



The Psychosocial Cost of “Nameism” in Culturally Blind Learning Environments

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a study on Black name-identity threat in predominantly white classroom settings. Drawing from semi-structured phenomenological interviews and framed by self-concept theory and symbolic interactionism theory, the current research explored how former students with distinctively black names perceived nameism in the classroom and how these perceptions colored their learning experiences. Findings suggest a power-perception dichotomy, forced chameleon effect, and name-identity hyperconsciousness became factors that impacted student self-conception. Implications for pedagogic practices that account for name-identity threats using a visual representation of student experiences with nameism are discussed. This paper aligns with the mission of the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education (AABHE) to advance equity and inclusive excellence by centering Black students’ lived experiences and illuminating how identity-based power dynamics shape educational environments. By examining nameism as a boundary-producing practice in the classroom, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to disrupt exclusionary norms in higher education.

Keywords: naming discrimination, distinctively black names, identity threat, implicit bias, social coding

Introduction

Choosing a child's first or "given" name is one of the most consequential decisions a parent will ever make. This admonition is averred in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes that the influence of a name begins from “the earliest moments of social being” (Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn, 2006, p. 3). When a parent bestows a first name on a child, the name gives form to the child’s presence in the world. While a name primarily serves as a personal identifier, it can also announce to others a child’s identity, culture, and community of origin. What a name means begins with what a child’s parents intended for the purpose of “converting ‘anybodies’ into ‘somebodies’”(Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn, 2006, p. 3, as cited in Geertz, 1973, p. 363).

However, what a name comes to mean outside the home and community can often mirror the effect of the Rorschach Inkblot, where sociocultural narratives are imposed on a name based on what the arrangement of letters and sounds conjures up in one’s mind, regardless of its actual or intended meaning. Research into name-identity threat revealed that job résumés with distinctively Black names, like Jamal or Keisha, were far less likely to result in a call back from potential employers than those with white-sounding names, like Greg or Emily (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003). Similar studies compared responses to email solicitations, bank loans, and rental applications, where inquiries with Black-sounding names held a greater chance of going unanswered, receiving a denial, or resulting in unfavorable terms when compared to those with white-sounding names (Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Hanson et al., 2016, p. 92; Block, Crabtree, Holbein & Monson, 2021). Additionally, study findings released by Shin et al. (2016) showed that mental health providers were less likely to make an online appointment with a user seeking

services when the inquirer's name was changed from "Lakisha" to "Allison," with all other aspects of the request being the same.

The question becomes to what extent name-identity threats occur undetected across a mainstream American society and its institutions? Also, how do people with ethnically identifiable names experience such threats when they are normalized to the point of invisibility? For people with distinctively Black names, the subtle nature of name-identity threat remains part of a larger narrative on Black identity suspended within an ethnocentric social order. Nuessel (1992) asserted, "Most people recognize that giving a name to a child is a significant social function with profound and lifelong consequences" (p. 10). In the following paper, I examine nameism, a blend of name and racism, as a consequential social reality for people with distinctively Black names.

Purpose of the Study

During the study, I aimed to address a persistent and insidious form of bias, discrimination, and hostility commonly acknowledged in research as an issue with macro-level implications. Nameism remains overlooked at the micro level, presumably given how difficult it is to divine the intentions of "opportunity gatekeepers", such as teachers and prospective employers, whose reactions to an ethnically identifiable name often go un verbalized (Gillums, 2025). The problem has become obscured by the subconscious nature of human behavior to adhere to social norms, including those motivated by bias and prejudice, when they occur largely beneath the surface of daily interactions. Even when bias-driven social norms were euphemized through seemingly altruistic ideals, such as colorblindness—or the virtue of seeing the absence

of blackness in a person as a positive—persisting attitudes toward distinctively Black names remain evidence of a society still in search of racial reconciliation.

In times past, this reconciliation occurred through enlightenment and a willingness to sit within the experiences of others with an open mind to what constitutes reality for those who live it. However, social harmony is neither static nor the presumed inheritance of the next generation, as each resets its own rules and norms. This investigation into nameism, specifically where name-identity threats begin and end as routine social realities for people with distinctively Black names, initiates within the present-day context of education.

