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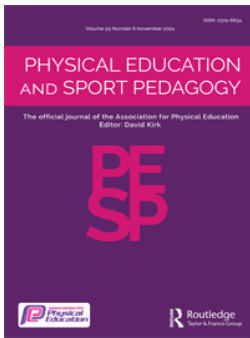
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Basketball shorts, plantation food, and ponytail weaves: Black teachers' experiences of becoming and being a Physical Education teacher

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ABSTRACT

Background: Despite increases in the ethnic diversity of the student population within English schools, there remains a distinct lack of Black and minority ethnic representation within the teaching profession. Research has explored the reasons behind this lacuna within education more broadly, highlighting discrimination, verbal abuse, lack of management support, and racial inequalities in pay and promotional opportunities contributing to Black and minority ethnic teachers feeling undervalued. However, within Physical Education (PE), a subject area where this gap is more pronounced, there has been less attention paid to the experiences of Black and minority ethnic teachers.

Purpose: This paper explores Black teachers' lived experiences of becoming and being a PE teacher. Two tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are drawn upon – the permanence of racism and counter-storytelling. These offer an interrogative lens to explore White norms and dominant discourses that render the education system inequitable.

Method: Semi-structured interviews with six self-identified Black PE teachers were used to generate data. Data were initially analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Then, in adopting the position of 'storyteller', these data were woven together and the themes reflected in a counterstory featuring three composite, fictional and data driven characters.

Discussion: The counterstory, featuring Shanice, Leon and Clive is offered, and demonstrates the permanence of racism through the multiplicity of overt and insidious ways it pervades all facets of these characters' lives. After offering the story we discuss three key themes embedded within it: lack of representation; stereotyping; and acts of resistance.

Conclusion: In drawing the paper to a close we offer a number of concluding remarks about Shanice and Leon's experiences. In so doing, we highlight some strategies that can be initiated within schools and higher education that might help to increase the representation of Black educators at all levels of the profession, promote more equitable practice, and better support Black teachers to fulfil their teaching aspirations. The paper ends by recognising the usefulness of counter-storytelling before we contemplate how, as an authorship team, we can extend this research.

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Introduction

One of my earliest memories of Physical Education was running around an old sports hall with pale brown walls, thick wooden floors, and loose floorboards that wobbled under my feet. I remember the smell of sweaty trainers and bodies, and the thundering noise of little feet running freely. I loved the feeling that came from sprinting round and round, legs and arms pumping, like I could propel into another stratosphere. Our PE teacher, a tall, slim woman, loved running. One day, she organised an assembly, presenting a clip of herself running the London marathon, the audience ‘oohing’ and ‘aahing’ as she briefly appeared on the screen. This teacher, that short marathon clip, influenced my love for running and so began my positive relationship with physical activity.

At secondary school lunch breaks were a time for basketball. I loved lying on the grass bank, sun on my face, waiting for others to arrive. The black, tarmacked court, without markings, and the huge, netless hoops didn’t matter to me. I loved this hour of constant running up and down, being part of a team. One lunchtime a teacher called me over, asking me to trial for the school team, and before long I was also playing for the city team, Sheffield Sharks. My relationship with basketball provided me with the confidence to embrace other sports in PE, and positively influenced my time in school.

These experiences were instrumental in deciding to pursue a career in teaching PE. Yet, I have become increasingly aware that I rarely see a PE teacher who looks like me. I notice this daily in my current role in schools – there are many young people who look like me, but they are not represented at the front of the classroom. Being of Jamaican and British descent, I sit firmly in the middle of two races. My identity enables me to experience different cultures, socialise with different races, and have diverse friendship groups. Whilst it gives me a unique perspective, this can be lonely at times, with society positioning me as not belonging to one race. (I’m not Black, nor am I White)

Louis’ (the paper’s first author) vignette reflects a positive relationship with Physical Education (PE) and this influenced his decision to become a PE teacher. For some young people though, PE can evoke negative memories. In recent decades research has highlighted how the structures, pedagogy and content of PE contribute to less favourable experiences for some girls, disabled students, young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those that identify as LGBTQ¹ (Kirk, Macdonald, and O’ Sullivan 2006). Interestingly, in a similar timeframe, English schools have experienced increased diversity in the student population. For example, minority ethnic students comprised 11.5% of the secondary school intake in 1999, a figure that has almost tripled over the last 20 years² (Owen et al. 2020). State funded mainstream secondary schools have approximately one fifth of students with a Special Education Need (SEN).³ And around one fifth of students have English as an Additional Language (DfE 2020). This diversity brings into question the extent to which teachers are prepared for the variety of young people attending mainstream schools. On this issue there remains a marked contrast between the demographics of teachers and their students. For example, whilst one third of students were from a minority ethnic background in 2020, only 15% of teachers identified being from a minority ethnic group.⁴

These statistics highlight an important issue around who is part of the teaching profession and the possible consequences this has on a diverse student population. For instance, Harrison and Belcher (2006) found White teachers are likely to draw on their own experiences of schooling and be less sensitive to the needs of students from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Elsewhere, research highlights how Black women teachers can help to uplift communities, bolster learning and contradict racial stereotypes (Acosta 2019). Moreover, research demonstrates how minority ethnic teachers are strongly placed to support both the majority and minority ethnic groups in raising achievement and educating on multicultural issues (Basit et al. 2006).

