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"If she runs away, I'll get to whip her": Anti-Black Humour and Stereotyping in School

Abstract:
This paper theorises empirical findings from a school in the north of England in order to contribute to theoretical understandings of racial microaggressions, particularly micro-assaults. In so doing, the paper argues that during the teaching of Black History, micro-assaults were articulated as racist humour and stereotyping, to increase tolerance for disparaging Black people and for justifying their unequal treatment. White teachers and their students were complicit in engaging in anti-Black racist humour and stereotyping, but from a Critical Race perspective, the paper argues that Black students' participation is best understood as a coping mechanism for reducing Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as a consequence of Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (MEES).

Keywords: *racist humour; stereotyping; critical race theory; racial microaggressions; History curriculum; racial battle fatigue*

Introduction

The largely ethnographic, qualitative data that explores the experiences of Black children in British schools, sheds light upon the permanence of teacher stereotyping. These stereotypes, by largely White teachers who play a pivotal role in the academic trajectory of their pupils, are based on cultural signifiers such as hairstyles, students' use of creole/patois, clothing, walking styles and musical taste, ostensibly presenting a challenge to their authority (Youdell 2003; Tomlinson 2008). Researchers have been careful to illuminate the nuances associated with racialised-gendered stereotypes of Black girlhood (loud, bossy) and Black boyhood (aggressive, physically intimidating) and, reveal that teachers' stereotypes exist as early as primary school (Wright, 1992; Connolly 1994, 1998; Nehaul 1996; Crozier and Dimmock 1999) and persist throughout secondary school (Sewell 1997; Blair 2001; Rollock 2007; Gosai 2009; Maylor et al. 2009; Vincent et al. 2013; Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2018; Chapman and Bhopal 2019; Joseph-Salisbury 2020). Based on Anglocentric

cultural interpretations of behaviour these assumptions have a direct impact on teachers' perceptions and responses to Black students' behaviour (Graham 2016). Black students therefore face increased levels of disciplinary sanctions and surveillance, and lower academic expectations. This is irrespective of social class background (Gillborn et al. 2012). As Crozier explains "the downward spiral of underachievement does not start with the child himself/herself, but it is the pathological view of the Black, or in this case African Caribbean child, that is so embedded within the school institution that conspires against his or her success" (2005, 596).

Black students have reported different, racialised experiences of studying the history curriculum at compulsory school levels (Traille 2006; Author 2017) and this is reflected by a dearth of students of African descent studying history beyond the compulsory level (Royal Historical Society 2018). These differences in experience are the result of a hostile racial climate being cultivated by structural and interpersonal forces that position Blackness as victim and Black History as non-British. The Key Stage 3[1] History curriculum may ostensibly provide the space for teachers to integrate Black History, but this structural ambivalence – itself a racist act – towards mandating it assumes (majority) white teachers: 1) have had racial literacy training during their initial teacher training, and continuing professional development for approaching diverse histories and diversity in the classroom; 2) know where to find the resources to teach the content; 3) are afforded the time to adapt content to their lessons, and 4) believe Black History to be relevant for all pupils irrespective of the school's demographics. Without an awareness of how structural and interpersonal racism can impact students of African descent, it remains under-researched how they cope (or not) with it or how they might mitigate its effects.

This paper does not seek to suggest that progress is not being made: indeed, positive changes to an examination board has included the topic '*Migrants to Britain, c.1250 to*

[1] In England, curricula content and assessments are split into Key Stages from 1-5. Students studying subjects at Key Stage 3 are aged between 11-13 years old. More information can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum

present[2]', which aims to provide a more historically balanced narrative of Britain's multicultural past and present for students taking their final History examinations at aged 16. Additionally, the Runnymede Trust, a leading race equality think-tank, in collaboration with distinguished academics at the University of Manchester and the University of Cambridge launched the website *Our Migration Story.* And very recently, a report by The Black Curriculum was published to encourage the embedding of Black British History across all UK schools by creating resources, syllabi and visiting schools to support teachers (2020).