National data show that a Black student in a predominantly white learning environment is statistically more likely to be assigned a white teacher than a teacher of color (“Race and Ethnicity,” 2020). By age 9 or 10, students become aware of their own racial groups’ status within the broader society and whether their group is in a position of power or disadvantage (Miller, 2019). While many children will never realize it during this phase of their development, the research also shows that students with distinctively Black names face the disproportionate risk of encountering name-identity threats well into their adulthood, which will impact their livelihoods, in most cases.

Setting the contextual framing for the study began with identifying the social setting where nameism tended to surface for the first time for people with distinctively Black names — in the classroom — which is also where identities in general first become influenced by authority figures outside one’s own community. While a person cannot change one’s skin color, she could influence how she is regarded based on the primary identifier bestowed on her by her parents. As language and cultural idiosyncrasies became less exclusive between race groups, changes in naming trends blurred the line between etymological indicators of Black identity, such as unique

names or unusual spellings of familiar names. Measuring the blackness of a name often became part of the calculation when deciding on a child’s leading lifelong identifier.

Over time, these calculations yielded names bearing varying levels of apparent blackness, with some distinctively Black names becoming more common in the American mainstream and thus less stigmatized than others based on whether they were racially assignable, exclusive, or unique, according to Cook, Logan, and Parman (2013), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Black Name Categories

Category	Definitions	Examples
Racially assignable	Names that seem black based on their disproportionate frequency among black children, with enough exceptions among other races to make them non-exclusive	Terrance, Jada, Darius, Monique
Exclusive	Names that are common primarily among a cohort of black children who were born during a given period	Deshaun, Ebony, Jamal, Imani
Unique	Highly uncommon names given only to one black child in a birth cohort, and thus deemed black by default	DeQuarius, JoQuisha, Trayvon, Sharonda

Cultural Blindness & Contributing Factors

Within an education context, cultural blindness has played a key role in creating the conditions for nameism to persist. The concept of cultural blindness was defined by the American Psychology Association as “[T]he inability to understand how particular matters might be viewed by people of a different culture because of a rigid adherence to ... one’s own culture” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). Using nationwide data on implicit bias, Chin et al. (2020) also found that most teachers held "slight" pro-white/anti-Black implicit bias that correlated with disparities in evaluations of students' academic performance and education attainment scores. Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes activated by the race and perceived socioeconomic status of students as indicators of academic potential. More pointedly, the study found that bias was strongly correlated with individual factors, such as identity, rather than commonly assumed situational contexts, such as socioeconomic status and student/teacher ratios. These findings help shape the ideal organizational context for studying nameism as it was experienced by people with distinctively Black names.

When implicit biases color teacher interactions with students, even if only perceived as having occurred, race-based assumptions can impede student potential regardless of background. Staats et al. (2017) cited a study that found implicit pro-White biases among teachers predicted Black students would score lower on test scores than White students solely based on the extreme suggestibility of race associations (p. 28). Quinn (2020) used a randomized Web-based experiment with 1,549 teachers to demonstrate how implicit bias surfaced through nameism. The study revealed that student writing samples randomly associated with a Black student were rated lower on average when compared to those signaling white authors. Research has also revealed how subtle or passive forms of hostility are often intellectualized into appearing non-racist when

patterns of prejudice become normalized into rational behavior (Arkes & Tetlock, 2004; Khan & Lambert, 2001).

Within this framing, interracially imbalanced education systems place the problem in a particular context that established the parameters for framing the pedagogic problem of practice at the heart of the study. For example, Figlio (2005) revealed the impact of name signaling, where a name hints at one's ethnicity and socio-economic background, by comparing social outcomes for cohabitated identical twins whose names varied in perceived racial identifiability. The study found that "Black sounding" names influenced different academic expectations from names that appeared white or ethnically neutral among teachers, all other conditions being equal. These results highlighted a uniquely particular, imprecise standard used to judge names at face value based on the aggregated taste of a white-centered mainstream. Once nameism became an embedded norm in everyday life, its manifestation became too abstract to detect at the micro level of analysis.

Whether or not a given educator's reactions to specific names can be proven motivated by bias or prejudice may be impossible to know for sure in most cases. Barnes (2001, as cited in Lawrence, 2005) highlighted the cross-cultural tensions created in the classroom when white teachers "operate with the privilege of whiteness and cultural norms that are oppressive to Black students" (pp. 27-28). Since educators wield the more significant interpretative influence in power dynamics involving interactions with students, they also have the power to decide whether an act would not have occurred but for bias, to include nameism. That said, the data beg the question of the extent to which the problem lies with inherent academic limitations of Black students from specific backgrounds or whether presumptions among teachers impose such limits.

