BEYOND THE LABEL: INVESTIGATING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL COST OF "NAMEISM" FOR STUDENTS WITH DISTINCTIVELY BLACK NAMES IN INTERRACIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Past and current research has explored the link between the "blackness" of a person's name and socioeconomic outcomes in American society. Black-sounding names were shown to influence employment prospects, access to credit markets, and choice of housing among other opportunities. While education research had identified a relationship between teachers' perceptions of students with distinctively Black names and perceived academic potential, it had yet to examine how targeted students perceive and internalize nameism, a portmanteau of name and racism, in predominantly white learning environments. A qualitative study examined nameism and its influence on students' self-conceptions and learning experiences. Using a phenomenological gaze to study participants' experiences, the results revealed mixed, contradictory views on Black-sounding names within the sample. Study participants expressed feeling compelled to maintain varying situational identities to avoid name-identity threats expressed through implicit bias and microaggressions. Participatory action research was used to construct a multimodal, evidence-based intervention to address nameism as a problem of practice in classrooms where experiences with nameism are most likely to occur.

Keywords: Black name, identity threat, deficit narratives, internalized perceptions

Dedicated to you, the Reader, for giving this work your time and interest.

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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 meaning is imposed upon a symbol based on what it conjures up in the beholder’s mind through rapid association, regardless of its intended meaning or how others view it. A person with the given name Muhammad, which means “praiseworthy” in Arabic, was likely to face much hostility after the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001 (Muir, 2004). The same held true for a person with a given name like Xīn Yán, a Chinese name meaning “beauty,” during the height of the COVID-19 global pandemic that began in 2020 (Foote, 2020). These two examples of name-identity threats point to extreme demonstrations of how names can become lightning rods for bias, discrimination, and even threats to a name bearer’s personhood within an Anglo-centered, monocultural American social structure.

Nameism, a portmanteau of name and racism for the purpose of this paper, frequently occurs in a society that has historically valued symbols and privileged identities that reflect the predominant monoculture. Ethnically identifiable names derive their value within a social order set by the perceived proximity of minoritized subcultures to the monoculture, which has long been characterized by puritanical, Anglo-European, or white-centered mainstream ideals. For people with distinctively Black names, the subtle nature of nameism remains part of a larger narrative within this social order, where a given name could signal either an assimilative intent or counter-assimilative identity, with benefits or consequences depending on the predominant culture in the moment.

Based on the perceived intent behind a name, societal reactions have exacted a cost on the name bearer in terms of acceptance, opportunities, and perceived potential, according to research. However, experiences with nameism present a problem for researchers given the ubiquity of bias in society and unknowability of the actual intent behind reactions when they occur. The classroom arguably functions as a microcosm of society and how norms are defined, making it the ideal social setting to investigate social phenomena, such as experiences with nameism. The following paper will investigate this phenomenon through the perceptions of students with distinctively Black names in mainstream social settings represented by predominantly white classrooms.

Throughout the paper, the reader will note the capitalization of "Black" in the tradition of the now-defunct descriptors "Negro" and "Colored." Each of these terms contemporaneously described reality for "a racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). As Black experiences are the focus of the paper, not the social construct of race

per se, descriptive terms such as “blackness,” “white,” and “whiteness” are used in lower-cased form to remind the reader of what centers this investigation: the shared experiences of those who stood the highest risk of experiencing anti-Black nameism in the classroom. Their voices remained largely unheard in research studies that comprise the body of knowledge on name-identity threats in predominantly white classrooms. The following study aimed to complete the narrative by privileging their voices as understudied aspects of identity threat in the learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

While many parents chose distinctively Black or Black-sounding names for their children that were African or Arabic in origin, others chose names that came to be considered Black by their aesthetics, construction, uniqueness, and prevalence in Black communities. Many of these names were characterized by affixes such as *Ja-*, *La-*, *-isha*, and *-tay*, common names spelled differently, or the creative use of punctuation marks such as apostrophes. Because most of them did not originate outside America’s borders, these names were uniquely American in origin. For the same reason, mainstream bias against such names could not be explained away as a consequence of xenophobia justified by fear-induced stereotypes linked to hostile foreign actors. Instead, names that insinuated blackness served as mirrors for a society where what was reflected back told an oft-undervalued story on the evolution of blackness and naming conventions.