Whilst considerable attention has been given to the lack of Black and minority ethnic (BME⁵) teachers within education more broadly (Haque and Elliott 2017; Hargreaves et al. 2007; NASUWT 2017; Tereshchenko, Mills, and Bradbury 2020; Wallace 2020), less research has focused upon PE. Set against this backdrop, this paper explores Black⁶ teachers’ lived experiences of becoming and being a PE teacher. For Louis, who is of Jamaican and British descent, undertaking this research represents both a personal and professional journey. At the time of writing this paper he had just embarked on a one-year course to qualify as a PE teacher; a profession he notes is predominantly

White. In this paper we use accounts from six self-identified Black PE teachers to craft a counterstory featuring three composite, fictional, data driven characters – Shanice, Leon and Clive. Before we offer the counterstory, we situate this within broader research about minority ethnic educators' experiences of Initial Teacher Training/Physical Education Teacher Education (ITT/PETE) and teaching Physical Education. We also discuss how drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful means of theorising the experiences of these PE teachers. Following this, the research context and methodological approach are outlined. We then offer the counterstory, '*Coping in this crazy world*', before discussing three key themes embedded within the story: lack of representation; stereotyping; and acts of resistance. In concluding we offer some closing remarks about these teachers' experiences.

Minority ethnic educators' experiences of ITT/PETE and teaching Physical Education

Despite increases in the ethnic diversity of the student population within English schools, there remains a distinct lack of BME representation within teaching (Wallace 2020). Tereshchenko, Mills, and Bradbury (2020) noted that in 2019, whilst 85.6% of all teachers were from a White British background, this was not reflective of the student population (with 65.4% of students classed as White). These differences are greater in particular areas of the profession, specific subjects, and some regions of England. For example, the School-Workforce Census reports only 3% of headteachers in state maintained secondary schools are from a minority ethnic background.⁷ Within PE, figures of 4% are cited for non-white ethnic teachers in the profession (McBean 2019). And in the North East, there are eight times more BME students than BME teachers (NASUWT 2017). Minority ethnic students on ITT/PETE remain low at only 19%⁸ in the 2020/2021 intake. Moreover, withdrawal rates for teacher training are higher amongst minority ethnic groups than majority trainees (Basit et al. 2006).

Attrition of minority ethnic educators from ITT/PETE programmes has been linked to a number of issues. Basit et al. (2006) noted that whilst similar difficulties were encountered by all teacher trainees, these were compounded by racism for minority ethnic students. Benn's (1996) work identified how PETE practices including mixed sex teaching, clothing, and dance, created challenges for Muslim women wishing to embody their religious identity in particular ways. Flintoff's (2014; 2015) research also highlights the connections between professional and ethnic identity, noting how stereotypes around academic credentials and physical capability, White peer views on BME pupils, and racialised jokes and banter add to the isolation experienced by BME PETE students. Similarly, Simon and Azzarito (2019a) identify how isolation is created for PETE students at the intersections of their racialised and gendered identities and predominantly White schools.

For those successfully navigating an ITT/PETE programme, challenges remain when working in schools. Twice the number of BME teachers report experiencing discrimination compared to their White counterparts; nearly two thirds have experienced verbal abuse from students compared to just over half of White teachers; and BME teachers feel less supported by school management than their White colleagues (NASUWT 2017). BME teachers are also more likely to feel undervalued because of racial inequalities in pay and promotional opportunities. A recurring barrier to career progression involves the allocation of stereotypical racialised responsibilities to BME teachers including: behaviour management, particularly for BME students; leading Black History Month activities; acting as community liaison; and being a role model (Acosta 2019; Haque and Elliott 2017; Hargreaves et al. 2007; Wallace 2020). It is unsurprising that 75% of BME teachers are considering leaving teaching compared to 58% of White teachers (NASUWT 2017).

With the recruitment and retaining of BME pedagogues highlighted as a concern, colleagues have called for a critical appraisal of PETE to identify the ways in which this contributes to the inequalities experienced by BME students (Benn 1996; Flintoff and Dowling 2019). On this matter, Harrison and Belcher (2006) believe PETE programmes should provide opportunities for trainee teachers to study a diversity of cultures, enabling them to work with a greater range of young

people. Yet, they acknowledge the difficulties in creating this environment in predominantly White classrooms. Relatedly, Flintoff and Dowling (2019) call for a critical examination of Whiteness such that this can be challenged. They draw attention to how the Whiteness of PETE is perpetuated through the dominance of White academics and PETE student cohorts alongside the use of school placements with a predominantly White student intake. It is this kind of unacknowledged privilege that positions BME PETE as ‘other’ through skin colour, dress, and visible signs of religion (Flintoff 2015; Flintoff and Dowling 2019).