Power imbalances often become an aggravating factor that gives rise to microaggressions, resulting in situations where the behavior is often excused, tolerated, or rationalized as a norm. Subtle hostilities and patterns of prejudice related to nameism are examples of microaggressions, a term coined by Harvard Medical School psychiatrist Dr. Chester Pierce (1974), who defined them as “Black-white racial interactions [that] are characterized by white put-downs, done in an automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion” (p. 515). Microaggressions can occur in one of three forms, the slightest being “microinsults” or subtle displays of disrespect toward another’s culture. Defined next are microinvalidations,” or actions that create feelings of exclusion in an individual. Finally, overt and deliberate encounters are defined as “micro-assaults” on one’s social identity whenever they occurred (Sue et al., 2007).

Table 2 outlines how the three forms of microaggression described herein might manifest through nameism under hypothetical circumstances within an interracial learning environment.

Table 2.

Name-related Microaggressions

Microinsults	Microinvalidations	Microassaults
Assuming a student has lower intelligence based on how “ghetto” a name appears to be	Assuming a student whose name is repeatedly mispronounced is exaggerating perceptions of racism	Deliberately, calling a student by an unwanted or derogatory name without regard for the harm it causes

Methodological Framework

Whether nameism was the root cause of tension between a teacher and a student or merely a symptom of a more significant social problem, the damage that perceptions of bias caused extended beyond a perceived slight. Brown (2015) found that students who had sensed discriminatory attitudes and behaviors in teachers were more likely to hold negative views on learning, show lower academic motivation, and feel excluded, which, according to Lewis (2018) can cause feelings of “invisibility in the narratives of their subjective sense of well-being” (p. 8). This can determine whether a student is motivated to take a critique for positive action or reject it (Cohen, Purdie-Greenaway & Garcia, 2011). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) called a student’s response to a perceived slight by authority figures the “threat appraisal” phase. During this phase, a targeted student will internalize the question, “Do I have the desire and ability to cope with this?”

Davidson (2000) prescribed phenomenology as the best means for locating unfiltered voices, examining human experiences through intersubjective perspectives, and interpreting the meanings for those who live them. Based on the preceding rationale, I utilized phenomenology to focus on “recognizing and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions” (Fossey et al., 2002). The next step entailed making a decision on which branch of phenomenology most aligned with the study’s aim. After reviewing the historical and contemporary literature on phenomenology as a methodological practice, I concluded my intention was not to resolve the complexity these conflicting approaches presented. Instead, I focused on demystifying how we understand what happens in the human consciousness when we redirect the why-something-occurs — perceptions of nameism in this case — from varying vantage points of experience.

Once I had selected the appropriate research methodology for the study, the central research questions that framed the inquiry evolved from the design process itself, starting with several foundational inquiries as a premise: What exactly am I seeking to discover about experiences with nameism? What will this discovery clarify? How will this clarification better the status quo? Accordingly, I narrowed the focus of the study to research questions that provided a pathway to investigate the phenomenon with clarity and focus beyond a yes/no response or easy-to-find facts. Doing so ensured that the study served as more than a mere synopsis of nameism. Based on these criteria, my research interest centered on what the study participants encountered, the results of the encounter, and the practical implications for pedagogy, as articulated in the following research questions:

Research Question #1: How do students with distinctively Black names perceive nameism in interracial classrooms?

Research Question #2: How do perceptions of nameism influence students' learning experiences in interracial classroom settings?

Research Question #3: How can educators mitigate the effects of nameism in their classrooms, given the subtlety of students' perceptions and experiences?