However, of the 498,100 teachers in state-funded secondary schools following the National Curriculum, 86.2% of teachers self-identify as White British, 1.6% as White Irish and 3.8% as any other White background (Department for Education 2018a). Consequently, teachers that choose to engage with Black History (numbers currently unknown) could draw upon largely inherited material or their *interpretation* of what should be taught, cultivating the potential for Black History to be informed by culturally racist stereotyping and racist humour. If there is no stipulated structural guidance for teaching it, these attitudes can all too easily and uncritically become part of the official knowledge taught to children in English schools. The question also needs to be asked: to what extent would students *choose to* study History beyond the compulsory level if their experiences are marred by racism? Figures from the Royal Historical Society (2018, 22) can in part answer that question because data at degree level reveal, "89% of students in Historical and Philosophical Studies are White, with 11% BME; this compares to 77.3% White and 22.7% BME for all subject cohorts."

This paper builds on previous research in race and education by demonstrating how racisms are collectively articulated through racialised stereotypes and racist humour. Specifically, this paper offers a fresh perspective to stereotyping and racist humour by using empirical data to explore how Black students *participate* in them as a coping strategy for minimising the effects of racial stress. That is, by centring the recipient of racism rather than

[2]Oxford Cambridge and RSA's approach to the topic on migration can be found here: https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/314536-migrants-to-britain-c.-1250-to-present-teachers-guide.pdf

the perpetrator, this paper demonstrates how 1) racist humour and stereotyping become uncritically used as a dominant mode of articulation in the current era of colour-blindness and, 2) centring the lived experience of recipients of racism provides a view outside of the "perpetrator's perspective" (Freeman 1995, xiv). A critical race perspective seeks to challenge taken-for-granted structures and processes resulting in unequal racial outcomes for people of colour – including negative experiences of education – outside of the perspective that inaccurately views racism as stemming from an irrational and ignorant few.

This paper is divided into three parts, the first provides a review of the literature on racist stereotyping and racist humour in English schools, followed by an account of the methodology and methods employed at the research school, Limehart Secondary School (a pseudonym), and the empirical data demonstrating examples of these instances. Lastly, the paper theorises Black students' participation as a coping strategy for occupying hostile spaces and reducing racial battle fatigue.

Racist Humour and Stereotyping of Black Children in English Schools

The reaction of Black children to racist stereotyping and racist humour in the literature is limited but compelling. They point to a range of defensive moves to counter or minimise racist harm, such as working doubly hard to be better than their teachers' expectations of them (Chapman and Bhopal 2019); drawing on cultural responses to teacher hostility and restore self-respect (Wright 2010); rejecting the function of schooling (Sewell 1997); subverting the traditional teacher as powerful, student as powerless relationship (Wright, Weekes and McGlaughlin 2000); or "resist[ing] within accommodation" (Mac an Ghaill 1988; Mirza 1992). Other research-based literature centres on racist humour directed towards students from a minority ethnic background based on racist stereotypes or, to substantiate, construct and police (White) masculinities (Connolly 1998; Crozier and Dimmock 1999; Nayak and Kehily 2001; Nayak 1999; Thomas 2012; Author 2017).

An anthropological study that specifically looks at racist humour in schools, arrives uniquely at the conclusion that racist humour is cut off from wider institutional and

ideological racisms; therefore, "ethnic and racial differences are often the material from which banter and laughter are created, constituting a convivial sociality which manifests closeness at the same time as difference" (Reid 2015, 24). Using a game the students routinely played, '*Say No to Niggers'*, Reid suggests "interactions of humour and laughter enabled peers to address their differences . . . lightly – to address serious subjects playfully and so to 'make fun of' what could potentially divide and distance them" (24-25). For context about the game, Reid writes,

> The Sixth Formers had just been given a new common room, much bigger than the old one, and freshly decorated. 'It was really big and nice and new and we wanted to keep it that way'. The pupils called a meeting about how they would keep it in good order. Their debates got evermore heated only cooling when someone was inspired to invent a game based on the purpose of the meeting. The pupils divided themselves into two teams. If a member of one team saw a member of the other team making a mess they were allowed to tackle them, 'A bit like tag-team wrestling', says Blair (white, America [sic]). 'The thing is, when we divided into teams we realised it was like, sort of a black team and a white team, so that became part of the banter, someone made up this name and it kind of stuck'. 'So what does SNTN stand for?', I ask. 'Say no to negroes', she answers in a rushed, embarrassed way. Alice (white), listening in, corrects her: 'Don't you mean "say no to niggers?". 'I was trying to be polite,' explains Blair. 'The thing is' says Alice, 'We weren't being rude, 'cause it's all a joke' (38).

