

## Needles in a Haystack: An Exploratory Study of Black Male Teachers in England

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### Abstract

*This paper draws on a study of black male teachers who teach in primary schools and aims to contribute to studies of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) teachers. Interviews with 10 participants examine the nexus of professional and social identities and how these are (re)constructed in or by schools. The teachers' agentic actions provide insight to the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and class and point to the ways that social and professional identities are in a constant state of (re)formation as black male teachers traverse (and tip-toe) within and between social and professional contexts. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality explore teachers' racialised experiences and perceptions of black male primary school teachers. Findings suggest that black male teachers' agentic actions support them in (re)constructing their professional roles and in the negotiation of their identities in primary schools.*

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### Introduction

Whilst there has been research into the experiences of BAME teachers and BAME women teachers in the UK (McNamara, Howson, Gunter and Fryers, 2010; Wilkins and Lall, 2011; Hargreaves, 2011; National Union of Teachers (2017); NASUWT, 2017), little is known about the specificity of black<sup>1</sup> male teachers as their perspectives. As a result, it is fair to say that their views are often obscured - indistinct from the experiences of male teachers *per se* or homogenised into discussions of the 'ethnic minority' experience. Where black males are included in research studies their experience is reported with caution due to small sample sizes and concerns about generalisability. Thus, Ellison's (1965) depiction of the invisible black man is apposite, narratives of Black male teachers in the England are overwhelmingly invisible *and* silent.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'black' is used here to describe those whose ancestry is located in the African diaspora. The author acknowledges that 'black' is used in a political sense to describe visible minorities who self-identify as other than white. In this paper both terms are used interchangeably. In the UK the terms Ethnic Minority, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) and more recently Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) have also been used at various points to refer to those considered as coming from ethnic minority groups.

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3 Given the dearth of research in England this paper draws from the USA and North  
4 America (Lynn, 2006; McNeil, 2011; Brockenbrough, 2012a, 2012b; Lewis &  
5 Toldson, 2013; Bhopal, 2015) to examine how social and teacher identities are  
6 (re)established and (re)formed in the early phases of black male teacher careers.  
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8 The study reported here privileges and foregrounds the voices of Black males as  
9 they seek to establish themselves in the teaching profession and illuminates the  
10 labour they expend in (re)negotiating their social and professional identities in  
11 schools. Extant research whilst providing insight to the experience and perspectives  
12 of BAME teachers in general, reveals only a sketchy outline of the perspectives of  
13 black men who are often conceptualised as peripheral to learning and teaching,  
14 primarily in relation to learning and/or behaviour support.  
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24 Over the years there have been calls to increase the number of black male teachers  
25 in schools. Abbot (2002) for example, argued that Black boys need more male role  
26 models in school to help them overcome underachievement. Whilst, Holley (2007)  
27 noted that "male teachers from ethnic minorities make excellent role models and are  
28 in great demand" (c.f. Maylor, 2009 and Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). Johnson  
29 (2009) too, asserts that "Barack Obama-style inspiration" is necessary for tens of  
30 thousands of children in the capital (London) suffering from a lack of drive and  
31 ambition. More recently, there have been concerns regarding the low numbers of  
32 black males in leadership roles, prompted by the fact that there were only 30 black  
33 male headteachers of Caribbean backgrounds in England in 2011. More recent  
34 statistics show that 93% of all headteachers are white (DfES, 2016). Black male  
35 teacher perspectives are rarely discussed in career pipeline studies, as knowledge  
36 producers or as those who lead schools (XXXXXXXX, 2018).  
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47 The call for black male teachers is often connected to their status as role models and  
48 as an antidote to the issues facing black boys. This often positions them as super-  
49 heroes. Put simply, more black teachers = higher achievement outcomes + lowered  
50 exclusion rates+ increased aspiration and so on. The super-hero metaphor is often  
51 utilized to illustrate the potential impact that the qualities of a former US president  
52 could have on pupil outcomes (c.f. Gunn Morris & Morris, 2013). Whilst the  
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3 aspirational expectations expressed in the sentiment are not without merit, it reduces  
4 the role of black male teachers to arbiters of educational inequality whilst  
5 simultaneously disavowing the education system (and schools) of their  
6 responsibilities to *all* children. The super-hero metaphor elides black men's  
7 professional knowledge and status conferring additional responsibilities upon them.  
8 Black male teachers thus, are positioned as saviors, able to remediate and make  
9 good the alleged failings of black boys and their families where historically the  
10 education system has failed. Notwithstanding, the number of black male teachers, at  
11 all phases of the career trajectory in England is overwhelming low and, if the  
12 aspiration outlined above were to be achieved by black males alone it would take  
13 hundreds, if not thousands of years, to achieve.  
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23 Similar aspirational sentiments are observed in the US literature, prompting  
24 researchers to assert that whilst black males are encouraged to enter teaching on  
25 the basis of their racialized identity they are pushed out when they begin to voice  
26 dissatisfaction. Referring to this process as 'double-talk', Pabon (2016) argues that,  
27 "even in the midst of being conceptualized as Black Supermen [black males] are  
28 undersupported and being pushed out of the very schools that claim to need them so  
29 much" (see also Jackson, Boutte and Wilson, 2013). Black male teacher presence in  
30 school according to Lynn (2006: 2005) reflects what is described as a "a continuum  
31 between resistance and accommodation to white patriarchal norms and practices as  
32 a way in which to survive the profession".  
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### 43 **Black male teachers**

