Research Paper　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Open Access**

Black Girl Leadership in High School: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT: The topic of this systematic review was Black girl leadership in high school. The systematic review was guided by two research questions: (1) How can Black girl leadership in high school be improved? (2) How does systemic racism explain Black girls' leadership difficulties in high school? Four themes emerged from the systematic review: Academic self-concept / warm demanding: Teachers' pedagogical approaches, which are not rooted in the theory and practice of warm demanding, do not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential. Tracking: The practice of class tracking by ability does not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential. Teacher identity: The scarcity of Black female teacher role models (a) presents a signal Black female high school students that their own leadership aspirations might be misplaced and (b) deprives them of the leadership guidance that only a role model could provide. Multisystemic approaches: There are few multisystemic approaches in place that could strengthen Black female high school students' ability to develop and exercise leadership. Because of the extent of the deficits faced by Black female high school students, multisystemic approaches seem to be the most effective potential solutions, but they are not widely utilized.

Keywords: black girls, leadership, tracking, multisystemic approach, warm demanding

I.　　INTRODUCTION

African-Americans(Black) girls and women represent 6.5% of the population of the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2023). However, African-Americans(Black) women are disproportionately represented in various leadership contexts. No African-American (Black) woman has ever been President of the United States, and, as of 2023, only 57 African-American(Black) women have ever served in Congress (covering a time period in which over 15,000 people have served in Congress) (Schaeffer, 2023). Two of the 500 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 corporations are African-American women (Carter, 2022). The average income of an African-American woman is $611 a week, in comparison to $680 for African-American men, $897 for white men, and $1,080 for Asian men (World Atlas, 2023). For nearly 40 years, Black girls have been among the lowest performing subgroups in mathematics and reading standardized test achievement (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2023).

From the 19th century onwards, theories rooted in scientific racism have attempted to situate Black people as being at or near the bottom of a hierarchy of qualities including intelligence and leadership capability (Winston, 2020). However, there is no meaningful interracial variation in intelligence or any of the qualities that contribute to leadership validated by these claims (Serpico, 2021). However, the consensus among some social scientists is that the position of African-Americans at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy in the United States is due to the centuries-long history and ongoing practice of systemic racism (Chatters et al., 2022). There is extensive documentation that African-Americans are educationally underserved (McCrea et al., 2019), disproportionately targeted by the justice system (Hagle et al., 2021), excluded from socioeconomic opportunities in both the private and public spheres (Lang &Spitzer, 2020), and even medically underserved (Knoebel et al., 2021). This evidence suggests that, in effect, the United States is still carrying out what has been described as a war (Manchanda &Rossdale, 2021, p. 475) on its African-American population, with the ultimate goal being to freeze African-Americans into a permanent underclass for the socioeconomic and political elevation of the white people whom America was built to serve (Manchanda &Rossdale, 2021).

High school appears to be a watershed moment in leadership for Black girls, a time during which many of them are explicitly or implicitly dissuaded from attempting to act on their leadership potential in terms of academic performance, career planning, or social involvement (McClellan, 2020). Scholars have typically studied this lifecycle of Black girls from narrow perspectives—for example, from the perspectives of academic self-concept (Collins et al., 2020), teacher-student relations (Butler-Barnes et al., 2022), and vocational planning (Gibson & Decker, 2019). The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize what is known about improving Black girl leadership in high school. The objective is to demonstrate that the alienation of Black girls from leadership potential and development is itself systemic and therefore harder to overcome through anything less than a radical approach. Black girls do not experience isolated obstacles in a random manner; rather, in terms of leadership, they experience systemic obstacles that combine to make it almost impossible for them to reach or exercise leadership potential.

There are systematic reviews of the experiences of Black girls in college and in vocations that succeed in exploring and illuminating the thorough nature of obstacles faced by these women. However, there is a gap in the literature that supports the context of leadership during the high school years. While scholars (Butler-Barnes et al., 2022; Collins et al., 2020; Gibson &Decker, 2019; McClellan, 2020) have documented individual strands of difficulties faced by Black girls in high school, there is no synthesis of how to improve Black girl leadership in high school.