Reid's logic suggests that by using this game, students made fun out of racism; however, there are several problems with uncritically looking at racist humour outside of wider systems of power and structural disadvantage.

Firstly, the study of humour, particularly in sites purporting to be colourblind and equal opportunity must be taken seriously because "humour is far from trivial . . . [A] sociological analysis of humour can tell us much about how existing social relations are reaffirmed and normative social boundaries maintained" (Lockyer and Pickering 2008, 808-

809). Reid's overly positive assertion that humour, in this case anti-Black humour, has a positive impact on group relations ignores the ethical limits to it and does not pay specific attention to how racialised inequalities are maintained and reified within and outside classroom walls. As Lockyer and Pickering continue, "humour cannot be taken as a form of discourse or performance that is isolated from other discourses or from wider configurations of sociality and social relations" (817).

Secondly, for racist humour to be successful, it must be understood and this is achieved because society is structured in racially hierarchical ways – a product of White supremacy. This reveals the fallacy of students, in Reid's study, inverting racism to show its outdatedness. Rather, racist humour "plays a pernicious role in reinforcing systems of domination and inequality" (Sue and Golash-Boza 2013, 1595).

Lastly, there is a unique component to racism in the British context: that of cultural racism. As Weaver explains

> cultural racism is a racism that moves from 'gazing' at and categorising the distant 'other' towards categorising the space that the 'other' and her culture 'use up' . . . racism that is constructed with the use of referents of cultural difference rather than, or building on, embodied racial difference, and expresses the urge to keep cultures apart (2011a, 51).

Therefore, the game *Say No to Niggers* urges this separation of Black and White pupils in order to keep the common room clean and tidy.

Thus, drawing on a critical race analysis of racist stereotyping and racist humour is useful for countering the assumptions in previous academic studies which portray Black children's negative experiences of schooling to be a consequence of 'a few bad apples' (Foster 1990; Foster et al. 1996). This logic individualises and localises the problem of racism to particular schools or teachers, rather than viewing these attitudes and behaviours as symptomatic and reflective of wider structural discrimination. Indeed, *all* teachers are

capable of perpetuating racist stereotypes and humour within an education system that has an explicit absence of race from policy (Gillborn 2005) and does not mandate the teaching of Black History (Department for Education 2013). Individualising racism removes institutional and state culpability, because the individual cannot be detached from wider, structural forces; as Wright argues, "White teachers' constructions of Black girls and boys related to wider constructions of femininity, masculinity and as classed subjects is linked to normative whiteness" (2010, 313).

The few studies that explore how Black students *participate* actively in racist stereotyping and humour, not as a form of self-hatred, but as a coping strategy – a temporary and fleeting moment of reprieve – for minimising a hostile space are mostly drawn from the American context (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 2004; Petroni 1970). Literature on stereotyping in the British context highlights teachers' stereotypes or, non-Black students' stereotypes towards Black students. This paper offers a departure informed by a critical race analysis to put forth a theoretical argument that suggests, irrespective of the intentionality of *individual* actors within a school setting "structural determinants of material conditions provide the frame through which institutional processes and practices at the meso level are enacted" thereby legitimising interactions also at the micro level (Phillips 2011, 177). This does not mean individual White teachers are the only ones that may understand and enact racist stereotypes and humour in the classroom, but rather, all persons within the school environment enter with an awareness of "political, media and popular discourses addressing race/ethnicity, inequality and racism . . . [contributing] to common-sense understandings of social life, which inform processes of micro-level racialisation" (177). Put simply, anti-Black racism at a political and ideological level, legitimises and cultivates opportunities for anti-Black racism to be enacted within school classrooms making for a hostile and stressful environment for Black pupils. Those Black students who participated in recounting racist stereotypes or humour did so as they were reflecting and reflected by wider racist society.

In sport, Hylton (2018) explores the use of racialised humour by Black coaches to lessen or disrupt racism's impacts, and the ways in which it can strategically empower their

voices. The findings revealed that humour provided a "relief from tension, psychic harm and a strengthening of a group" (340). As Hylton explains "humour can be used to handle and disrupt unpalatable experiences of racism . . . [therefore] the use of racialised humour as offence and defence is complex and requires further examination (328). The articulation of humour as coping or humour as defence against harm is similarly supported by Wilkins and Eisenbraun who argue

> Laughter and humor are instinctive coping mechanisms that help people deal with the disappointments and struggles of life. Specifically, it is believed that by finding humour in stressful or potentially threatening situations, people can replace negative with positive affect, thereby giving them an increased ability to cope with negative states of affairs. Humor based on incongruities or things that appear inappropriate for their context, is particularly well-suited to reappraising negative situations from different, less threatening perspectives (2009, 349).