"Most people recognize that giving a name to a child is a significant social function with profound and lifelong consequences” (Nuessel, 1992, p. 10). Upon that premise, I approached nameism as a consequential social reality that manifested in persistent and insidious forms of bias, discrimination, and hostility with multifactorial

implications. Name-identity threats have become obscured by the subconscious nature of racialized social norms, some of which were prettified through seemingly altruistic ideals, such as colorblindness or common refrains like “I don’t see color” that normalized the virtue of seeing the absence of blackness in a person as a positive. Where progress can be noted, cross-cultural reconciliation happened through mutual enlightenment and a willingness to sit within the experiences of others with an open mind to what constitutes a legitimate alternative reality for those who live it.

However, social harmony is neither static nor the presumed inheritance of the next generation. Each generation resets its own rules and norms within a social context that constantly evolves. Research on the development of children show they begin locating their identities within a culturally predominant social structure that differs from their own culture early in the school experience (Sullivan, Wilton, & Apfelbaum, 2021). 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). Setting the contextual framing for the study began with identifying the social setting where nameism tended to surface for students whose names were part of this dynamic.

For many people, nameism began in the classroom, where identities were most likely to be impacted by an authority figure outside one’s cultural community for the first time. Today, 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). 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, with bias was strongly correlated with individual factors, such as identity, rather than situational factors, such as socioeconomic status and student/teacher ratios. These factors shaped the organizational context for studying nameism as a longstanding problem of practice in the classroom.

By placing students most likely to experience nameism at the center of this study, specifically those with distinctively Black names in predominantly white learning environments, I aimed to describe what lay beneath their experiences when their names perceivably made them the target of discrimination or hostility. I recall being a fifth-grade student transferring mid-year to a Lorain, Ohio, middle school where I was one of two Black students in my class. Already feeling out of place for that reason alone, I also recall feeling isolated and extremely sensitive to subtle displays of favoritism when white teachers engaged white students while either never calling on me or reflexively appearing far less engaged whenever I attempted to contribute. While my name was not the issue, the hyper-consciousness I felt about my skin color did not have a clear trigger.

However, those feelings of isolation left me wondering whether my teachers judged every error in an essay, wrong answer on a test, or inability to grasp a complex math problem as a consequence of my blackness. This perception made it harder for me to grow from mistakes or accept correction without the fear of being stereotyped. I felt typecasted for a role and place in the classroom social order because of my race, and I sensed the same about every Jamal or Keisha whose names made them even easier to essentialize. I did not have the words back then to articulate how and why I harbored those anxieties, but I had undoubtedly noted how the perceived blackness of one's identity often mediated the difference between belonging versus fitting in as a student.

Background of the Problem

Before narrowing the issue to the classroom, I determined that the span and nature of nameism's broader social impact bore reckoning. 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). Study findings released by Shin et al. (2016) revealed how mental health providers were less likely to make an online appointment with a user seeking services when the name was changed from "Lakisha" to "Allison," with all other aspects of the request being identical. Similar studies compared the rate and nature of responses to email solicitations, bank loan requests, and rental applications, where inquiries with Black-sounding names stood a greater chance of going unanswered, being denied, or receiving unfavorable terms when compared to those with white-sounding names (Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Hanson et al., 2016, p. 92; Block, Crabtree, Holbein & Monson, 2021).

Mistriotti (2022) described a "Black Tax" applied to applications, statements, and writings associated with uniquely Black names that summarily "decreases the applicant's success and the reader's perception of quality," which was not limited to human judgment. When Black-sounding names were disembodied from actual persons, Internet algorithms and artificial intelligence applications rapidly associated the names Jamal and Keisha with negative terms like "unpleasant" while associating names like Matt and Emily with "pleasant" (Caliskan-Islam, Bryson & Narayanan, 2016). Another study revealed that online name searches were more likely to link a Black-sounding name such as "Latanya" with criminal records than the racially ambiguous name "Tanya" even when

no criminal record existed (Sweeney, 2013). Incidentally, names viewed as “race neutral” and thus are rapidly associated with white identities, such as Brandon, Melissa, Jeremy, and Theresa, remain free from stigma despite actually being the most common names among inmates in U.S. prisons (Ferrett, 2017; Williams, 2001).

