant focus on ***individualistic leadership*** characteristics, histories, commitments
- Phase 1 study of equity directors; 13 equity director interviews (5 Black women; 3 other WOC)
- Theories: Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) + racialized organizations (Ray, 2019)
  - Racism & sexism interlock & play out in district and school organizations

## Findings:

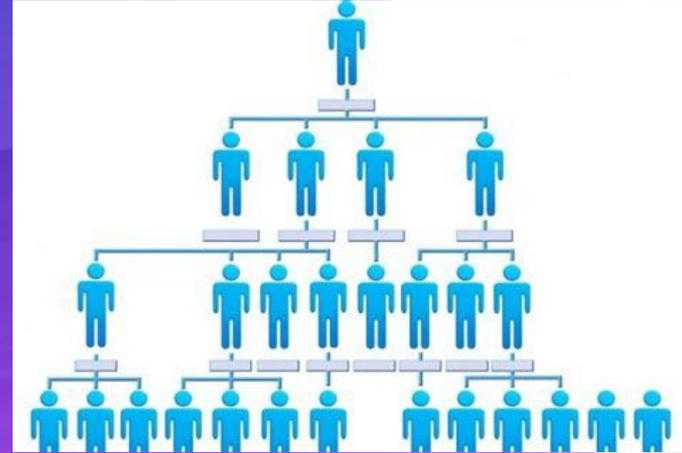
Differential  
Organizational  
Returns, Multiple  
Paradoxes

1. Black & other WOC equity directors experienced “organizational double jeopardy,” which exacted a high **toll** of racial battle fatigue.
2. Racial-gendered experiential knowledge of Black & other WOC equity directors was a **resource** for strategic change-making

## 1a. Differential Organizational Returns: Structure

Across different equity director role configurations. women of color, **esp. Black women**, tended to have:

- higher formal educational credentials;
- smaller staffs;
- smaller budgets;
- less access to the superintendent & executive decision-making ...than their male or white woman counterparts.



## 1b. “Double Jeopardy” → Racial Battle Fatigue

“With the men who are white . . . [they] would be like, ‘oh they're really passionate. . . what a powerful leader’

And then I would [say] the same thing, it would be like, ‘So you really need to tone it down. . .you're too harsh, you're offending the principals, I have had principals complain about you.’ A white female principal complained to my supervisor because I was asking things like, ‘Well you’re [a] 70% Latino community - when is the last time you sent something home in Spanish?’ You know, anything of that nature. I was perceived just like in this negative tone.

But my counterparts? Especially white males...are perceived as they're passionate, they're just trying to get down to the core problem here.”



**Reflecting  
on your  
own  
context**

Have you noticed or experienced  
ORGANIZATIONAL DOUBLE  
JEOPARDY in your district?

If so, how does it show up?

## 2. Race-Gendered Knowledge for Strategic Moves

“Okay, so I used to be five people down from the superintendent. **Which is a problem, right, if you’re really talking about equity.** So now, I am two people down from the superintendent. . . and it’s taken five years. It’s taken five years to do that.

[I also went from 2 staff to 11]. **I’m all about strategic moves.**

We have this grant that was funded under someone else. I said, “How about give me those positions under the grant. Let me kind of restructure them and let’s see what happens.” So they gave me the positions. That was the last year.

So we structured the position for it to have some accountability and some data tracking and we created a system for reporting. And so, we were able to show in that final year that they had made contact with over 220 more unduplicated students compared to what they had years before. And I said, “So if I make these part time positions and take them off as independent contractors, would you fund them from the general fund for the district?” And they said, “Yeah.”

## Conclusions/Implications

- District central offices (like schools) are NOT neutral spaces. Explicit recognition of **racialized & gendered oppression** in educational systems may begin to help address them.
- Organizational double jeopardy takes a significant emotional, psychological and even physical **toll** on Black and other women of color in equity roles - districts must address to sustain leaders.
- These equity directors also have race-gendered **knowledge** they deploy strategically to reshape the organization (“spidey sense” of what will happen re power, how to navigate)
- Less focus on individuals (e.g., self-care, work-life balance) and more attention to shifting **organizational conditions**.

# Implications for Your Leadership

What's one way YOU might apply what you've learned to your practice, given your own organizational context & your race-gender positionality?

## Looking down the road...

Phase 2: Longitudinal work with 3 districts to examine how equity leadership spreads across a system & informs change

[www.leadforequity.com](http://www.leadforequity.com)

Thank you!



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