The structural inaction towards mandating Black History and the subsequent positioning of Blackness as deficit in the classroom is an example of structural mundane, extreme, environmental stress as I show next.

Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress and Racial Battle Fatigue

The concept of 'racial microaggressions' was first defined and developed by African American psychiatrist, Chester M. Pierce. Working with African-American communities, Pierce argues that racism is a system of control guiding the lives and experiences of African-Americans, who, in response develop race-related stress conditions. In historically White spaces, such as schools and workplaces, Black people are exposed to mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES) (Pierce 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1995). *Mundane* refers to the everyday, taken-for-granted experiences of African-Americans that are *extreme* because their experiences have psychological and physiological consequences; *environmental* refers to the readiness of environments – including institutional, cultural and policy practices – to

aim against the Black male presence in particular; and *stressful* because time that could be spent engaging in creative or professional endeavours is consumed by finding survival techniques to deal with various acts of racism (Smith, Hung and Franklin 2011, 64).

Traditional race research, exploring overt and gross acts of racism directed towards minority groups, exhibits inherent operational prejudices that sustain the marginalisation of these groups because the dominator is mostly ignored from the object of study. The gap in anti-racist work for the English education system has been the lack of connecting micro-level racism to wider structural and ideological racism. A lack of this congruent link between micro and macro means that in academic research, the recipient of racism is targeted to be "understood, helped, analysed, categorized, altered, and controlled" (Pierce 1995, 278). This paper is particularly timely as fixed (4,565) and permanent (25) exclusions of students for racist behaviour have increased since the previous year according to statistics from the Department for Education (2018b) as well as evidence of schools pressuring families to home-school children in order to reduce their exclusion statistics (The Independent, 2018). Worryingly, a Black mixed-race pupil at a primary school in the south-east of England attempted suicide after sustained racist bullying (Metro.co.uk, September 2019).

Dealing with structural racism (anti-Black curricula; exclusions) and interpersonal racism (racial microaggressions; bullying) is stressful and can result in fatigue. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) is a set of psychological, physiological and/or behavioural responses to encountering racial microaggressions. Smith, Allen and Danley explain, such responses include "frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attitudes; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies (2007, 552)."

Participation in racist stereotyping and humour is one way students of African descent might mitigate against the racialised climate underpinned by racial microaggressions, when studying history at Key Stage 3. Of course, not all Black students will engage in this behavioural response, but this paper has identified instances of where this has happened. According to Franklin (2019, 4), "when studying racism-related stress and

resulting racial battle fatigue it is critically important to investigate buffers or defences that attenuate the harmful impact of stress on both mental and physical health . . . coping is the mechanism by which individuals understand, reframe, or react to events". This paper contributes to the behavioural component of RBF by suggesting that *participation* – in anti-Black racism – is another such response and coping strategy.

Aim of study

The aim of the research was to explore Key Stage 3 (KS3) students' experiences of Black History Month (BHM) and Black History (BH) with a particular focus on African and Caribbean students in two English secondary schools. The study is underpinned by critical race methodologies, specifically critical race ethnography and counter-narratives. Critical race methodologies are underpinned by the following assumptions: in societies saturated by white supremacy, even methodological approaches can be underpinned by deficit assumptions about particular groups; therefore, using alternative frameworks from the established, Eurocentric perspective privileges multiple ways of knowing (Dunbar Jr. 2008); educational institutions are not colour-blind spaces underpinned by equal opportunities and meritocracy, rather they are colour-conscious, deeply racialised spaces, which cultivates a racial climate; therefore people of colour are authentic holders of knowledge in terms of their experiences living under hierarchically racialised conditions (Yosso 2005). Thus, this paper focuses on illustrating Black students' experiences of Black History in Limehart Secondary School fracturing the colour-blind discourse that the History curriculum encourages an appreciation of cultural reference points and social cohesion (Royal Society or the Arts 2009).