Anecdotal accounts of nameism also exposed how the perceived “blackness” of a name could eclipse the race of the person attached to it. Jamaal Allen, a self-described white man living in Iowa, recalled being taunted at a sporting event and called "a white man with a [racial expletive] name" ("6 Words," 2015). Lakiesha Francis, a self-identifying white woman from western Ohio, reportedly heard family members warn her mother that people would not be able to pronounce her name, and “some might think there were Black people in your family" (Blake, 2019). These experiences speak to the power of distinctively Black names to arouse deep-seated ethnocentric bias and hostilities that might otherwise remain hidden no matter the race of the targeted persons.

An excerpt from the bestselling book *Freakonomics* exposed the unspoken, commonly held assumption that mainstream perceptions often make about Black-name identity through the following ask-then-answer proposition: “What kind of parent is most likely to give a child such a distinctively Black name? [A]n unmarried, low-income, undereducated teenage mother from a Black neighborhood who has a distinctively Black name herself” (Levitt & Dubner, 2006, p. 184). I sought to understand how racial tropes such as these become accepted as objective truths and how they colored the experiences of students with names that appeared in Levitt & Dubner’s (2006) “blackest names” list. This aim led me wonder how the notion of “blackness” in a name came into being, with the origin story of blackness and its definition lying anterior to the question.

Blackness defined. Revisiting the origin story of blackness is not an attempt on my part to frame this investigation into the psychosocial cost of nameism around race-based social phenomena such as Critical Race Theory, which argues the role of class, the legal system, and the economy in perpetuating systemic racism (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1996). Instead, I used the origin story of blackness as a premise for establishing how mainstream attitudes toward cultural indicators, such as names, had contorted the meaning of "Black" throughout its evolution and from conflicting vantage points. These disparate views converge on an unsettled history of intergenerational tension between people living a Black experience in a white-centered society. To make this point, I highlight the closer proximity of the relevant history on race to present-day concerns than many imagine.

Anchoring distant history to recent times was the passing of Helen Viola Jackson, the last surviving Civil War widow who had died just three years ago (Budryk, 2021). Her death was followed by the 2022 passing of Daniel R. Smith, the child of a man who was enslaved before the Civil War (Smith, 2022). Today, Viola Fletcher remains a living embodiment of the Tulsa Massacre in 1921 at age 109 (Cachero, 2021). These are just a few examples of ways in which history remains closer to the present and the racialized tensions that persist than they often appear in a society that seems all too ready to turn the page. As recent history has shown, an enduring tension over the meaning of blackness has long been perpetuated by the whims of a social structure that valued and rewarded the ethnocultural surrender of non-white identities, as long documented in history.

The history of blackness. Black identity took form once being melanated meant being grouped into a common phenotype based on a continent of origin. This grouping

replaced what it meant to be Ebo, Yoruba, Fon, Bakongo, and other discrete African ethnicities once bound by a single identifier. The narrative on Black identity is anchored by the origin of the sociocultural embeddedness of views on blackness. The concept of "blackness" first came to form through a conjoining of religious dogma and economic exploitation in the 15th Century, starting with Pope Nicholas V's decree on the right of Portugal's monarchy to enslave "barbarous" and "pagan" sub-Saharan Africans (Lucanus, 1905; Kákosy, 1991; Takacs, 1995; Wise & Wheat, n.d.).

While Nicholas's motive was primarily driven by a desire to place Africans under papal authority through religious conversion, his decree also catalyzed the viability of Portugal's "plantation slave model" economy, where blackness became the substratum of the European societies and essential to the function of the slave plantations, or what are best described as death camps for kidnapped Africans. From that moment, differences in skin color between Africans and Europeans made enslavement easier to justify morally following a time when slavery was more about conquest between similarly characterized ethnicities split along class divisions. By making skin color a basis for enslavement under the color of religious authority, a widely accepted nomenclature that explained apparent differences between people became a precursor to racism as we now know it.