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45 Thomas and Warren (2017: 87), argue that "when an African American man decides  
46 to teach, his presence in the classroom is laudable, yet the conditions under which  
47 he teaches are often troubling and precarious". In a study of the navigational  
48 strategies adopted by an African American teacher, Thomas & Warren found that the  
49 teacher perceived his experiences in the professional learning community as racially  
50 hostile and marginalising. In the US against a backdrop of White supremacy critical  
51 theories are used to examine the lives of black male teachers (Lewis 2006; Lynn  
52 2006a, 2006b; Lynn and Jennings 2009; Brockenbrough 2012a; Brown 2012; Brown  
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3 2014; Pabon 2016, 2017; Woodson and Pabon 2016). These studies highlight the  
4 intersections of race and gender affording insights to the lived experiences of black  
5 males. Lynn (2006b) for instance, draws on experiential knowledge (a tenet of CRT)  
6 to identify the everyday tensions and achievements through the use of narratives.  
7 Research that addresses the experiences of black males in the US examines  
8 access, approaches and strategies for recruitment and retention (insert some refs);  
9 research which concerns black males as role models and their pedagogies and  
10 practices. These studies have challenged widely held beliefs about teaching, race,  
11 and gender through the privileging of experiential knowledge and black male teacher  
12 voice (Pabon, 2016). As this paper concerns the experiences of black males in  
13 England, the literature review will focus on the latter two points mentioned above.  
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23 The commitment to teaching and the advancement of black youth is highlighted in  
24 Lewis's (2006) study illuminating a desire of black male teachers to be more than  
25 just role models for black youth. Another aspect of the role modelling discourse  
26 positions black males in the role of disciplinarian. Brown (2012) for example,  
27 highlights teacher's understandings of their roles and this is juxtaposed against the  
28 tensions they face when positioned as disciplinary figures in school. Brown argues  
29 that this positioning fails to acknowledge the pedagogical work of the teachers  
30 through its over-emphasis on their racialised and gendered identities. Martino &  
31 Rezai-Rashti (2010) draws on feminist, queer and anti-racist theory to explore how  
32 an African Caribbean teacher understood role-modelling. They argue that the  
33 discourse on black male teachers requires a disarticulation to one which is more  
34 nuanced and which challenges the often cited trope that couches the potential of  
35 black male teachers within a discourse of role models. Brockenbrough (2011)  
36 examines the gendered participatory politics of 11 black male teachers and  
37 concludes that research has failed to take account of the inattention to male privilege  
38 (see also Foster and Brockenbrough, 2012); black men's conflictual encounters with  
39 white women and black males desire for male-oriented spaces and conversations. In  
40 another study Brockenbrough (2012a) points to the experiences of black queer male  
41 teachers, arguing that being marked as queer carried with it a heavy burden, one  
42 that is a consequence of homophobic surveillance. He drew specific attention to the  
43 closeted participation of black queer males, their experiences of the classroom as a  
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3 closeted space and the classroom as a site of teacher-pupil power struggles  
4 concluding that more research was needed to go beyond theoretical blindspots and  
5 underexamined areas such as the policing of queerness and the production of  
6 masculinity. Brockenbrough (2012a; 2012b) challenges the view that more black  
7 male teachers are required in schools as 'otherfathers' (a term coined by Lynn,  
8 2006). He attests that:

13 "As popular discourses continue to construct Black male teachers as father  
14 figures for Black youth, what happens when these men, dutifully answering  
15 the call to embody and perform conventional modes of manhood in the  
16 classroom, encounter the gendered power dynamics and professional culture  
17 of a traditionally female workplace" (Brockenbrough, 2012c: pg.2).

22 Another strand of US research has emphasised black male teacher's pedagogy and  
23 practice and its impact on classroom learning. Lynn (2002) utilises Critical Race  
24 Theory (CRT) to examine the perspectives of black male teachers in schools. He  
25 notes in particular, the role of black male teachers have as change agents, with  
26 responsibilities as role models and their ability to relate to African American youth.  
27 The teachers in this study understood the connection between teaching and social  
28 change and saw teaching as a call to change the lives of disadvantaged African  
29 American students. In this study blackness and maleness were seen as assets and  
30 not liabilities. In a later studies Lynn (2006a, 2006b) draws attention to the  
31 marginalised position of black male teachers in discourses about learning and  
32 teaching, arguing that they demonstrate a unique kind of cultural competence that  
33 extends to an understanding of children's cultures and their day-to-day lives. Lynn  
34 notes that black male teachers "tend to view teaching as a form of 'racial uplift', and  
35 that they are important in helping black males to 'navigate the culture of power  
36 (2006b: 239). A later study by Brown (2009) contends that African American male  
37 teachers are "constructed as a monolith, without much recognition to the varied  
38 perspectives and beliefs that he might employ to work with African American male  
39 students". His study found that whilst teachers were committed to radically altering  
40 the educational outcomes of African American males they did so in different ways.  
41 Brown challenges the "one-size-fits- all logic when thinking about teachers who could  
42 effectively meet the needs of historically underserved populations of students" (pg.  
43 489).

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5 Whilst research in the US and North America has shed light on the experiences of  
6 African American teachers, little is known about why black men enter teaching or of  
7 their experiences in England (Roach, 2005). Even less is known about the ways in  
8 which their professional and social identities are (re)constructed in or by the  
9 institutions in which they work. In primary schools' male teachers are low in numbers  
10 and this number is lower still for BAME men. By dint of their occupational choice  
11 black male primary teachers inhabit a predominately classed, raced and gendered  
12 education space. By examining their agentic actions it is possible to provide clearer  
13 understanding of their intersectional experiences as well as point to the ways that  
14 black males' social and professional identities are formed as they traverse  
15 boundaried social and professional contexts (XXXXXXXX, 2018). This study thus  
16 sets out to add a new dimension to the debate on BAME teacher experiences by  
17 considering directly the experiences and perceptions of Black male primary teachers.  
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### 29 **The research**

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31 The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of 10 early career black  
32 male teachers. Three research questions guided the study:  
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- 35 1. Why do black men become teachers?
- 36 2. In what way are their experiences of training and their early careers inflected  
37 by and lived through the lens of race?
- 38 3. How are their multiple social identities constructed by the education spaces in  
39 which they learn and teach?  
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45 The findings reported here draw on face-to-face life history interviews with 10  
46 teachers. The participants self-identify as Black Caribbean and were accessed  
47 through the author's professional and personal networks. Life history methodology is  
48 used to capture, at a deep level, the complex and multiple ways in which the social  
49 construction of identity evolves over time whilst being cognisant of the social and  
50 structural context within which the individual (re)shapes their life (Goodson, 2013).  
51 Methodological analyses of the transcripts are informed by Gunaratnum (2003) who  
52 asserts that race and ethnicity are in a constant state of intersectional production.  
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3 Participants were interviewed twice – once nearing completion of initial teacher  
4 training and again 18 to 24 months later. Interviews were transcribed and coded  
5 using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Several themes emerged from  
6 the data including: the influence of family and community; educational experiences;  
7 teaching as a career choice; race salience in academic and professional learning;  
8 purpose and values and aspirations for the future. This paper however, reports on  
9 the salience of race only. Ethical clearance was obtained via through the authors  
10 employing institution. Additionally, informed written consent was received from  
11 participants who were also aware of their right to withdraw at any time.  
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### 20 **Positionality**