At Limehart Secondary School, a state-funded school in the north of England, I spent the course of a term (three months), observing and interviewing students and three history teachers in two classes. Firstly, I conducted participant observations during BHM/BH lessons and events with data collated in a field-note journal. Two History classes (Class 1 and Class

2) and one E-Baccalaureate[3] class (students were 14-15 years old) was observed. The data was analysed using thematic analysis using a critical race framework. Secondly, I conducted focus groups and interviews with students and their history teachers – a total of 25 students and 3 history teachers participated in this study. The data was analysed using narrative analysis because it "allows for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning" (Riessman 2001, 706). These methods were employed to answer the following research questions: 1) what current institutional pedagogies for teaching BHM/BH; 2) what do KS3 students and their history teachers understand the purpose of BHM/BH to be; 3) how do students of African and Caribbean descent experience BHM/BH and, 4) to what extent Black students have individual or collective agency to determine the approach to BHM/BH. This paper focuses on the third research question as humour and stereotyping was an unintended finding under the broader theme: racial microaggressions, and the data is derived from Class 1 where there were two Black boys and one Black mixed-race girl. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Racist stereotyping

Class 1.

Topic of lesson: Life on a plantation

Kevin (the teacher) puts on a video 'Slavery and Plantation'
Video is played in a minor key, shows images of "resident labourers" who are Black enslaved people shackled.

Bushra (South Asian): Sir, I don't wanna watch this, it's horrible the way they're treated, I don't like it.

Kevin: What is horrible about it? Explain? How do you know how they were treated?

Keisha (Black mixed-race): Why is it *not* horrible?

[3] Further information on this type of subject – available to students who will be sitting their final examinations in secondary school – can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc

Kevin: STOP! We need to watch to understand how it was horrible. It's *just* about slavery and plantations okay?! You'll be doing a film and role-play.

Students: Noooo…

Class: Yes! Boom!

Kevin: It says, it's because of their primitive lifestyles, what does that mean?

Aaron (Black Caribbean): **Is it because they lived in huts?**

Kevin: Yes, what are you comparing it to?

Aaron: **Europe**.

Kevin: Yes.

Ibrahim (South Asian): Because they had dark skin, white people thought they were hard workers.

Kevin: Yes, hard workers, but they also thought they were easy pickings and less intelligent. Now I can reel off a list of names of people from Africa who were *he whistles* top notch (pointing to his head).

The video is paused on a Black man tied up, lying on the ground; Kevin says, "not nice". Kevin shows the image of an enslaved person with torture equipment around his ankles and neck and says "it can't run fast [because the equipment] slows them down perfectly." One student has her hands in her ears and she is told to remove them.

Discussion

Micro-assaults are conscious, verbal or non-verbal expressions of racism (Sue et al. 2007) and the risk of viewing the (racist) individual as just one bigoted person means that White people are framed as innocent of their racist practices. Put another way, White people are not unaware of the attitudes and practices that marginalise Black people, and the various benefits and advantages they accrue by virtue of being White. I draw on Leonardo's myth of White innocence (2009) to argue that Kevin is entirely aware of his racialised position in the classroom, but also in society, and therefore he is able to use this position of power to silence critical dialogue on racism, refer to the enslaved man as 'it', and trivialise enslavement to 'just' slavery. Kevin is fully aware of the racial hierarchy in which he lives, works and benefits.

Therefore, the findings suggest racism is deeply embedded within the structures of schooling. This is because individual racism is a fallacy as it is a reflection of group power and wider structural-ideological racism, supporting Essed's concept of everyday racism (1991). In this example, Kevin extracts key moments from the video he would like discussed further (African's "primitive lifestyle"), affirming to Aaron that he is correct in comparing this to Europe (read: White) and the racist trope of deficit understandings about Black bodies return by suggesting enslaved people were physically superior but intellectually *inferior*. Aaron's participation by making comparisons with Europe, though led by Kevin's questioning, suggests that the world in which they both inhabit, contain conscious and unconscious assumptions that Europe (civilised) and Africa (uncivilised) are easily demarcated spaces. To tell or be able to make such a comparison is achieved because society is saturated with racism – a by-product of White supremacy. Indeed, this is keenly supported by Kevin in this example especially, as the focus is on demarcating the civilised (White) from the uncivilised (Black) and on repeating through a video and class discussions, the inhumane treatment faced by enslaved African people rather than the White racial ideology underpinning chattel enslavement. The Black male body tied and laying on the ground in the video, and the student's visceral reaction to seeing it, serves also to contribute to a racialised, stressful environment (Pierce 1975a).