In challenging White supremacy and institutional racism, CRT is a useful resource in critiquing establishments, standards, beliefs and practices that disadvantage minority ethnic groups (Blackshear 2020; Blackshear and Culp 2021; Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Hiraldo 2010). Whilst CRT comprises five tenets – permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, and counter-storytelling, two are utilised in this paper. First, the permanence of racism that proposes racism is an endemic and inherent aspect of society, controlling all facets of life, justifying racialised hierarchies and power relations (Hiraldo 2010; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Second, and to demonstrate the permanence of racism, we use counter-storytelling. This tenet enables marginalised groups to tell their personal stories, providing an alternative view and exposing the (White) dominant ideology (Hiraldo 2010). Although use of CRT within education research is well established (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995), its application within PE is relatively recent. For example, Blackshear and Culp (2021) demonstrate ‘whiteness as property’ and the ‘permanence of racism’ through an interrogation of the PETE standards. Blackshear’s (2020) analysis of SHAPE America’s⁹ Teacher of the Year¹⁰ (TOY) award reveals how the ‘permanence of racism’ operates through an all-White selection board. Blackshear (2022) develops this work to explore the experiences of Black women physical educators who have achieved the PE TOY accolade. Using ‘permanence of racism’ and ‘counter-storytelling’ she demonstrates their exceptional achievements within a White system that renders them invisible. Simon and Boyd (2023) use CRT to highlight the painful emotional load Black and Latinx pre-service PE teachers experience at the intersections of their racialised identities in predominantly White PETE programmes. Similarly, Simon and Azzarito (2019a; 2019b) articulate the identity struggles and survival mechanisms of ethnic minority female PE teachers based in predominantly White schools. In adopting a colour-blind approach these educators’ experiences of systematic racism are ignored, whilst they simultaneously experience moments of hypervisibility connected to their racialised identity. Like these scholars we draw on CRT to interrogate White norms, majoritarian narratives, and dominant discourses that support an education system of inequality and privilege.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six self-identified Black teachers (four men, two women). These varied in age (25–43 years), years of teaching (1–20 years), and positions held (PE teacher, Head of Subject, Pastoral Lead, Senior Leadership). All had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in secondary PE albeit through different routes (Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Teaching Programme, Schools Direct); and had worked in different contexts including teaching abroad, and in English state and/or private schools. Prior to the interviews, participants were invited to create a timeline charting their relationship with PE and their teaching journey. Timelines could include written text, photographs, drawings or notes relating to significant memories, experiences, events, or people. These timelines proved to be a useful complementary resource for the interview schedule (developed by Louis and Annette based on the study’s focus). For example, when questions were asked about school PE, linked to career choice, the timelines were often referred to as these typically depicted (school) teams, trophies won, and people who had facilitated a positive relationship with PE. These references offered opportunities to prompt and/or probe to gain more detailed insights. Interviews were undertaken by Louis who recruited the

participants through personal contacts and BAME PE.¹¹ Interviews were recorded online through Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately 45 min and was transcribed verbatim.

At this juncture it is important to acknowledge how our individual identities and biographies inform this study. Louis is a Jamaican/ British male trainee PE teacher in his early 30s. Annette and Hayley are White women academics in their early 50s. They taught Louis during his Masters programme between 2020 and 2021. During this time we shared many conversations about social justice issues in schools and PE. This included the lack of diversity within the PE profession and Louis subsequently focused on this area for his dissertation. On completion of his research, Louis, Annette and Hayley agreed to embark on a writing project together. Through this collaboration we have reflected on different aspects of our lives including school experiences, sporting interests, career aspirations and our identities. Exploring our biographies in this way has helped us to recognise how, in different ways, we have experienced inequalities and discrimination. We also gained an appreciation of where and why we hold privilege in our lives. For example, we are cognizant that Annette and Hayley's academic status and Whiteness create a differential power dynamic with Louis. Our open and collaborative approach sought to mediate this, but we are conscious that we cannot escape the ways in which we are differently and similarly positioned.

The study gained ethical approval from the University's research committee. Data were analysed using the six stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This involved Louis and Annette independently: (1) familiarising themselves with the data, annotating each interview transcription with initial observations; (2) coding the six transcripts; and (3) generating themes by collating codes. They then met to (4) review and (5) define their themes, and (6) reflect upon what the themes offered in relation to CRT and existing literature. In stages 4–6, Hayley acted as a critical friend, interrogating how themes were shaped through Louis and Annette's prior experiences, positionality and theoretical understandings. In using CRT, we were keen to present the data using counter-storytelling. Thus, on establishing the themes, Louis, Annette and Hayley came back together to adopt a 'storyteller' position, mapping out the plot, context and characters for the story (Smith 2016).