The stark difference in skin tones eventually found its utility as a basis for taking humans with dark skin color *en masse* forty-one years after Nicholas's papal decree was issued in 1400. Portuguese explorer Antáo Gonçalves gave words to the concept of blackness in his writings when he described a woman as a "black Mooress" during his maiden expedition into the African continent (French, 2021, pp. 66-67). Her skin darkness justified her capture, reportedly making her the "index case" or first victim of

the transatlantic slave trade. Fifty years later, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, the namesake for a U.S. federal holiday, journaled the following reflection on his first contact with indigenous people of color that echoes Gonçalves's observation:

> We saw naked people. They were a people poor in everything … with 50 men, all of them could be held in subjection and can be made to do whatever one might wish" (French, 2021, p. 56).

While racism did not yet have a name and blackness not yet accepted as a conception, their earliest manifestations were rooted in an impulse toward subjugating darker-skinned people for the express benefit of serving and preserving an Anglo-centered monoculture.

The question of "who was Black" and what being Black signified were the focus of a veritable contest of ideas hosted by Bordeaux's Royal Academy of Sciences in 1739 (Gates & Curran, 2020). This convening of scholars and thinkers became the inflection point in history that moved the concept of race from being a matter of lineage and bloodline to a taxonomy of essential differences, such as skin color, hair texture, and cultural differences, according to Gates and Curran (2020). The contest propagated a belief in the "degeneration" of humans through the influence of science asserting itself through religion and theology, a notion that appeared in Thomas Jefferson's "Notes on the State of Virginia" in 1787 (Gates & Curran (2020), where he noted "the real distinctions which nature has made" between African and European identities.

These differences were codified in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and various laws around which a white-centered social structure was constructed and sustained for centuries. As these social structures evolved around the globe, so would notions that darker-skinned insinuated a purpose based on divinely

ordained servitude to white-centered society. Racial difference also became essential to establishing the notion of whiteness, or the patina of "racelessness" that sat opposite to the "African Other" at the center of "enlightened" societies (Ferber, 1999, p. 8-11). In contraposition to Gonçalves's experience with the "black Mooress," Blumanbach (1795) defined whiteness by his impression of women from the Caucacus region of Russia who possessed unrivaled beauty, hence the term "Caucasian." Caucasian became a label for skin color that culturally symbolized beauty by its societal association with whiteness.

Eighteenth-century French aristocrat George-Louis Leclerc was credited with first coining the term "race," theorizing that "Nordic Caucasians" predated darker-skinned people, who could become whiter by leaving tropical regions and moving to cooler climates (Ferber, 1999). Over time, skin color became less of a human classifier based on geographic origin and more of an indicator of "cultural and behavioral difference, and a standard for legitimizing role expectations" (Jablonski, 2020, as cited in Dikotter, 1992). While long disproven as a metaphysical truth, Leclerc's race-based theory of physical proximity to whiteness as a means of improving the survivability of darker-skinned people endured metaphorically through a widely held belief that innate privileges accrued to those who assimilated into whiteness.

The chasm between blackness and whiteness widened once intellectualized through Immanuel Kant's pseudoscientific musings on racial differences and hierarchy during the Enlightenment Era. Kant's philosophy on natural human social order placed whiteness at the top and blackness at the bottom, giving form to what Jablonsky (2020) called a "psychosocial template for racism" that had evolved as a necessary component of the preservation of white-centered "civil" societies. This template influenced Thomas

Dartmouth Rice's portrayal of a blackface stage character, Jim Crow, which laid the foundation for a body of anti-Black southern laws in the mid-1800s.

Rice and others used racial ventriloquism to advance disparaging notion of an essential nature to Black identity in the white imagination. (Woodward & McFeely, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). As the minstrelization of blackness became more popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it signified a visceral disdain yet weaponized fascination with blackness. This bipolar view of blackness was socialized into the zeitgeist of American society through schoolbooks like *Tom Sawyer,* television shows like *Tarzan King of the Jungle,* to movies like *Birth of a Nation*, each popularizing portrayals of Black people with flattened identities that were accessorized within white-centered realities (Burroughs, 2010; Grimké, 1915; Twain, 2010).