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22 As a Black woman teacher educator, I was both an insider and outsider in the study.  
23 I was an insider due to my ethnicity and the fact that I shared similar cultural  
24 experiences to the participants. I was also an outsider, due to my professional role  
25 as a teacher educator, my age and gender were different to the participants and, as  
26 such, might influence the data elicited. I used my personal experience both as a  
27 former school teacher and teacher educator to conceptualise a study that would  
28 examine the experiences of black male teachers and reveal how they found “ways to  
29 escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice” (Hill  
30 Collins, 2000, pp. 9). I considered too, the fact that the participants might be less  
31 inclined to share their stories with me than they might with a man and thought  
32 carefully about the issues I might face from collecting narratives from participants  
33 who are invisible, quiescent and whose experiences of being schooled and of  
34 teaching in England would be markedly different to my own. I was cognisant also  
35 that their stories might prove difficult to tell.  
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### 48 **Methodology**

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50 Critical Race Theory (CRT) is deployed as the primary methodological and analytic  
51 tool through which to explore racialised, gendered and classed subjectivities. CRT  
52 emerged from Critical Legal Studies in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989) and is used to  
53 foreground the salience of race in the teacher’s professional lives and to  
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3 contextualise this historically and contemporarily. CRT originates from the USA, but  
4 its use in the UK has grown in recent years (Chakrabarty, Roberts and Preston,  
5 2012; Gillborn, 2005, 2006, 2013, 2014, 2015; Hylton, 2012; Housee, 2012; Rollock,  
6 2012; Warmington, 2012). At its core is the contention that racism is endemic,  
7 institutional and systemic - it is normal, ordinary, not abhorrent and integral to the  
8 way in which society works (Bell, 1992; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT  
9 analysis provides a framework for a race conscious examination of structural racism.  
10 It does not set out to find answers but instead exposes issues, revealing the overt  
11 and covert ways that racist ideology, structures and institutions create and maintain  
12 racial inequality. As such, it is a helpful tool in which to examine questions of  
13 epistemology, knowledge production and dissemination. CRT critically examines  
14 master (or dominant) narratives that are reproduced and the counter-narratives that  
15 are silenced. Based on five key tenets, CRT focuses upon: the centrality and  
16 intersectionality of race and racism; the challenge to dominant ideology; a  
17 commitment to social justice; the centrality of experiential knowledge and; the  
18 interdisciplinary perspective. It is not my intention to rehearse the detail of CRT here  
19 as these are examined elsewhere (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and  
20 Thomas, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings,  
21 2010). Rather it is my intention to highlight the tenets of CRT that are salient and  
22 have greater significance to the study at hand, notably that (a) racialised identities  
23 are central to and intersect with black male teachers' experiences in school; and (b)  
24 foregrounding the experiential knowledge of black men as contingent to  
25 understanding the manifestations of multiple discrimination (Rollock, 2012). It  
26 illuminates how race is inscribed, assigned, taken up and resisted by black male  
27 primary teachers in their places of learning and work. In this sense, CRT exposes  
28 whiteness as a system of meaning about race, ethnicity, class and gender  
29 (Leonardo, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2010).  
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50 In addition, an intersectional lens is adopted to emphasise the way in which people  
51 are characterised by their complex multiple identities, thereby promoting a greater  
52 understanding of the complexities posed by different axes of differentiation (Brah and  
53 Phoenix, 2004; Hill Collins, 2000). Used in this way intersectionality can be deployed  
54 to identify the ways in which subtle, hidden and structural systems of power and  
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3 control combine to produce 'intersectional invisibility' (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach,  
4 2008), and illustrate how singularly, and in combination, structural systems of power  
5 impact upon black male teachers. Located in the field of black feminism  
6 intersectionality illustrates how the lives of black women are qualitatively different to  
7 those of white, middle class feminists and black men. hooks (1984: 194) and  
8 Crenshaw (1989) argue that "intersecting patterns" of racism and sexism often  
9 produce the experiences of women of colour and illuminate these experiences as  
10 both multiply subordinated and different. The utility of intersectionality nonetheless,  
11 has expanded beyond the specificity of black women to encapsulate the experiences  
12 of other marginalised groups, including minoritised men (Anderson & McCormack,  
13 2010; Bowleg, Teti, Malebranche & Tschann, 2013). hook's (ibid) argues that it is in  
14 the social realm that racist and gendered stereotypes are continually utilised for  
15 black women. This observation, I suggest also holds particular salience for black  
16 women *and* black male teachers. As Roach (2005) attests:

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26 "the expression of the professional and political orientation of the teacher  
27 is informed by the actuality of the teacher's lived experience which  
28 shapes not only her/his identity but also identification. This has  
29 implications for what is expected of black teachers and men who teach"  
30 (pg. 335).  
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35 Similarly Mirza, (2009) suggests that intersectionality is both embodied and lived.  
36 Here the lived experience is 'an interpretation of the social world', in which regulatory  
37 discursive power is performed or exercised in the social world and across space and  
38 time. Along with CRT, intersectionality provides a prism to explore the ways in which  
39 black male teachers negotiate the education landscape of schools. Both provide the  
40 analytical tools to emphasise the way in which people are characterised by their  
41 complex multiple identities and promote a greater understanding of the complexities  
42 posed by different axes of differentiation. Due to the exigencies of word limits  
43 however, it is not possible to do justice to an exhaustive coverage of CRT or  
44 intersectionality here.  
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## 54 55 Findings

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3 It is important to note that not all of the teachers in the study shared the same  
4 experiences. Racialised, gendered and classed experiences were situationally  
5 contingent, affected by contexts of professional learning to lesser or greater degree  
6 and related to how the teachers understood and experienced 'race'. The intention  
7 here therefore, is not to draw generalised conclusions but instead to illustrate the  
8 ways in which race was interpreted, ascribed and resisted reflecting what Lynn  
9 (2006) describes as a "a continuum between resistance and accommodation to white  
10 patriarchal norms and practices as a way in which to survive the profession".  
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18 *He's only here because he's black*

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21 Despite holding the necessary qualifications and experience to teach some  
22 participants reported that 'proving' their credentials is essential in order to be  
23 considered as an authentic trainee or qualified teacher Authenticity here, relates to  
24 whether black males racialised identities were in concert with the roles they  
25 inhabited, the extent to which it was necessary to differentiate one's social identity in  
26 order to disassociate from hegemonic perceptions of black males and the  
27 'additionality' that was needed in order to demonstrate professional standards. For  
28 Shawn, who qualified via an employment-based route to teaching, it was important to  
29 put effort into proactively demonstrating his abilities as a teacher as this was one  
30 way of garnering professional recognition:  
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38 Some might think ah... he's only here because he's black. He's the token  
39 black guy. So I thought I had to prove myself, that I was as worthy as them.  
40 You know...as clever as them. I did feel I had to prove that I wasn't there  
41 because I was black. I was a teacher first. At first I felt like that but towards  
42 the end I got  
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44 the respect from them.  
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48 For David, a newly-qualified teacher who obtained a PGCE from a prestigious  
49 teacher education institution, his authenticity as a trainee teacher was questioned by  
50 peers. He notes that "everyone said, you know. How did you...like you're kind of....  
51 on the outside". The question of whether he was 'in the right place' positions David  
52 *outside* of the academic sphere of learning and *outside* of his role as a trainee  
53 teacher. Both Shawn and David are othered, their presence considered a form of  
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3 affirmative action or constructed as imposter whose “outsider” status is created in the  
4 minds of those whose perceptions of what it means to be a teacher do not extend to  
5 the bounds of race.  
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8 Tyrone, on the other hand, an Early Years teacher who taught in the area where he  
9 grew up, worked hard to resist and disassociate himself from popular caricatures of  
10 black males. Tyrone went to great lengths to dress the part at his place of work and  
11 to be seen as different to other black men. Professional attire and deportment was  
12 one way of achieving this:  
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17 I’m the only person in school who wears a tie and trousers. The  
18 headteacher doesn’t wear a tie. I present myself in a way.... especially to  
19 let them know. That look. I’m a black guy but I’m a teacher first and  
20 foremost. That’s something I do.  
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24 ‘Dressing the part’ was a pragmatic strategy both to differentiate and disassociate  
25 himself from ‘other black guys’:  
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28 I think people are just going to look at me the way they just look at any  
29 other black guys from outside the barber shop with their baggy jeans and  
30 trainers and I think they’re going to see... that’s to say this is what you’re  
31 *really* like.  
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35 ‘I’m a teacher first and foremost. That’s something I do’, reflects Tyrone’s desire to  
36 present a teacher identity that is not inflected by race. He is acutely aware of the  
37 ways in which his racialised identity gains prominence, how he is judged by his  
38 colleagues but also how he is perceived in the community by black guys in baggy  
39 jeans. Tyrone resists the ascription of the ‘token black guy’ and uses agentic  
40 strategies in the form of dressing the part, to counter hegemonic discourses.  
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#### 48 *We need black male teachers*