Polkinghorne (1988, 7) describes stories as 'a special type of discourse production [whereby] ... events and actions are drawn together into an organised whole by means of a plot'. Counters-tories offer an opportunity to challenge grand (and pernicious) narratives and beliefs by providing marginalised voices with an opportunity to share their perspectives and lived social realities (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Louis and Annette worked with each other to weave together direct interview quotes from all six teachers that represented the themes. As such, Louis and Annette melded the voices of the six PE teachers to reflect their individual and collective experiences through three composite, fictional, data driven characters. These three composite characters were developed by considering different features and amalgamating characteristics from the six PE teachers (for example, gender, years spent teaching, employment in different schools, current post, and experiences) to create Shanice, Leon and Clive. For trustworthiness purposes the story was presented back to the six teachers for feedback. All those who replied were positive in their responses, noting how the story: contained messages that people from a minority ethnic background could relate to; provided an opportunity for others to learn; and offered an effective platform for silenced voices to be heard.

The stage is set – whilst travelling to a conference on the train Shanice, a Black female PE teacher, encounters Leon, a friend from her time at university. Having not seen each other for years they spend time sharing some of their experiences of teaching.

Shanice and Leon: 'Coping in this crazy world'

As the train pulls away from the platform, rain streaking down the windows, I look up and spot him. It must be eight years since we were at university, and he hasn't changed – tall, lean, head nodding to music. As he approaches I wave, and his face breaks into a wide smile. 'Oh my days bruv, Shanice, how long's it been?'

as he throws his bag on the overhead shelf, and newspaper on the table, easing himself into the seat opposite. 'Where're you headed? I thought you'd moved abroad?' he asks.

Naa, that didn't quite work out, I'm here in the Midlands now, PE teacher at an independent school. They've given me a couple of days off to go to a conference, learn about some new qualifications.

'What, no way, you're kidding me, that's where I'm going!' His eyes go huge, 'That's mad you've been living near here. I moved to be with my girlfriend about a year ago', he shakes his head in disbelief, 'So c'mon, what's gone on since uni, how've you been coping in this crazy world' as he gestures to the newspaper, the headline a stark reminder that racism is alive and kicking in the twenty-first century.

God, where to start? PGCE ... interesting. Then Dubai and Asia ... bizarre. Then some temp contracts before getting this PE and Pastoral Lead role. What about you? I thought you'd be ruling the world by now, stopping all this crap from happening'. I smile, trying to make light of my comment that settles heavy as we both look down at the newspaper. 'I'm trying Shanice. All this carry on, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, it's made me see things differently, you know?

I nod, as he continues. 'Like my PGCE placements, it was no accident where I was sent first – gang central, tough kids, other males wouldn't have lasted. But I had some currency, I'd spent some of my youth in the area, I knew people these kids knew, staff loved me, mentor was fantastic. Second placement, very different – suburbia. The students gravitated towards me 'cause I was a novelty, the cool guy. 100 lads turned up to my after-school basketball, but the Head of PE wasn't impressed. I think he was fearful of these kids flocking to me. I was 6 ft 4, dark, in prime physical shape, and I heard I didn't fit his image of a PE teacher'. He looks at me, incredulousness written on his face. 'The other staff lobbied for me to get a job, which he didn't want to give me, but he couldn't not appoint me 'cause of how I performed at the interview'.

Wow, my placements were mainly White schools' I add, 'the students took ages to warm to me, I had my work cut out building their respect, but then it was amazing what I got out of them. My mom always said, 'you'll need to work twice as hard as anyone else to get where you want, because of your ethnicity'. My current school's students are quite diverse, although I'm the only Black staff member, apart from a technician. And do you know how many times I get confused with her? We look nothing alike except we're both Black!

'Huh', he nods in frustration, knowing the feeling of mistaken identity time and time again, skin colour the first thing to be seen. 'Well, I ended up leaving that first school after two years 'cause I couldn't put up with him anymore. You could wear shorts, right? But he had a problem with my shorts, basketball shorts, pulled me up about it and said I couldn't wear them. He wanted to eradicate any cultural aspect of who I am. Even my haircut would have put me in isolation at that school. He caught me one day in the PE office eating lunch and he goes 'Hey, your family's from Jamaica aren't they? What is that plantation food you guys eat?' I'm like 'What?' and he starts laughing and says 'I'm joking, I mean that plantain food'. If I was in any other situation, I'd have done something, but I needed a good grade'.

No way! Well in Asia a photographer came into my school and another teacher was asked to take my class. All the brochures depicted White teachers. I was like, what's going on? Made me realise how few Black educators there are, which means Black kids don't see teaching as an option. And of course, fewer Black teachers means less Black headteachers. It's a sustaining cycle, no role model, no inspiration.

Totally get it, like my new school's mainly White pupils and I'm the only Black staff member. When I started I heard some Black kids going 'No way he's a teacher'. At least five times that first day, I got asked questions about my race, and where I'm from. I'm like er, London.

God, that used to frustrate me, but thinking back I guess they weren't exposed to many Black teachers and just wanted to know more about me and how I got there.