The objective of this systematic review is not to generate a theory that applies broadly to Black girl leadership in high school. There is already such a theory, that of systemic racism. The theory of systemic racism proposes that the adverse experiences and outcomes of African-Americans in the United States are largely the products of design, with all levels of power in American society collaborating to ensure that African-American people are criminalized, underserved, pathologized, and given feedback to cement their position at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy (Chatters et al., 2022). The theory of systemic racism explains why African-American are isolated from their own leadership potential and not allowed to exercise it in private and public contexts (Chatters et al., 2022); the objective of this systematic review is to examine how, in various complementary ways, the institution of high school organizes these obstacles.

II.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following two research questions guided the systematic review.

RQ1: How can Black girl leadership in high school be improved?

RQ2: How does systemic racism explain Black girls' leadership difficulties in high school?

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	- Focuses on the experiences of Black female students in American high schools [except insofar as used to support a theory or a larger concept related to the systematic review]. - Includes some discussion of racism / systemic racism. - Specifically addressed to some aspect of leadership, whether academic, social, or personal.
Exclusion Criteria	- Older than 2000. - Not peer-reviewed. - Not in English.

Extracted Studies

Methodology and Methods

The following academic databases were consulted for the systematic review: Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. Using these search parameters, 211 abstracts that appeared relevant were identified. After reading these abstracts, 189 were discarded as likely to be irrelevant, leaving 22 articlesfor inclusion in the systematic review. The 22 articles are: Austin, 2010; Berry, 2005;

Cosier, 2019; Davis et al., 2011; Griffin &Tackie, 2017; Hambacher et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2017; Ibourk et al., 2022; Klopfenstein, 2005; Krylov, 2021I; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021;

Lofton Jr, 2019; Maylor, 2009; McClelland, 2020; Mccray et al., 2002; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006; Rojas &Liou, 2017; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022. Figure 1 below presents the PRISMA guidelines as applied to article selection for the systematic review.
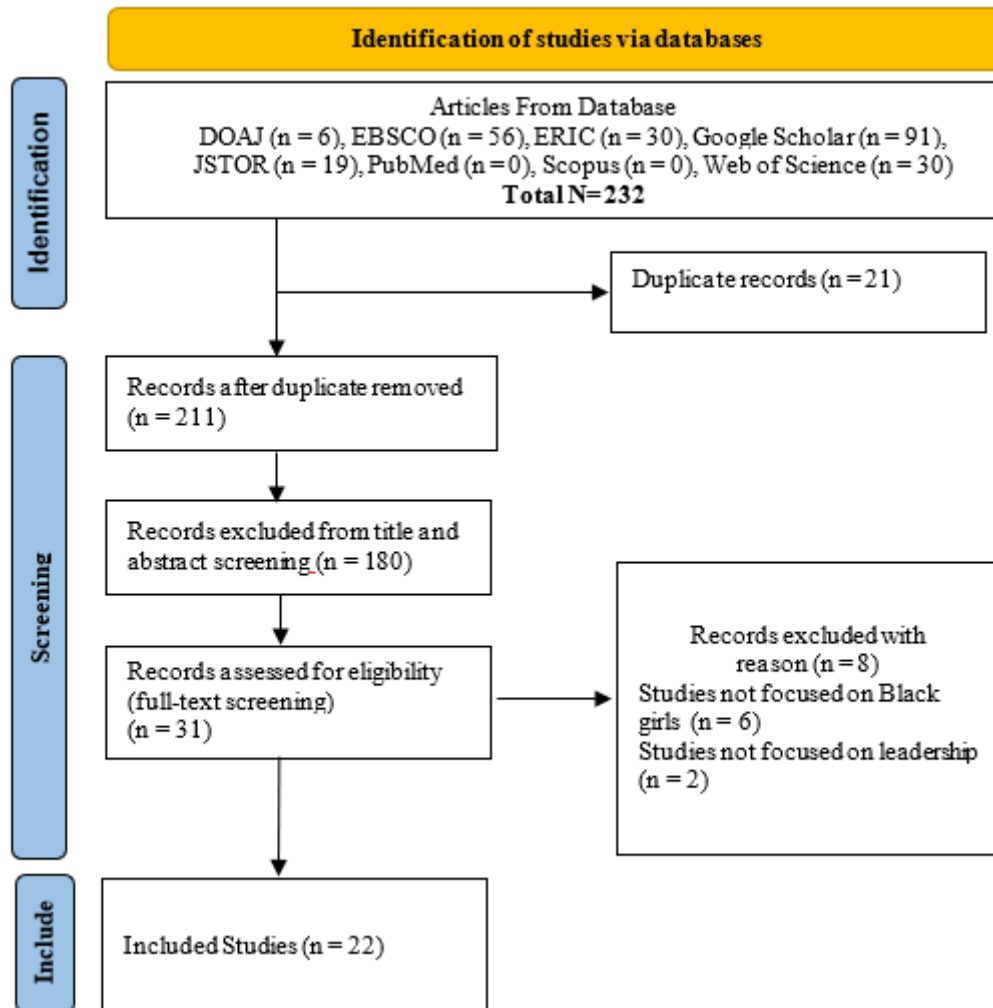