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50 Participants were conscious that they were considered as assets in some schools. In  
51 contrast to the token black guy narrative Joshua, recognised that the scarcity of  
52 black male teachers resulted in some schools being more inclined to employ them  
53 than others:  
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3 I think people are ...depending on what school you go to...people are  
4 bending over backwards to get black male teachers, or competent Black  
5 male teachers. I'd say it depends on what school you do to.  
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8 Shawn too, considers his teaching post as being associated with the added value he  
9 offers. The area in which he works has a high ethnic-minority population and the  
10 local authority has been proactive in recruiting teachers who reflect the communities  
11 it serves:  
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15 I think the headteacher has chosen me because she sees my value. I'm  
16 valuable to her, that's why she headhunted me. I think it comes from  
17 knowing that because we need black teachers in schools right here in  
18 [name of local area].  
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22 The extracts above speak to a narrative which emphasises a need to recruit black  
23 male teachers solely on the basis of a racialised and gendered identity. For Joshua,  
24 this is secondary to his capability as a teacher. In a similar vein, Charles agrees that  
25 more black male representation is beneficial. His rationale is similarly constructed by  
26 the view that, as a teacher, the capacity to carry out the role to a high standard is  
27 critical:  
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33 I do believe that we need to have more black men in the professions –  
34 period. I don't believe that we need to have black men in there for us to  
35 see role models. When a young kid wants to be a footballer, he doesn't  
36 look at black footballers, he looks at the best footballers. People don't say  
37 I want to find a black businessman, they say I want to be Bill Gates, I want  
38 to be Steve Jobs.  
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43 Charles was clear that his race was not the only aspect of identity, 'I identify  
44 myself as a black man but the way I live my life is as a competitor. I do that  
45 because I don't want the fact that I am black to be an issue in any decisions I  
46 choose to make'. Charles is aware of the power of an ascribed identity stating  
47 that 'they're going to put you in that category'.  
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54 *I had to come and see you*  
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3 Perhaps one of the areas where racialised and gendered identities are most  
4 apparent is in the realm of perception. Participants were acutely aware of how  
5 societal representations of black males affected their day-to-day lives in schools.  
6 Wayne a privately educated, Graduate Teacher Programme trainee spoke about the  
7 way in which he was 'policed' and 'monitored' due to a presumption that he was  
8 "yard man" (a person who lives in a deprived area and involved in criminality). His  
9 classed identity was elided and unrecognised by colleagues. Earl too, recounted how  
10 the perception of the angry black man was ascribed:  
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16 I spoke earlier about people in my school feeling threatened by be.  
17 Whenever I disagreed about anything or had had a conversation with  
18 someone when we weren't on the same page it was always reported that  
19 I was angry. It's quite frustrating when people tell you how you feel.  
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24 He goes on to state:  
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26 I understand now it was about fear and it was a lack of understanding. I  
27 feel as black males we are misunderstood. The vast majority of the  
28 population do not have interactions with us socially or personally. What is  
29 perpetuated in the media, film, the news, Crimewatch is one of aggression  
30 or violence, intimidation, criminality and so forth.  
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35 The racialised stereotype of the angry black man is a recurrent theme in the lives of  
36 black males. Writing on the implications of gendered racism in the workplace,  
37 Wingfield (2005:201) posits the view that:  
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41 For Black professional men, experiences with gendered racism also took the  
42 form of encounters with controlling images, though not the ones Collins (1990,  
43 2004) describes. Instead, they faced a new controlling image - that of the  
44 "angry Black man". The existence of these controlling images also structures  
45 the ways in which Black professionals - both men and women - respond to  
46 encounters with gendered racism.  
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51 The perception of a black male teacher extends beyond the purview of those  
52 who work in schools and may also include parents. Joshua recalls a meeting  
53 with the parent of a white pupil in his class during teaching practice. The school  
54 is located in a predominantly white area and this is reflected in the staff. Joshua  
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3 was one of three males and the only black teacher. He comments that  
4 'everywhere I go I feel that the way I look, and I've been told – until somebody  
5 gets to know me, I am intimidating. I'm 6ft 3, I've got [dread] locks which I'm not  
6 going to cut for the sake of it'. He described an occasion where the children  
7 were being dismissed at the end of the day. Unexpectedly a mother of a child  
8 ran up to him announcing:  
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13 I had to come and see you. My daughter came home and she told me that  
14 this big black guy with really big hair was working in her classroom and I  
15 had to come and see. It's really nice meeting you. All of the kids are  
16 talking... the way they talk, there's nothing malicious.  
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20 Referring to 'this big black guy' reveals a desire to meet Joshua which is not  
21 necessarily concerned with his ability to teach (would she have wanted to meet her  
22 child's teacher if he had been described as 'a big white guy'?) but with his racialised  
23 and gendered identities - as well as his physicality. By putting her child's (as well as  
24 the other children's) 'talk' in context it has allayed the parent's fears and ostensibly  
25 puts her at ease. Such daily seemingly normal interactions can, it may be construed  
26 as microaggressions, everyday verbal and non-verbal communications that snub,  
27 slight or insult intentionally or unintentionally. Microaggressions are specifically targeted  
28 at those who are from marginalised groups – in this case black males. Rollock (2012:  
29 517) describes racial microaggressions as 'subtle and insidious, often leaving the  
30 victim confused, distressed and frustrated and the perpetrator oblivious of the  
31 offense they have caused'. An alternative explanation is what Newman (2005) terms  
32 "identity bruising", a form of "knock-back" that takes place in the work of men in  
33 primary schools and occurs when one's sense of identity is ascribed by another.  
34 Whilst not referring specifically to race, "identity bruising" take many forms:  
35 including, the perception that men are good role-models, that there may be  
36 something sinister about men who choose to work with children (particularly those in  
37 the early years) and that some men embody a "thug identity".  
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## 52 **Summary and Conclusion**