You're right, and it's good for them to see themselves represented in teaching. In fact, the keynote speaker at this conference will probably talk about how representation matters, how can you become something you can't see? He says low numbers of minority teachers send a clear message to minority ethnic kids that positions of authority are not available to them. And it doesn't hurt the White kids to see someone of colour teaching. At my new place they were taken aback that someone of colour even lives there. And there's a reason for that. Like if I go out on Saturday night, there's a 50% chance I'll be racially abused.

I don't get it. Its 2021 for God's sake. I feel like I'm on a personal crusade teaching folk about my culture. I love my department, they wanna learn, but some of them are oblivious. I've had to ask them to not touch my hair, not use the term 'coloured'. I took my ponytail weave off and everyone was like 'What is that?' I've had to give advice on why Black girls might not want to swim because of their hair. It's too much pressure sometimes, although I like bringing flavour to the department. I see it as part of the reason I'm here – to offer a different

viewpoint, to represent others, to explain the barriers I've faced. You'll like this, I'm trying to get them to eat curried goat at the moment, but they don't even eat chicken on the bone!

He gives his big hearty laugh, 'Baby steps Shanice. You know, some schools are so traditional, like what they deliver. I remember at PETE placement not having a clue about rugby and that's all they did, although they said I could do basketball. And what's the obsession with competition? Are any of my kids gonna become top athletes? Unlikely, but can I get them to enjoy activity, to want to do it for their whole lives? That's my goal. Folk seem incapable of thinking differently, adjusting to different cultures. Like planning for Eid doesn't need much thought, but does it happen? British culture is everywhere in schools, through displays, the Union Jack, the Queen – it doesn't resonate with the kids, just excludes them. At my first school we used to have a cultural 'day', got phased out 'cause SLT¹² were more bothered about results'.

We actually ran a culture week' I offer, 'I organised a routine inspired by African and Caribbean dance. Some of the Black girls and their parents were so thrilled their culture was being represented. Following week, I took a group of mainly White girls to an athletics meet and they were scared 'cause they thought some Black boys would steal their iPads. It's that stereotype, Black lads, stealing, drugs ...

... or sport' he interjects, 'like your Black masculinity stereotype. I've seen colleagues not think about the lad, just look at the body and make a judgement based on him being Black, presuming he'll be an absolute beast on the rugby field.

God, I had that at school 20 years ago' as I recall being pushed into the fast events in athletics because of my ethnicity. 'Things never change'. Do you remember when we entered that tag rugby tournament, and we kept getting those comments about 'Cool Runnings'.¹³ Like what did a bobsleigh team have to do with rugby?

Mad! And the tutor said it was harmless banter? I try not to push Black kids down the sports route 'cause we are so much more than that. That's another lesson I've learnt from Clive, today's keynote. He was my secondary school PE teacher. I got into some bother at school and he took me under his wing, got me onto a leadership programme coaching kids. I tried to replicate it at my old school, teach kids not to be held back by the colour of their skin. And it doesn't just have to be Black kids, but I understand some of the things they're facing, some of the skills they'll need.

'Who'd have thought it? Leon the role model' I say smiling.

'I know right?' He grins before continuing, 'he gave me my second teaching post too, Clive. He'd moved to assistant head by then and was on the interview panel. I broke down when he phoned to say I'd been successful and he said it was one of his proudest moments to employ an ex-pupil. I told him straight, this is all because of you, you showed me what was possible. I wonder if it'd been someone else doing the interviews would I have gotten the job? Would my face fit? Even with strong subject knowledge, if there's someone similar, I think they'll look. It might be a race thing or you're not the same culture as us. He taught me how to present myself. I remember him saying, as a Black man, if you stand up and talk with conviction, you're labelled aggressive, intimidating, but folk around you can be effing and blinding¹⁴ and they're seen as passionate. Learn how to present your argument, agree on what behaviour won't be tolerated before a meeting, and call it out when others cross the line'.

Hmmm, I could have done with him at my last school. I made a folder of resources for teachers around Black Lives Matter right? Another staff member presented it to the governors! I should have said something, like, why the hell are they not talking to me? Blew my mind and I realised, I'm the only one in this room. But if I don't keep talking about it no one else will, so I end up being the Black woman talking about race yet again.

Yep. I've had people in senior positions who think they have the same values as you, but their actions don't align. Take Black History Month, they did nothing. They can't understand because they don't navigate that world so I'm always the one who raises these issues. It spurs me on to be honest. I'm like, if you're not gonna support me, I'll look to have impact elsewhere. Like, as Head of Subject I can influence the PE department's culture, through actions and conversations. But it's exhausting at times ...

Agree, I think we have to perform to a higher standard and work harder than White teachers. I want to progress, but the percentages of Black staff moving up the ranks concerns me.

Well, I know you Shanice, when you hit a wall you just come back with a new approach, keep plugging away.

