The Double Jeopardy of Equity Director Leadership:

Race, Gender & Oppression at Work

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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

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

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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.
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.
“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

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Thank you!

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