Figure 1. PRISMA guideline application.

Data / Themes Extracted

The 22 articles identified for inclusion in the systematic review were examined for themes. The purpose of theme extraction was to look for factors that could explain Black girl leadership in high schools. Four such factors were extracted from the 22 studies in the systematic review:

Academic self-concept / warm demanding: Teachers' pedagogical approaches, which are not rooted in the theory and practice of warm demanding, do not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential.

Tracking: The practice of class tracking by ability does not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential.

Teacher identity: The scarcity of Black female teacher role models (a) presents a signal Black female high school students that their own leadership aspirations might be misplaced and (b) deprives them of the leadership guidance that only a role model could provide.

Multisystemic approaches: There are few multisystemic approaches in place that could strengthen Black female high school students' ability to develop and exercise leadership. Taking a Multisystemic approach to the

deficits faced by Black female high school students, seem to be the most effective potential solutions, although,   it is not a widely utilized approach.

Appraisal of Study Quality

The purpose of this section of the systematic review is to describe study quality. Twenty-two studies were extracted using the parameters of the systematic review. Each study was ranked for quality on the basis of information from Table 2 below. Table 2 describes what are known as the levels of evidence.

Table 2

Levels of Evidence (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2011, p. 10)

Level	Description
I	Evidence from a systematic review of all relevant randomized controlled trials (RCTs), or evidence-based clinical practice guidelines based on systematic reviews of RCTs.
II	Evidence obtained from at least one well-designed RCT.
III	Evidence obtained from well-designed controlled trials without randomization, quasi-experimental.
IV	Evidence from well-designed case-control and cohort studies.
V	Evidence from systematic reviews of descriptive and qualitative studies.
VI	Evidence from a single descriptive or qualitative study.
VII	Evidence from the opinion of authorities and/or reports of expert committees.

Of the 22 studies (Austin, 2010; Berry, 2005; Cosier, 2019; Davis et al., 2011; Griffin &Tackie, 2017; Hambacher et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2017; Ibourk et al., 2022; Klopfenstein, 2005; Krylov, 2021I; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Maylor, 2009; McClelland, 2020; Mccray et al., 2002; Morales-Chicas&Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006; Rojas &Liou, 2017; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022) in the systematic, each is at Level VI except for that ofKrylov, which is at Level VII.

Data from the Systematic Review

The findings of the systematic review have been presented and synthesized below. This is the data from the systematic review. The presentation is based on the themes of (a) academic self-concept / warm demanding, (b) tracking, (c) teacher identity, and (d) multisystemic approaches.

Academic Self-Concept / Warm Demanding

Scholarly research (Scammacca et al., 2020) demonstrates that, in the earliest years of life, children demonstrate almost identical levels of mathematics and reading achievement by race. There are two reasons for this empirically observable pattern. First, contrary to theories advanced by scientific racism, there are no detectable racial variations in intelligence (Serpico, 2021). Second, young children are not highly influenced by academic self-concept (Sewasew&Schroeders, 2019), which is a relatively advanced means of looking at oneself through conditions of performance.