Discussion: Representation, stereotyping and resistance

In utilising stories to present the findings, we move between the standpoints of 'storyteller' and 'story analyst' (Smith 2016). Whilst we have embedded the themes identified from the analysis

of the transcripts within the story, we also recognise that without these being made explicit the story presented can be read in different ways. As such, we now focus on three interrelated themes that consistently appear in these teachers' working lives: lack of representation; stereotyping; and acts of resistance.

Lack of representation: 'How can you become something you can't see?'

Permanence of racism is evidenced through the different ways that a lack of representation materialises within the counterstory: through the national curriculum and its delivery; the 'Britishness' of the physical spaces within schools; the lack of Black teachers; and the images used in publicity materials. Importantly, this lack of representation is embodied and negotiated on a daily basis, taking an emotional toll on these teachers. Shanice discusses the weariness of being confused with the only other (non-teaching) Black staff member; working twice as hard to get White students' respect; pressure at being the 'expert on racism'; injustice when asked to step aside for a White teacher to be photographed for the school's brochure; and the loneliness of being 'the only one in the room' who takes an anti-racist stance. Her reflections resonate strongly with the isolation experienced by ethnic minority female teachers in Simon and Azzarito's (2019a) research, and the 'professional alienation' reported by Black female educators in Acosta's (2019) study. Similarly, Leon recalls: the disbelief he encounters from students at him being a teacher; exhaustion from being the only one who raises issues around race; injustice when his manager wants to eradicate his cultural identity; uncertainty around 'would my face fit?' every time he applies for a job; and the conundrum he faces in challenging racist comments because of his position as a PETE student, echoing some of the findings in NASUWT's (2017) report. And we hear of the impression management work Clive consciously undertakes to ensure he is read in a particular way.

For these educators there is much emotional management work occurring, a process that is difficult to share with (White) colleagues. This places them in an uncomfortable environment, creating feelings of isolation and othering, as has been reported elsewhere in the literature (Acosta 2019; Simon and Azzarito 2019a; Simon and Boyd 2023). Of course, this emotional labour is being navigated against the backdrop of neoliberal and performative discourses, and the constant negotiating of power dynamics. As highlighted by Simon and Azzarito (2019b), these teachers' racialised identities intersect with White infrastructures to add further challenges to their work. It is these kinds of conditions that contribute to poor physical and mental health, burnout, and higher rates of minority ethnic teachers leaving the profession as identified consistently through previous research (Acosta 2019; Basit et al. 2006; Blackshear 2022; NASUWT 2017).

These multifaceted representational racisms that are persistently present also have longer term consequences for these teachers. Through the counterstory we hear of Shanice, Leon and Clive's concerns regarding the discourse (re)produced through a predominantly White workforce that teaching is not a viable career for Black students. Echoing the words of one of Blackshear's (2022) research participants, Leon draws on the advice of his mentor Clive, noting 'how can you become something you can't see?', with Shanice adding 'It's a sustaining cycle, no role model, no inspiration.' Moreover, the Whiteness of PE moves beyond the teaching profession, underpinning and informing curriculum content, delivery, and the spaces in which the subject takes place, resonating with the concerns of Flintoff and Dowling (2019). Leon highlights the traditional nature of the activities in PE, the dominance of competition, and teachers' inability to consider the needs of different students, for example during Ramadan. He draws attention to the exclusionary nature of the physical spaces in schools created by displays that promote British (White) culture. In combination these policies, activities and actions work together, endorsing a particular discourse for Black students. As Flintoff and Dowling (2019) remind us, they are different, 'other', and do not belong in education.

The menace of stereotyping: 'He wanted me to eradicate any cultural aspect of who I am'

The permanence of racism in these educators' lives is also evident through persistent and pernicious stereotyping. By taking issue with his basketball shorts, a sport often associated with Black male identity, Leon was clear this was an attempt by his Head of Department to eradicate what he represented culturally, to get him to assimilate into British (read White) culture, and fear of his success. Leon apportions some of this fear to the way he looks, '6ft 4, dark, in prime physical shape' with a haircut that 'would have put me in isolation at that school'; a look he was informed, 'didn't fit the image of a PE teacher'.

hooks (2004) work on Black masculinities is a useful reference point here. She identifies the narrow range of negative stereotypes that are imposed upon Black men by a White patriarchal society – 'animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers', 'untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling' – fearful tropes that conjure images of violence and danger. Moreover, she links the personal to the political, societal and cultural to explain how these stereotypes work to restrict and confine Black men to particular roles. These sentiments are echoed in Leon's recollections of the advice given to him by his mentor, Clive, 'as a Black man, if you stand up and talk with conviction, you're labelled aggressive, intimidating, but folk around you can be effing and blinding and they're seen as passionate'. In Clive's case, he had established how to navigate the terrain of meetings with colleagues, 'Learn how to present your argument, agree on what behaviour won't be tolerated before a meeting, and call it out when others cross the line' to challenge stereotypes around Black masculinity. The issue of Black masculinity also emerges when Leon discusses the racist practice of channelling young Black men into sport, based on outdated stereotypes around physicality. This practice is not aimed solely at men, but also women, with Shanice highlighting how she had been funnelled into particular sports because of the assumption she would be fast, based on her ethnicity.