The aesthetics of blackness. A narrow view of blackness increasingly set the whiteness standard against which Black identities were juxtaposed, giving white identity the illusion of purity by comparison, even when it was blemished by poverty, low education, and a lack of land ownership. Put simply, the blacker one's blackness appeared, the whiter one's whiteness aesthetically became. Carr (2023) described "aesthetics" as a branch of Western philosophy devoted to the study of a "philosophy of perception" within a white-centered social structure. While an aversion to the taxonomy of blackness can be attributed to a belief in its inherent inferiority, a philosophy of perception may offer the most logical explanation for how a white-centered social structure came to determine the aesthetic value of blackness, including names associated with Black culture and its history of being subjugated based on how it appears and manifests vis-à-vis whiteness.

Horvitz (2021) defined whiteness as a superficial construct that is "manufactured by culture [and] relies on subjugating intrinsic wildness" in people to justify taking land and anything else it desires. He personified whiteness by its pursuit and preservation of a "monoculture of conformity" that undergirds a racialized social order:

> The cultured body, regardless of color, conforms to different social expectations, behaviors, responses, modes of expression, movements, postures and even patterns of attention to make its way in the world. The character of that entire assemblage is conditioned in a multitude of subtle and not so subtle ways in schools, the workplace, by the institutions of governance, in the hallways, C-suites and interior spaces that define law, public character and acceptable social behavior (Horvitz, 2021).

Over time, how blackness was defined became based on whatever definition benefited members of white society at any given time. A white child born to a white father legally took on his name and thus his inheritance. Conversely, the identity of a child born to an enslaved African mother followed her womb, which ensured the continued availability of plantation labor. Incidentally, this also removed paternal liability for white fathers who had produced children born to enslaved women with what poet C.R. Williams (2020) described as "rape-colored" skin in reference to the light-brown complexion that she inherited from her ancestors.

Following the emancipation of Africans during and after the U.S. Civil War, blackness no longer presumed a person was enslaved. With a growing number of mixed-race people now able to pass as other than Black, the *Racial Integrity Act* of 1924 and its "one-drop" rule would redefine blackness using the "science of race" and thus ensured

social privilege remained preserved based on white identity to the exclusion of anyone with Black blood (Rode Hoed, 2023). In other words, race was not contemplated in a vacuum. Nor could the Black race remain tied to a region or ethnicity since Africaness included people whose skin tones varied more than any other region on Earth, from light pale to deep ebony (Crawford et. al, 2017). Eventually though, blackness found its utility as a sociocultural construct that required no basis in human biology, contrary to Kant, Blumanbach, and Leclerc's assertions, yet could be argued as such when required to center whiteness. Restated, blackness existed as a cultural counterpoint of reference to one's inherent humanity and social value relative to white people.

Thus, the extent to which names could indicate where one fell along a spectrum of blackness determined one's social mobility. One's place on the spectrum influenced the likelihood of enjoying social mobility or suffering social stagnation in the white-centered mainstream. Within that framing, distinctively Black names served as constant reminders of what intergenerational perceptions of blackness were rooted in: a monoculture of conformity that preserved itself by stigmatizing references to blackness. However, control over how blackness was defined saw a shift as the "blackening" of names made their bearers living reminders of the insuppressible nature of Black culture.

The blackening of names. Puckett and Heller (1975) produced a seminal work titled *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage* that examined the evolutionary power of naming conventions. The authors outlined how naming conventions, once used to control Black identities, became indicators of self-determination. Names given to Africans in captivity were initially assigned as labels used to market them as chattel for purchase. As Christianity took root within culturally uprooted African families in the

New World, Biblical names like Elijah and Isaiah became common among them, along with English names like John and Mary, which remained common in Black families long after their ancestors were emancipated from a life of servitude to white antagonists.