The Pygmalion Effect is the relationship between what is expected of someone and what they are able to perform (Chang, 2011). This effect, which has been tested and confirmed since the late 1960s, applied to students in the sense that students either rise up or sink down to the expectations placed on them by their teachers (Chang, 2011). For example, students who receive tacit or overt signals from their teachers that they are incapable will become increasingly incapable. On the other hand, students who receive tacit or overt signals from their teachers that they are capable students will become increasingly capable. This finding has been experimentally demonstrated in experiments in which people perform better on academic assessments when they receive confidence and support from their teachers beforehand (Chang, 2011). However, there are also real-world demonstrations of the Pygmalion Effect. One such demonstration came in Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, in which the math teacher Jaime Escalante elicited high levels of performance from numerous students on the Advanced Placement (AP) calculus test (Stein, 2020). Escalante's experience, which was documented in a book as well as a Hollywood movie (*Stand and Deliver*) was based on two intertwined concepts: Warmth and demanding. In terms of warmth, Escalante genuinely

cared for his students, many of whom came from a Hispanic background, as he himself did (Stein, 2020). In terms of demanding, Escalante regularly told his students that he was holding them to a high standard of performance (Stein, 2020).

The relationship of warmth and demanding can be applied to Black girls' experiences in high school in the following way. First, it is true that many (non-African-American teachers) who are aware of, and eager to work against, systemic racism are approaching Black female students with warmth (Rojas &Liou, 2017). However, not all warmth has the same effect on students Rojas and Lou have written that students who are from marginalized groups tend to interpret "sympathy as a cue for low ability and lowered expectations for learning" (Rojas &Liou, 2017, p. 28). Therefore, when teachers, principals, and others ostensibly attempt to serve the needs of Black female high school students by implicitly or explicitly lowering standards for them, the reaction of this population is negative (Rojas &Liou, 2017). Exempting someone from a test, not rigorously checking their homework, or otherwise relaxing performance standards ironically sends much the same message that overt racial abuse once did, which is that a student is not as good as other students (Rojas &Liou, 2017).

The warm demanding theory counsels teachers that warmth is not sufficient on its own, (Cosier, 2019; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022). For example, in Escalante's case, the teacher was aware that students had difficult home lives that made it difficult for them to study, so one of the expressions of his warmth was to approach their families and work with them in order to create partnership that would free up study time (Stein, 2020). The subsequent research confirms that warmth and demanding has to intersect (Cosier, 2019; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022). Demanding a great deal from students without trying to respect and work with limitations is a means of alienating these students (Cosier, 2019; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022). Similarly, conveying warmth and sympathy by lowering standards is a means of signaling to these students that they cannot perform, and, accordingly, these students maintain a low academic self-concept (Cosier, 2019;Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022).

The best levels of academic self-concept for Black girls in high school appear (McClelland, 2020) to arise from contexts in which these students are (a) held to high standards (often, by teachers of their own racial background, who provide influential role models); and (b) shown warmth that is not generic or apologetic, but that aligns with the teachers' high expectations. Although older-style racism is still present in the relations between non-African American teachers and AfricanAmerican students (Gibson & Decker, 2019), the current expression of racism is more insidious, because it is often based in the claim that African-American or black culture is simply different in ways that exempt it from certain standards (Ibourk et al., 2022). For example, some mathematics standards have been rewritten with the accommodation that 'black culture'—itself a racist construct, as there has never been a homogenous black culture or even a single black cultural tradition (Ibourk et al., 2022)—does not prioritize correct answers, and so mathematics assessments need not award points for correct answers (Krylov, 2021). Leaving aside the spurious and arguably racist basis for such arguments (Ibourk et al., 2022), they are uniformly received by marginalized students, including Black female students, as signals that, in the paraphrased words of one such student in a qualitative study, 'we are not expected to be smart' (Davis et al., 2011, p. 4).

To succeed as leaders, Black female students in high school have to begin with a strong academic self-concept, as the future basis of their leadership depends on graduating from high school and, in many cases, obtaining further education (McClelland. 2020). There are several ways in which the high school experiences of these women limit their academic self-concepts. First, Black female students in high school are still often the victims of old-style racism from white teachers who ignore or neglect them, discipline them unnecessarily, and otherwise convey a lack of care that facilitates the academic disengagement of Black female students (Gibson & Decker, 2019). Second, there is a newer trend (Ibourk et al., 2022;Krylov, 2021; McClelland, 2020; Rojas &Liou, 2017) of supporting Black female students by relaxing the academic standards that apply for them—a dubious approach that, according to Ibourk et al., (a) itself rests on profoundly racist assumptions that a hypothetical, homogenous 'black culture' is not compatible with scientific rigor; and (b) signals to Black female students that they are not allowed or expected to be smart. Third, very few teachers understand and can apply the paradigm of warm demanding (Cosier, 2019; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022), which, as numerous studies (Griffin &Tackie, 2017; Hambacher et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009) have demonstrated, is the pedagogical style to which Black female students respond best, especially when it is administered by African-American teachers.