The menace of stereotypes also lies in the ways these acts are disregarded as 'harmless banter', in the case of the 'Cool Runnings' analogy, or 'joking', in relation to the 'plantation food'. Like Flintoff's (2014) study exploring BME students' experiences of PETE, these teachers are in a constant process of negotiating these everyday microaggressions, reflecting the racialised power dynamics at play. Moreover, appropriating stereotypes in this way makes them difficult to challenge. These comments insidiously sediment into individual consciousness to become 'truths' (Hill Collins 2000). In turn, these are translated into actions, beliefs, and policy having negative consequences for these teachers and their students. For example, in the simple act of wearing basketball shorts, having a particular haircut, and eating certain foods, stereotypes associated with Black masculinity come to the fore leaving Leon's professionalism questioned and the possibility of him not passing his PGCE a reality. Moreover, the comment around 'plantation food', one that has associations with slavery, is left unchallenged because of Leon's tenuous position as a PETE student. For Leon his passivity is purposeful, as he notes 'If I was in any other situation, I'd have done something, but I needed a good grade'. However, his passivity should not be read as an unwillingness to resist. As Hill Collins (2000, 290) trenchantly observes, 'There is always choice, and power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be'. Like the teachers in Simon and Azzarito's (2019b) study, who often tried to make their racialized identities invisible, Leon chose to ignore these racial microaggressions to achieve his goal of becoming a teacher. Further acts of resistance appear within the counterstory and form the basis for the final theme.

Acts of resistance: 'If you're not gonna support me, I'll look to have impact elsewhere'

The conversation between Leon and Shanice reflects the daily struggles and challenges encountered by Black PE teachers and that have been identified elsewhere (Flintoff 2014; 2015; Simon and Azzarito 2019a; 2019b; Simon and Boyd 2023). Despite these, they remain positive and committed to teaching, recognising the responsibilities that come with being a Black teacher. Reflecting the findings of others, these educators: challenge racial stereotypes and resist the status quo (Acosta

2019); raise standards (Blackshear 2022); act as role models to staff and colleagues (Hargreaves et al. 2007); and drive cultural awareness (Haque and Elliott 2017). For example, Leon argues that ‘it’s good for Black kids to see themselves represented in teaching’, whilst Shanice articulates the benefits she brings to her colleagues, ‘I see it as part of the reason I’m here – to offer a different viewpoint’. Aside from being role models and educators, these teachers actively challenge policy and practice to create opportunities for others (Hill Collins 2000). For instance, Clive actively supported Leon to engage in a leadership programme at school to prevent him getting into trouble. This strategy is successful, not only for Leon, but his own students as he replicates the leadership programme in his efforts not to position his students solely as athletes. Like the teachers in Blackshear’s (2022) study, he engages in a culturally responsive pedagogy that recognises his students’ needs, rejecting an elite and competitively focused curriculum in favour of promoting a lifelong relationship with physical activity. For Shanice, she spends time creating resources around the Black Lives Matter movement to support teachers in educating their students, recognising that ‘if I don’t keep talking about it no one else will’.

These teachers also demonstrate agency in pursuing opportunities to progress professionally within a (White) system that they are aware is structured in ways that disadvantage them because of their ethnicity. Despite her concerns, Shanice articulates that she wishes to progress, whilst acknowledging that she needs to ‘work twice as hard’ and ‘perform to a higher standard’ than White colleagues. Shanice’s sentiments resonate strongly with the two Black women PE teachers in Blackshear’s (2022) study and the five Black female educators in Acosta’s (2019) research who regularly exceeded work expectations reinforcing detrimental superwomen stereotypes that Black women internalise. Similarly, Leon secures his latest role as Head of PE despite questioning ‘would my face fit?’ He seeks advice from his mentor Clive, and begins to better understand how to present his point of view such that he is less likely to be labelled as an aggressive intimidating Black man. On encountering negativity he remains undeterred, arguing ‘It spurs me on to be honest’. Despite the permanence of racism in these PE teacher’s lives, their stories reflect the concerted efforts they make to ensure this structural imposition does not define them.

Concluding remarks

In drawing the paper to a close we offer a number of concluding remarks about these PE teachers’ experiences. In so doing, we highlight some strategies that can be initiated within schools and higher education to increase the representation of Black educators at all levels of the profession, promote more equitable practice, and better support Black teachers to fulfil their teaching aspirations. The paper ends by recognising the usefulness of counter-storytelling before we contemplate how, as an authorship team, we can extend this research.