Racist humour

Class 1.

Topic of lesson: Life on a plantation

Aaron (Black Caribbean) is watching football on his iPad. What's hilarious is that he's right at the front of the class; he turns and spots me, I widen my eyes and shake my head. He gives me a cheeky smile and turns it off. His smile suggested feeling comfortable enough with me to demonstrate that he found his iPad more engaging than the lesson – and that I would show my silent agreement by not informing the teacher.

The groups with Aaron: he's the overseer. The slave owner is South Asian; the other three slaves are South Asian and one White. All students could choose a role themselves. ***Aaron is speaking with an African accent with the self-chosen African name Kwako Obaka is shouting,***

"Do your job or I'll get into trouble"

with a ruler in his hand. *The slave owner is loving this. He's hitting his fellow students with rulers. A South Asian girl group is watching, laughing. "It's funny, sir" one student says, to which Kevin, the teacher replies,* "yes" *and walks off.*

David (Black African) is in the other group and he is the overseer. He takes pleasure in telling me,

"If she [points to dual heritage girl, Keisha] runs away, I'll get to whip her".

Kevin is giving a stiff (private) talk to David about something I've missed. David, is fuming. Kevin writes on his report card and David walks around class.

All the while, Aaron is shouting in his faux African accent. David walks to the back of the room and the teacher says to him, "come on, let's do some work". He's angry and sits down. Kevin winds down the group work and plays the film Roots; all students sit and watch.

Discussion

This example provides an explicit illustration of an environment underpinned by a racial climate whereby anti-blackness through humour – even by Black and other racial minorities - is permissible and sanctioned. Humour, during what is meant to be the cultivation of empathy for enslaved persons is one such example of a response that is inappropriate for their context according to Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009). It is important to state here that Black student participation was not on the basis of internalised self-hatred, rather the classroom environment was geared towards positioning those who were enslaved as inferior and so it was *that version* of Blackness these students sought to distance themselves from, not a wholesale rejection of who they are.

Weaver (2007, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) provides a comprehensive account, analysing racist humour and the rhetorical techniques within which these jokes operate. This discussion will not explore these various types, but instead use Weaver's analysis of the dual logic of racist humour (2011b), to focus on the culturally racist humour found in the research. Cultural racism used in racist humour is a type of everyday language that contains deficit understandings about Black people based upon cultural codes of their inferiority. Similarly, Black participation in this racist humour is a type of approval thereby granting them peripheral "acceptance, status, and social capital in primarily White networks" Yosso et al. (2009, 762). The classroom has thereby become a hostile racialised space in which Africans could be humiliated and the history of chattel enslavement imitated using rulers and props.

Weaver argues these codes are forms of cultural, or embodied racism rather than the traditional, biological/scientific racism. The extant stereotypes that appear in jokes explicitly or implicitly connect intelligence to genetics, biology or race and juxtapose with reference to physicality – all of which give the depictions a distinct embodied dimension (672). Husband (1988) supports this assertion, arguing that British humour based on race is culturally racist and underpinned by uneven binary positions. In this example, it is the powerful slave owner versus the powerless enslaved African. Culturally racist humour allows the joke-teller to escape the repression of ordinary, rational speech in which racist sentiments or words are regarded socially, and lawfully, as unacceptable.

Unique in this example is the participation of Black students in using a mock-African accent and the fun expressed (by David) in abusing a 'slave'. I suggest such behaviours are a temporary reprieve from a hostile space that permits the use and abuse of Black bodies, allowing Black students to occupy a powerful position normally not afforded to them. Contrast this sharply with the telling off David receives by Kevin, which demonstrates the fleeting nature of temporary acceptance: a reminder that he is a Black boy and a quick, sharp reminder of his powerlessness with the use of the report card.

Black participation as a coping strategy for MEES and racial battle fatigue

In both examples, Black students experienced micro-assaults during the teaching of Black History as it centred around enacting enslavement and reinforcing the ideology of White supremacy and Black inferiority. David, during an interview with Aaron after the observations of Black History, confessed to me that he has suffered racist abuse, he said, “sometimes people can be racist to me, but once they find out [about Black History], they'll probably not be racist anymore.” When I pressed for an example, David explained, “Once, someone called me a black bitch, so I went and said, if you're calling me a Black bitch, well, that's my own… I'm proud to be a black person. What about you, are you proud to be your own colour? That's what I said, once”.