Before parents began giving their children Black-sounding names in the 1970s post-Civil Rights era, Black girls were given names like Addie, Denise, Carole, and Cynthia. These were the names of the four young girls killed in the 1963 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama ("Birmingham," 1963). Similarly, Black boys were given names such as Henry, Charles, and George. These names were just a few among hundreds listed as victims of state-sanctioned and vigilante lynchings documented in the opening statement of *The Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of The United States Government Against the Negro People* ("Civil Rights," 1951). Thus, the extent to which traditionally acceptable names could not protect Black people from race-based systemic marginalization or violence meant surrendering one's cultural identity had eventually reaped diminishing returns.

Evolution of black naming conventions. Changes in naming patterns signaled Black families' desires to move away from being forced into an identity idealized by white society, a phenomenon called "nigrescence," where encounters with systemic racism precipitated the exploration and formation of a diasporic Black identity (Cross, 1991). According to Girma (2019, as cited in Neal, 2001), parents gave their children distinctively Black names as an act of resistance to hegemonic norms beginning in the late 1960s: "As naming rights for African Americans has not always been guaranteed, the process of naming has been a battleground of sociocultural and political consciousness" (p. 18). A growing demand for self-determination widened the chasm as Black-sounding

names became a byproduct of the "serial forced displacement" of Black communities (Rothstein, 2017; Hunter, 2022).

The displacement started with "redlining" in the 1930s when Black families were systematically restricted from living in communities demarcated by mortgage lenders using red lines on color-coded maps, hence the term. Subsequently, federally subsidized housing complexes or housing projects, initially built as part of an effort to give low-income families shared access to jobs, schools, and affordable homes in overcrowded urban areas, became known as simply "the projects" as divested, overcrowded, and structurally contained ghetto-like conditions became associated with the forced segregation of Black families caught within poverty and dire living conditions (Rothstein, 2017). Other segregative efforts over time included gentrification and urban renewal that only deepened the divide.

The longer this isolation persisted, the more unique or non-traditional names became as signifiers of who came from these socially isolated and marginalized communities. "Because names connect people to their history, families, and culture, naming can be an act of dominance and a symbol of psychological and sometimes physical control of one group over another" (Lindsey, Nuri Robbins & Terrell, 2009, p.28). Consequently, as a growing portion of the Black community sought inclusion into a white-centered mainstream, the rise of a new prejudice — nameism — emerged in response to the number of Black people who paradoxically sought the benefits of social integration while holding on to their Black identities through naming conventions, which elicited social reactions that sought to impose a chilling effect on Black expression.

The black-name paradox. Would-be parents ultimately faced a choice between giving a child a culturally defined identity that signaled liberation versus a socially constructed identity that conceded assimilation. Those persons caught between the pros and cons of name choice experienced what Du Bois (1987) described as double consciousness, or a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 38). Civil rights activist and author Amiri Baraka offered the following metaphor to describe the inner conflict between one's true Black identity and the social identity one must maintain to avoid the contempt of white society:

> We try to be black, and meanwhile you got a white ghost hovering over your head that says, 'If you don't do this, you'll get killed… you won't get no money [sic] … nobody'll think you're beautiful … nobody'll think you're smart. That's the ghost. You try to be black, and the ghost is telling you to be a ghost ("Making Black America," 2022).

Within the context of mainstream reactions to distinctively Black names, the so-called ghost proliferated as Black identity became increasingly pathologized in research through an evolving language of race. Realizing the power of language to define social identities, Elliott (2016) advanced a counter-narrative that challenged racially discriminatory claims by describing the origins, sounds, and constructions of unique names in the Black community: "The creativity that invented the smooth sounds of jazz and the unique, poetic flows of hip-hop spilled over into the naming of Black children. A mixture of Swahili-sounding names and pleasing percussive sounds gave birth to names like 'Lakesha, Swantezza, Johntae, Rashawn, and Shaquan.'"

For Black people seeking to shape a culturally informed identity, non-traditional names represented the syncopated rhythm of Black creativity, often derived through the senses and worldly experiences centered on blackness. However, tensions persisted between opposing cultural perspectives on unique and creatively derived Black-sounding names. The opposing view was animated by an Anglo-centric, puritanical impulse that rejected worldly, sense-driven experiences and embraced rigidly austere social norms that demanded compliance, as Berg (1975) explained:

> The Puritan mind is very much alive in 20th-century American society, as can be seen by how many white Americans conceive of the race problem …They are far more likely to adopt the Puritan posture of casting a baleful stare at those who do not appear to be living up to the exalted purposes of the Grand American Design and condemning them for their willful lack of commitment to it. The Puritan mentality … is still with us: only the 'vocabulary of motives' has changed (p. 7).