Tracking

Academic tracking is a distinct mechanism that blocks the leadership potential of Black female students in high school. In the previous subsection, the leadership potential of Black female students in high school was considered in terms of how they are treated by teachers. However, the issue of tracking does not involve the personal relations between students and teachers. Rather, it is based on how schools themselves structure classes and the high school experience in a manner that, even if unintended, decreases the likelihood that Black

female students will develop their leadership skills and potential (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006).

Tracking is a means of routing certain students into certain classes (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006). One of the problems with tracking is that students themselves, being familiar with it, are once again subject to the Pygmalion Effect. In particular, studies have demonstrated that minority students are aware that being in certain classes represents the school's judgment that they are not intelligent (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006). The issue of whether tracking is warranted or not is an open question; there is as yet no consensus in the literature on whether students should be tracked or not. However, approached purely from the perspective of leadership, when Black female and other minority students notice that they are in classes designed—in their own evaluation—for less intelligent students, a common response is academic and emotional disengagement (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006).

Tracking represents a two-edged problem for which there is not yet a solution. If students are tracked, then there is the possibility that the students who are not in more advanced classes will become more disengaged. If students are not tracked, then there is the possibility that students will be underserved, as the opportunity to tailor education to students' differing levels is limited (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006). It is also possible that Black female students will respond to no-tracking environments with disengagement, as they will interpret the absence of tracking as a tacit admission that they are other minority students are not expected to be smart (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006).

Teacher Identity and Student Leadership

One challenge faced by Black female high school students is the scarcity of teachers who share their backgrounds (Berry, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2005; Maylor, 2009; Mccray et al., 2002). The fact that a disproportionate number of high school teachers are not African-American (and, in particular, not Black girls) represents a powerful signal to Black female students (Berry, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2005; Maylor, 2009; Mccray et al., 2002). Teachers are a status group, and, as such, the scarcity of Black female teachers signals that Black girls are missing from what the sociologists Max Weber described as an honor group. As Gane(2005) summarized Weber's view,

> class is a form of economic stratification (or positioning within the market), whereas status refers instead to social stratification (or 'the distribution of honor'). The key distinction here is between classes, which are economic rather than social forms, on one hand, and status groups (Stände), which are social forms of community on the other. (Gane, 2005, p. 217).

Observing teachers who do not look like them, and who do not come from their backgrounds, has led Black female students in high school to feel that they themselves cannot be in positions of leadership (Berry, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2005; Maylor, 2009; Mccrayet al., 2002). This problem is compounded by the fact that Black female students already have fewer opportunities for identifying and benefiting from role models elsewhere, whether at home or in the popular culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McClellan, 2020). The problem of Black female teacher underrepresentation is itself closely related to the very problems faced by Black female students, because, in both cases, excluding social factors are at work (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McClellan, 2020). Brown-Liburd & Joe (2020, p. 87) have pointed out that educational institutions, ranging from secondary institutions to PhD-granting institutions, are much less likely to hire underrepresented minorities with appropriate credentials. Therefore, Black female teachers have a much more difficult time reaching leadership positions as teachers, modeling the very difficulty that their Black female students are facing in high school and will continue to face afterwards (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McClellan, 2020).

The Absence of Multisystemic Approaches

The difficulties faced by Black female students in developing their leadership skills in high school are systemic. Individual factors contribute to the problem, but, ultimately, the problem has many roots and therefore requires what has been described as a multisystemic effort to resolve. One such effort was described as follows:

After assessing the needs and strengths of the school, the team determined that multisystemic programs (i.e., individual, small group, and school-wide) were required to meet the needs of all students. Just Love comprises three programs: (a) Just Mentor (a school-based mentoring program), (b) Just Connect (a classroom adoption program), and (c) Just Rewards (a school-wide student incentives and enrichment program). (Henry et al., 2017, p. 167).