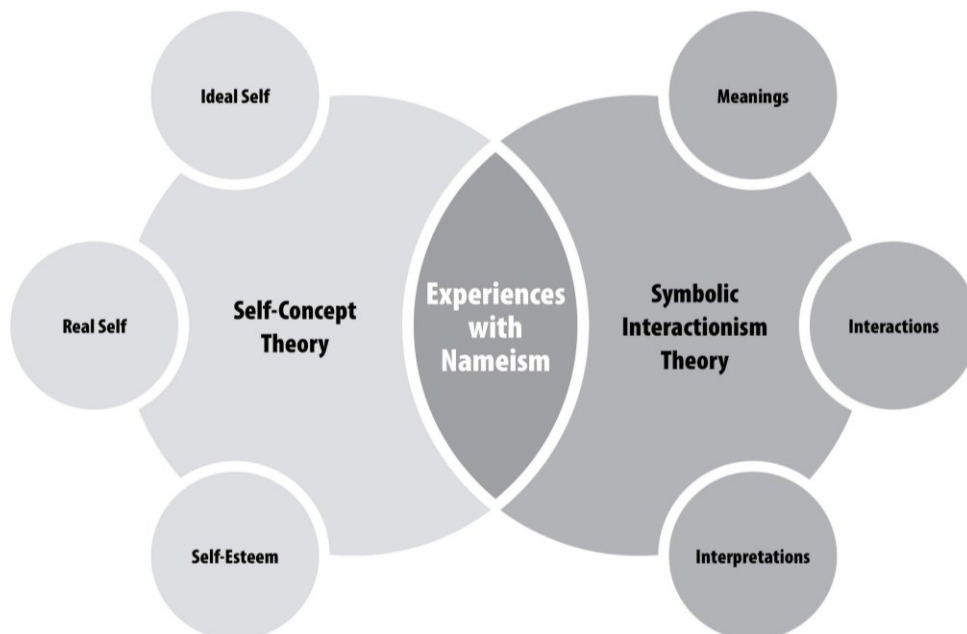
Theoretical Framing

Determining the most appropriate theories for a study framework required careful contemplation of how reality was constituted and how meanings were constructed. Doing so helped me understand what underpinned the phenomenon and how this influenced a general understanding of name-identity threat in its varied manifestations. Accordingly, I identified two theories that conceptually aligned with my approach to employing the study's phenomenological framework: self-concept theory, with its emphasis on real self, ideal, self, and self-esteem

(Rogers, 1961); and symbolic interactionism theory, which focuses on language, interactions, and interpretations (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986). Self-concept theory and symbolic interactionism theory share the “self” as a fundamental concept within an experience, with the difference being the mechanism of influence by which a person constructs their being within a given moment. The selected theoretical framework merged each theory's interrelated elements, with experiences with nameism forming a nexus between the two. Figure 1 illustrates the concentric relationship between the two theories relative to the phenomenon, followed by a description of each theory relative to the phenomenon under inquiry.

Figure 1.

Theory-based Concept of Experiences



Methods

Unlocking bounded experiences among study participants required methods, or research tools, that enabled me to capture and retain descriptions of the phenomenon while making space for interpretations of what the data suggested. Purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were the qualitative methods that I selected to achieve the study's phenomenological aims. Purposive sampling ensured participants fit the profile of people most likely to have encountered nameism in interracial learning environments because of their distinctively Black names. I was particularly interested in study candidates whose experiences consisted of the purest instances or most unusual variations of name-identity threat a X where the problem of practice appeared most acute.

My choice to employ a semi-structured approach was determined by my desire to obtain results that I could later compare across similar studies and my focus on understanding the phenomenon within a tight contextual framing. The sample was relatively homogeneous in the areas of ethnicity, education level, and approximate age. I considered each participant highly competent to discuss their relevant experiences with name-identity threats in the classroom after an initial "icebreaker" conversation with each. The moderate degree of structure for the interviews, such as similar questions asked of all participants in the same order, ensured that data saturation was not a moving target during the study. Table 3 outlines the demographic data on the study participants under anonymized distinctively Black names.

Table 3.

Demographical Profile of the Study Sample

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	PWS*
Terrell	Male	38	Black	Yes
Ebony	Female	26	Black	Yes
DeAndre	Male	39	Black	Yes
Nia	Female	32	Black	No
Jada	Female	22	Black	No
Imani	Female	35	Black	Yes

Note. Attended mostly predominantly white schools*

I integrated the interview focus areas into the framework developed by Høffding & Martiny (2015), whereby "phenomenological commitments" during the interview process ensured "the 'objects' studied are in fact 'subjects,' in the sense that they have consciousness and agency." In other words, unlike inanimate objects or animals, participants were positioned to "produce accounts of themselves and their worlds" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 97). I subsequently framed the interview script using Bevan's (2014) key concepts of the phenomenological interview process, as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4.*Phenomenological Interview Process*

Interview structure	Contextualization	Apprehend the phenomenon	Clarify the phenomenon
Researcher approach	Acceptance of participants' natural attitudes	Reflexive critical self dialogue	Active listening and engagement
Method	Descriptive questions and narratives	Focus on modes of appearing	Imaginative variation

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the data were collected, I qualitatively analyzed the results using phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. As with the semi-structured interview process, my analytical approach required me to engage the data initially with an open mind, in this case, while reviewing the transcripts and repeatedly listening to the participants' recorded descriptions of their experiences as often as necessary to ensure literal and contextual accuracy. Specifically, I sought to examine the connection between how study participants pre-reflexively "intended upon" the objects that comprised their experiences with nameism. Table 6 illustrates the framework for the phenomenological analysis undertaken during the study.