Like others (Benn 1996; Blackshear 2020; Blackshear and Culp 2021; Flintoff 2014; 2015; Simon and Azzarito 2019a; 2019b; Simon and Boyd 2023), our research highlights the rewards and challenges experienced by Black PE teachers. Moreover, the counterstory reflects these educators’ tenacity and determination to overcome these challenges, progress in their careers and make a difference in the lives of the young people they teach. Whilst racism is an enduring aspect in these teachers’ lives, they are well versed at negotiating and navigating various barriers. However, working in this way takes its toll which often goes unrecognised. With retention pressures a growing concern in the teaching profession (Lynch et al. 2016) and reports of teacher shortages being at crisis point (Morrison 2019) the need for recruiting and retaining teachers like Shanice, Clive and Leon has never been greater (Acosta 2019). However, ensuring they, and other Black teachers, remain in the profession is challenging as we discuss next.

Whilst we acknowledge there is a need for change, we also recognise that overhauling established structures, like education, is not an insignificant task. Here we draw comfort from Hill Collins (2000) who advocates for change from within organisations and institutions. Indeed, we note the number of well rehearsed practical suggestions put forward to support minority ethnic teachers.

For example, Blackshear (2020; 2022; Blackshear and Culp 2021) demonstrates the need to publicly celebrate the achievements of Black teachers; to secure their representation on selection boards and panels; and to ensure their involvement in the development of teaching standards and curricula content. Simon and Azzarito (2019a; 2019b) point to resourcing *all* teachers to engage in professional development focusing on issues of racism in education; offering safe spaces to reflect on racism within schools; recruiting minority ethnic staff; and utilising critical pedagogies within the curriculum. Within ITT/PETE they advocate for the recruitment of more minority ethnic students and academics. Taken together these actions have the potential to trouble some of the taken for granted assumptions and stereotypes that circulate about minority ethnic pupils, ITT/PETE students, and teachers whilst increasing representation within the profession. Moreover, they provide opportunities for alternative social realities and viewpoints to be shared and brought to the fore.

On this latter issue counterstories, like the one offered in this paper, provide an opportunity to gain insights into different lived experiences. In this way they offer a platform for critical engagement and learning. Like Flintoff (2014; 2015), we would advocate for counterstories to be employed as a pedagogical tool in PETE programmes. She argues, these ‘stories of difference’ can be an effective medium in engaging White student teachers in discussions around race and racism, encouraging them to make connections between their identities and power relations and to reflect on how these influence their teaching practice and the creation of inequalities. We are pinpointing PETE programmes here because this early stage of teacher socialisation offers a fertile opportunity to develop a critical consciousness that is key to debunking pernicious stereotypes and challenging enduring inequalities.

In considering embarking on further research together, we note Backman et al. (2021) who call for more longitudinal research that focuses on how particular content areas in PETE are transformed and transmitted into schools. As an authorship team we have discussed the value of capturing Louis’ teacher training journey and first years of teaching. We are keen to learn more about how he continues to navigate his journey within the teaching profession. At the same time, we would like to better understand how content around race, racism, and indeed other areas of social justice, are transmitted, during his training, and how this is transformed. Whilst there is a collective enthusiasm to continue to collaborate, we are also aware that, just like Shanice and Leon’s story, this kind of work may add to the emotional and personal toll Louis encounters as a new teacher. In a very material sense the stakes could not be higher for Louis as he seeks his first teaching post and is already aware that he will need to reconcile the possibility that potential employers may not be as receptive to his line of research.

Notes

1. LGBTQ* – an acronym used for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning.
2. Statistics available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>
3. Statistics available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729208/SEN_2018_Text.pdf
4. Statistics available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>
5. We recognise the problematic nature of the BME and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) acronyms, because of the way these homogenise a diverse set of ethnic identities. For example, the English census data categorises ethnicity as follows: Asian/ Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Bangladeshi, and ‘other’ Asian); Black/ Black British, Caribbean, African, and Black ‘other’; Mixed or multiple ethnic groups; White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma, and ‘other’ White background); and ‘other ethnic groups’. However, we use the acronyms BME/BAME within this study where they have been used by others so that we accurately reflect their work.
6. We use the term Black in this paper to reflect the overarching use of this label by our research participants. We also use this label with caution, acknowledging that it simultaneously homogenises and masks differences. For example, some of our participants supplemented their use of the term Black with other descriptions that

reflected their multiple identities and backgrounds including: Mixed – Black Caribbean; Black Caribbean British; Black and White Caribbean.

7. Statistics available from: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/latest#by-ethnicity-and-role>
8. Statistics available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/initial-teacher-training-census/2020-21>
9. SHAPE America, The Society of Health and Physical Educators of America, the oldest and largest organisation for PE in the USA, existing at national, regional and state level.
10. The TOY award recognises exemplary teaching in PE, dance and health at elementary, middle and high school level as well as in Adapted PE.
11. A network for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Physical Education teachers to support each other, share good practice, and address issues of equity and diversity within PE and the teaching profession.
12. SLT – Senior Leadership Team
13. A film based on the true story of the first Jamaican bobsleigh team and their journey to compete in the 1988 Winter Olympics.
14. A common expression used in England that refers to swearing and using obscene language.

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