However, Black students also participated in racial stereotyping and racist humour and I argue this participation is perhaps best understood as a coping mechanism for occupying a racist classroom space in which Black History, Africa/Africans are routinely ridiculed and disrespected. Their participation was not frequent, but it did occur, which suggests that even for a temporary while, the cross over to being the ‘same’ rather than being associated with primitivity was an attractive pursuit.

I wanted to discuss the humour underpinning some of the ‘life on a plantation’ performances I observed, and thus, whether re-enactments should continue. Both Aaron and David were adamant that the use of humour by non-Black students was inappropriate and contributed to environmental stress and racial battle fatigue. As they explained,

> *“Yes [they should], if people have to find out the truth, yes, but the thing is, I don't want people laughing, because if it was them in that position, they would not be laughing, they would be crying their eyes out” (David).*

> *“I think that wasn't bad, actually, like if they [students] just stopped the joking around. They don't really have to change anything about the performance, but they just like, stop making jokes and see the seriousness of why we were doing it, and if*

they would just like… All the stuff we were using, if like, the rulers for whips and that remote for that thing where you burn them…

The researcher: *The branding?*

Yes. If you actually place in your head the actual pictures, they're not going to be laughing" (Aaron).

Ironically, they were not conscious of their participation because this articulation of racism is so embedded and every day, it becomes unseen and unremarkable - just part of the fabric of spaces in which students inhabit and negotiate relationships. Racist humour and stereotyping are forms of 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991) whereby "individuals may be more compelled to indulge in the 'forbidden fruit' of racism, in an ostensibly post-racial society, via 'fun' and 'humour' to circumvent perceived constraints on racist discourse more generally" (Pèrez 2017, 957). Thus, empirical data in this paper fractured the colour-blind discourse in education, suggesting instead, that classrooms are colour conscious spaces and race and racism shape everyday conversations, reinforcing "everyday and systemic forms of white supremacy" (957).

Performing slavery, life on a plantation and mock slave auctions are forms of subtle and overt racism particularly when other historical tragedies of a similar magnitude are not acted out or interspersed with racist humour, but sensitively approached and made legitimate through the History curriculum. These behaviours are reflective of the adaptive techniques Black people must use to minimise the harm of racial microaggressions. Moreover, Smith, Allen and Danley assert that societal ideologies about Black inferiority legitimises the social conditions under which they encounter microaggressions and thus, Racial Battle Fatigue is the result of "constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional coping with racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments (campus or otherwise)" (2007, 555). Racial Battle Fatigue is a very real psychological consequence for ethnic minorities living under an uncertain, precarious and in some cases, dangerous racial climate (Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000). This includes self-doubt, frustration, isolation, discouragement and exhaustion, and physiological symptoms including headaches, high blood pressure and fatigue (Harwood et

al. 2015). This paper adds to the current literature on coping strategies by suggesting that participation is also one such strategy for some Black students.

Conclusion

The paper contributes to theoretical understandings of racial microaggressions and specifically, micro-assaults to shed light on the school classroom environment being colour-conscious rather than colour-blind spaces, and the History curriculum being racially hierarchical rather than socially cohesive. Indeed, racisms are collectively articulated through the forbidden fruits of racist stereotyping and humour – and this includes being understood and articulated by Black students – where race is reified and the Black body inflicted with frightened images of primitivity. Drawing on racial battle fatigue and MEES, this paper acknowledges that the articulation of anti-Blackness by Black children is not equal to their White peers or White teachers and there is an emotional and psychological cost for doing so. Additionally, Black students do not possess both racial prejudice *and power* as their White counterparts, but rather this participation was a coping strategy for gaining temporary acceptance in a hostile White space. Not all Black students participated in racist humour and stereotyping, but the articulation of anti-Black racism by Black students as a coping strategy is a useful area for further research – as well as the impact on their sense of self and academic work.

This paper offers a fresh perspective to the literature on race and education in schools as it centres the recipient of racism and sheds light upon the ways in which Black students survive a hostile space, and cope on an individual level. Without a structural commitment to Black History, racist tropes can all too easily and unquestioningly become part of the official knowledge. The privileging of normative whiteness through the removal of Black History at a structural level, as argued in this paper, means that teachers are legitimised in cultivating racialised spaces through the curriculum.

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TBC

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