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54 This paper highlights the experiences of black male teachers in England. The men  
55 presented in this paper whilst sharing similar racialised and gendered identities  
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3 experienced learning in professional contexts in a variety of ways. They were  
4 conscious that they were in demand and, at the same time, a scarce resource and  
5 went to additional lengths to foreground their capabilities as teachers.  
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8 Examining black men's experiences through the lenses of CRT and intersectionality  
9 highlights the salience of race in the professional and personal lives of the teachers  
10 and the ways in which they negotiate their racialised and gendered identities in  
11 schools. The study indicates that black male teacher identities are affected by  
12 negative assumptions and stereotypes and which may impact on judgements made  
13 about their positionality in schools. Notwithstanding, these men adopt a range of  
14 strategies to counter negative or stereotypical perceptions and deploy agentic  
15 strategies to foreground their teacher identity and the contributions they make to  
16 learning and teaching. Research in the US indicates there is much that can be learnt  
17 from black male teachers, with regard to the ways that race, gender and class are  
18 experienced prior to and post qualification; how their experiences may be impacted  
19 by employment-based or university-based training routes and, whether dominant role  
20 modelling discourses might influence black men's day-to-day experience in school.  
21 Attention to the ways in which schools might engage in "double-talk", a situation that  
22 creates the conditions which position black males as needed but a rare, elusive  
23 resource, is a useful starting point, one which moves beyond a unitary  
24 conceptualization of what it means to teach while male and black.  
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