Table 6.

Framework for Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological Reduction	Eidetic Reduction	Universal Description
Horizons	Imaginative “possiblizing”	Essence of the phenomenon
Relevant meaning units		
Thematic clusters	Textural & structural descriptions	

Results

While the study results do not find their value in terms of their generalizability, that is not the goal of phenomenology. Within the specific context of each participant’s perceptions, each gave structure to their experiences that brought the common features into view, whether actual or possibly figmental. Each interpreted what was happening through the lens of their past experiences with nameism. The extent to which the thick, rich descriptions of their experience rang true (Shenton, 2004, p. 69) established the value of their voices as each brought to bear “abundant, interconnected details, and possibly cultural complexity” (Stake, 2010, p. 49) that surfaced key themes across the study sample. The value of my research centered on the extent to which I could draw connections between what participants disclosed and their experiences that were not situationally dependent. The boundedness of the study participants’ experiences across situational contexts revealed three main facets: power-perception dichotomy, forced-chameleon effect, and identity hyper-consciousness. Each key theme and their alignment with forms of racism, as defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics, are described below.

Key Themes

The study results led to several critical findings on the action research implications of power-perception dichotomy, forced chameleon effect, and name-identity hyper-consciousness.

Finding #1: Power-Perception Dichotomy. With no definitive assurance or confirmation of what motivated a teacher's intent, the answer was often lost between a teacher's authority and a student's perception of that authority relative to the discretion to insult one's identity without rebuttal or consequence. While not all study participants recalled experiences where their distinctively Black names were the obvious impetus of a perceived assault on their identities, "Jada" offered an example of the inner dialogue that took place in those moments:

I judge based on whether the teacher shows an effort to make the adjustment. Like, they might ask you again. They might not. So, if they don't ask you again, that might be a clue that they're not really gonna work hard at it. Or if they ask you, and then they're still mispronouncing it at that moment, without, like, maybe writing out the pronunciation themselves and making an obvious effort. Those might be some key takeaways. [lines 377-383]

Finding #2: Forced Chameleon Effect. The internalized pressure created by a power-perception dichotomy often resulted in an accompanying "forced chameleon effect" among study participants. The chameleon effect implicated the interplay between the "real" and the "ideal" self as elements of self-concept theory. "Nia" discussed the ways in which pressure forced her to constantly preempt or confront negative thoughts about her based on first impressions among her teachers, which made it difficult for her to stay in the good graces of her teachers:

Every year, every school, I definitely felt like there were some who were out to misunderstand me. They'd look at me, and I did kind of have moments where I challenged them, and they were just like, 'Oh, she's a problem.' [lines 216-219]

Finding #3: Name-Identity Hyper-Consciousness. A sense of “name-identity hyper-consciousness” implicated past experiences with racism and their effect on one’s self-esteem among study participants. “DeAndre” gave words to an inner conflict as he described his own perceptions of certain Black-sounding names:

I think it's maybe the combination of the syllables. My [white] counterparts, I think they will say to themselves, well, the name 'Andre' already exists. Why do they need to add a little spice and put a 'De-' on it? Or 'Ra-', 'you know, like, 'why does it need an extra syllable?' I think that's why some names come off as black or black sounding. [lines 296-300]

Based on the study’s results, what students often perceived went beyond identity threats by adding the pressure of simply “being” within those emotionally confining moments. The greatest takeaway for educators is an understanding that how they treat a student’s name does not go unnoticed, particularly when a student may be one of the very few ethnocultural identities represented in the classroom.