The program discussed by Henry et al. mobilized an entire school, large numbers of parents, and a community organization (a church) that was prominent in the local community in a multilevel, multisystemic approach to

resolve the problems faced by largely African-American children at this school. In the absence of such concerted, multisystemic approaches, it is unlikely that Black female high school students' leadership aspiration and development can be supported. Another multisystemic approach is the so-called SPARCK model, which is a coaching framework that has been applied to Black female high school students. The components of SPARCK are as follows: "Story (or how the student defines herself), Purpose (or the student's role in the world), Aspirations (or dreams and goals), Reflection (or how the student is doing regarding reaching these dreams and goals), Connection (or support systems), and Kick-start (or the student's action plan)" (Harris et al. 2020, p. 42). SPARCK was part of a multisystemic approach applied to leadership development among Black girl high school students (Harris et al., 2020). The coaching framework known as SPARCK was applied by a combination of teachers, administrators, parents, and outside consultants as a means of addressing various leadership potentials and capacities latent in Black girl high school students. The end result of this multisystemic approach was that Black girl high school students in the case study developed and exercised many leadership behaviors, in domains ranging from academics to social commitment and volunteerism. Although the programs described by Henry et al. (2017) and Harris et al. (2020) were different from each other in content, characteristics, and approaches, both programs were designed to be implemented by key figures in various aspects of Black girl high school students. The premise of both of these programs was multisystemic, that is, based on the premise that developing leadership among Black girl high school students required the implementation of radical changes undertaken by multiple stakeholders.

III. CONCLUSION

Findings

    The systematic review was based on two research questions: (1) How can Black girl leadership in high school be improved? (2) How does systemic racism explain Black girls' leadership difficulties in high school? In terms of RQ1, the following themes emerged: (a) Academic self-concept / warm demanding, (b) tracking, (c) teacher identity, and (d) multisystemic approaches. The findings are presented in the results chart in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Results Chart

Theme	Results
Warm demanding	Teachers' pedagogical approaches, which are not rooted in the theory and practice of warm demanding, do not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential (Cosier, 2019; Davis et al., 2011; Griffin &Tackie, 2017; Hambacher et al., 2016; Ibourk et al., 2022; Krylov, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McClelland, 2020; Rojas &Liou, 2017; Safir, 2019; Vomund& Miller, 2022).A particular problem is that, in attempting to counteract systemic racism, standards are relaxed for Black female high school students, an approach that does not improve self-concepts or strengthen leadership potential.
Tracking	The practice of class tracking by ability does not promote strong academic self-concepts in Black female high school students, which, in turn, limits their leadership development and potential (Austin, 2010; Legette & Kurtz-Costes, 2021; Lofton Jr, 2019; Morales-Chicas& Graham, 2021; Riegle-Crumb, 2006). Black female high school students who perceive themselves as being in lower ability levels will feel demotivated, disengaged, and discouraged, once again degrading their ability to develop and exercise leadership.
Teacher identity	The scarcity of Black female teacher role models (a) presents a signal Black female high school students that their own leadership aspirations might be misplaced and (b) deprives them of the leadership guidance that only a role model could provide (Berry, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2005; Maylor, 2009; Mccrayet al., 2002). Black female high school students therefore need to encounter more Black female high school teachers as part of their success journeys.
Multisystemic approaches	There are few multisystemic approaches in place that could strengthen Black female high school students' ability to develop and exercise leadership (Harris et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2017). Because of the extent of the deficits faced by Black female high school students, multisystemic approaches seem to be the most effective potential solutions, but they are not widely utilized. Only two studies were found on this potential solution. Nonetheless, both of these studies demonstrated that Black female high school students were able to develop and

exercise numerous components of their leadership potential when exposed to multisystemic approaches.

IV.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Although there were only two studies (Harris et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2017) on multisystemic approaches to leadership development among Black female high school students, both studies showed promise. Given that leadership deficits and obstacles confronting Black female high school students are likely to be due to multiple, interacting factors, multisystemic approaches would appear to have the most promise in addressing these deficits and obstacles. However, for multisystemic approaches to leadership development among Black female high school students to be more widely adopted, more research on such approaches is necessary. The accumulation of such research could illuminate best practices that could be applied to reduce some of the leadership deficits and obstacles confronting Black female high school students.

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