Alignment with Forms of Racism

The American Academy of Pediatrics identified three forms of racism that young people may experience in situations such as those described in the study: structural, personally mediated, and internalized (Trent et al., 2019). Starting with structural racism, this form involves legal, education, and government institutional practices and policies that privilege and subordinate people en masse based on identity (Flores, 2010). This form may be the least

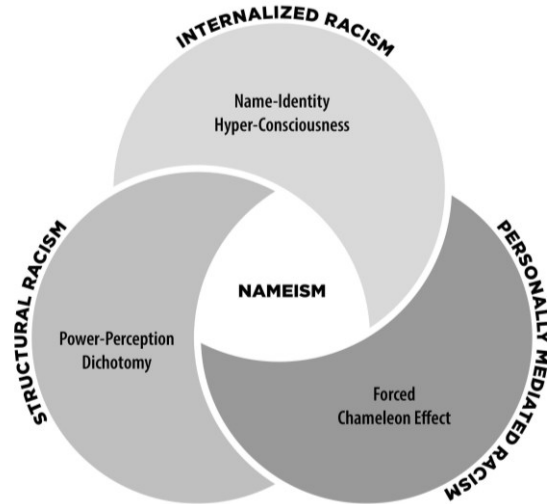
obvious in the minds and perceptions of students who are younger. However, all study participants acknowledged the hidden and historical nature of structural racism in society even if they could not always attribute it to a teacher's actions. For this reason, five out of the six study participants believed in the plausibility of racism, even without evidence, in every instance of nameism they had experienced, observed, or suspected. This form of racism aligned with the "power-perception dichotomy" theme identified in the study's findings.

The second form of racism is personally mediated, which involves stereotypes and sweeping generalizations made about a race (Jones, 2001). A young person with a distinctively Black name that falls into the "unique" category along the spectrum of name blackness may become the target of perceived limited academic potential. Here is where the questions on why some names seemed blacker the others left more than half the participants colorfully describing stereotypes associated with certain names. Whether this form happened to a study participant directly or vicariously, this mode of appearing in one's experience based on name-identity assumptions became the one that study participants consciously sought to undermine. This form of racism aligned with the "forced chameleon effect" theme identified in the study's findings.

Internalized racism takes form when members within a stigmatized group ascribe validity to stereotypes and deficiencies associated with their own group (Pennington, Heim, Levy & Larkin, 2016). A Black person who engages in nameism may or may not realize it when it happens, but in three of the interviews, study participants appeared to disparage some names as "ghetto" and validated the legitimacy of seeing unique Black names through a deficit view. Stereotype threat loomed whenever perceptions of racism pushed study participants to internalize racism by code switching to avoid being stigmatized by teachers because of their names. This form of racism aligned with the "identity hyper-consciousness" theme identified in the study.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the themes that surfaced in the study sample along with the various forms of racism that appeared to manifest through the reported experiences with nameism.

Figure 2.



Study Findings

Despite the number of variables that might explain bias among teachers and in broader society, perceptions of subtle forms of racism most often mediated which identity participants chose or felt compelled to bring to the surface as a preemptive measure in a given situation. This reality created the multiple sites of identity that participants — and perhaps many people with distinctively Black names — had to readily maintain at any given time.

Merely sensing the potentiality for nameism often occurred among study participants by comparing the signals in the present to what they had previously sensed in past experiences. Comas-Díaz and Jacobsen (2001) defined ethnocultural allodynia as a heightened sensitivity to

relatively unclear triggers or gestures that appear to be demonstrations of racism based on prior exposure to “painful culturally based situations.”

As Husserl (1931) admonished, “Every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations” (pp. 54–55). What became apparent to me was the challenge of identifying which stages of the K-12 learning journey are most ripe or appropriate for an intervention to confront nameism in the classroom effectively. For one, while some participants could reflect on their middle school experiences to recall perceptions of bias, others could go no farther than junior high or high school.

Success, in these regards, will lie primarily in the extent to which the gap between student perceptions and teachers’ awareness is closed by a shared awareness of the phenomenon. Among educators, this means interrogating their role in either fostering an affirming culture for all students or perpetuating name-identity threats for those who are most likely to perceive them.

Response to Research Questions

Based on the study results, the structures of students’ relevant experiences are dependent upon situational context-creating linkages and the fluid interplay of various parts of the phenomenon, such as elements, variables, objects, and intervention strategies, which responds to Research Question #1. The dual focus on symbolic interaction and self-conception helped to unravel ways in which this conflict manifests between external perceptions and internal reactions, which can factor into the extent to which perceptions of nameism influence students’ learning experiences.

The study did not uncover a relationship between nameism per se and how this might have impacted the quality of learning. However, perceived assaults on a student’s ethnic identity

played a role in how students processed or embraced critique from teachers who appeared to purposely malign their names, which responds to Research Question #2.

Relative to Research Question #3, I devised a multi-tiered intervention to account for its various modes of appearing in the lives of students whose identities are often socially constructed around their distinctively Black names. The intervention entails the sequential application of name-identity value affirmation, peer perspective-taking, cross-group engagement, and organizational-community commitment, as described below.

Name-identity value affirmation. Microaffirmation activities include having students research their first names for meaning and history, including why their parents chose the name, and presenting the findings to the class. In doing so, each student's name and identity become essential for developing positive feelings toward one other and a sense of attachment to each student's in-group.

Peer perspective-taking. Once students have demystified the stories behind their first names and located their in-group identities through name-identity value affirmation, the next activity involves modeling counter-nameism behaviors. This exercise will encourage empathy by having students assume the perspectives of others while reducing feelings of isolation by making every student feel seen and valued through inclusive behaviors that involve all students in the class (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Cross-group engagement. Once name-identity value affirmation and peer perspective-taking have sufficiently created a safe space to confront racial or ethnic differences that exist in the classroom, having members of one in-group engage members of other in-groups to identify any unique cultural attributes through a positive lens that will help peers "feel recognized as individuals" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p.182).

Organizational-community commitment. The final activity bears the broadest implications that aim to reinforce the lessons learned through the first three activities. This effort will challenge school community members to pledge publicly to honor names, the stories behind them, and commitments to eradicating nameism.

Implications for Practice

Based on the study results, a professional practice product was developed to help educators better understand the nuances of nameism as a problem of practice in response to research question number three. This professional practice product will achieve its core aim by de-abstracting the socioculturally driven aspects of experiences with nameism in the classroom. It also encourages “stakeholder interaction with collected data and to promote the co-creation of meaning” (Pankaj & Emory, 2016) by facilitating an emergent learning process that meaningfully includes educators in a shared sensemaking process. This approach demystifies student experiences with nameism by illustrating the conditions and enabling factors in which educators can map determinative aspects of the problem of practice to what they can control, including their own behaviors and attitudes.

The proposed framework demonstrates the value of a “ladder of inference,” a tool designed to help a community of educators reconcile varying impressions or biases instigated by pre-formed thought patterns (Peterson, 2023). A ladder of inference in this instance will challenge popularly held preconceptions about distinctively Black names by presenting a visual representation of the problem, in the form of a job aid, which will help educators discern when, how, and why nameism persists in their classrooms. During this process, a facilitator would

ideally guide educators with diverse backgrounds and experiences toward a mutual understanding of the manifold dimensions of nameism, as shown in Appendix A.

As an example, “student identity” sits at the nexus between attitudinal catalysts and behavioral mechanisms that determined the structures of experiences with nameism, with the categorical “blackness” of a name being a mediating influence. This relationship highlights a tension between culturally directed aspects of social-identity formation and problem-framing elements that often get overlooked, such as socio-historical narratives that had normalized the malignment of names that appeared “too Black” in day-to-day social interactions. When examined as a gestalt, experiences with nameism can be best understood as emergent, socially enacted, and structurally dependent vis-à-vis, simply appearing in one’s consciousness as mere isolated perceptions.

Conclusion

Ultimately, nameism must be recognized among educators as a relevant problem of practice where success is measured by the potential effect an intervention will have on the perceptions and learning experiences of impacted students. This effort will require a self-awareness and situational focus on the experiences of those students who face the highest risk of being summarily reduced to personas that over-index in negative outcomes based on their distinctively black names. The preceding study sought to position teachers to play a key role in normalizing respect for all name-identities in the American education system, starting with the creation of intellectual spaces characterized by responsive mentoring and dynamic learning. More research that investigates how students experience identity threats along various intersections will advance a collective understanding of how perceptions become realities, as told

through the words of those who live the experience of having to navigate culturally blind learning spaces. The study contributed to the body of social science by describing and interpreting experiences with nameism by identifying the objects within the consciousness that bind them across similar situational contexts.

In alignment with the mission of the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education, this work underscores the importance of centering Black students' lived experiences as a foundation for advancing equity and inclusive excellence in educational spaces. By illuminating how identity-based practices such as nameism shape learning environments, the study contributes to broader efforts to dismantle structural barriers and foster educational contexts where all students are recognized, affirmed, and supported.

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Appendix A

Conceptual Framework for Experiences with Nameism