Dr. Daniel Black (2023) rebuked the puritanical design with his take on why nameism persists: to preserve white ancestral lines. Forcing white-sounding names such as John and Charles upon Black people, according to Black (2023), conjured up the ancestors of white descendants every time someone uttered those names, rendering Black people devoid of an inherent purpose except to lift white existence into immortality. In short, Black essentially argued that to give a child a distinctively Black name was to reject a legacy of white ownership of Black identity. For these reasons, gauging a name's "blackness" remained a critical decision for parents-to-be, many of whom found themselves impaled by the Morton's Fork as the consequences of giving a child a distinctively Black or a "socially advantageous" name, with both presenting drawbacks.

The spectrum of name blackness. Over time, degrees of blackness became calculable as some names that signaled blackness began to gain greater acceptability than others. As a result, a spectrum of blackness made resistance to total assimilation easier to obscure as a person's name became accepted as *prima facie* evidence of how Black a person appeared to be. While a person could not 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.

The most stigmatized names had unique constructions that made them appear "exceptionally Black" such as names like Diondrake or Vioneisha, (Cenoura, 2015). Here, the notion of social taste as a byproduct of invisibilized privilege becomes relevant to this discussion. James (2009, as cited in Kristeva, 2003, p. 225) described "taste" from a normative, mainstream (i.e., white-centered) view as a gut-reactive, socialized sensation "that cannot be translated into words, is impossible to memorize, and is instantaneous and irresistible." That which appeared distasteful, such as the "blackest" of names, thus appeared to be the natural consequence of inherent deficiency in the mind's eye.

While traditional names, such as Kevin, Christopher, Michael, David, James, Anthony, and Matthew, were as prevalent in Black communities as they were in others, the fallacy that the Black community over-indexed in names that were "blackened" by their association with socioculturally segregated communities served to pathologize names that deviated from the norm. Zax (2008) cited the exaggeration of Black-name subcategories such as "Swahili Bastardizations (Shaquan), Luxury Latch-ons (Prada),

Megalomaniacal Descriptors (Heaven), and The Unfathomably Ridiculous (Anfernee)" as examples of the increased stigmatization of naming conventions in the early 20th Century. Over time, a Black-name deficiency measure came into view, yielding names that bore varying levels of apparent blackness, with some distinctively Black names being more common in the mainstream, and thus more acceptable, based on whether they were racially assignable, exclusive, or unique (Cook et al., 2013), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Black Name Categories

Category	Definition	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.	Kevin, Tyrone, Monique, Jada
Exclusive	Names that are common only among Black children who were born in a given period	DeSean, Jamal, Ebony, Imani
Unique	Highly uncommon names given only to one Black child in a birth cohort and thus deemed Black by default.	D'Brickashaw, BenJarvus, Sha'Carri, Jo-Quisha

Mainstream reactions to uniquely concatenated names interpreted as the "blackest" happen to present a linguistic irony for critics of uncommon names. Nearly 80 percent of the English language itself is composed of "loan words" taken from French, Italian, Latin, and other languages ("What percent," 2015). Similarly, many Black-sounding names perceived as unique and unconventional borrowed their etymological naming styles and constructions from those same languages. Examples include seemingly

"homespun" Black-sounding names that echo the syllabic cadence of traditional French names like Daijea or Laétitia, Italian names like D'Angelo or Jolanda, and names of Latin origin like Lataysha or Dontavius. Once these names became DeAndre and Latisha, their formations took on a melanated hue that place them within the isolated communities described in the previous section (Cenoura, 2015). Situational context also became a factor when judging the favorability of Black-sounding names. These situations included influences on the cultural zeitgeist at a given moment, such as whether a name belonged to a celebrity, public figure, or names that were defined by the persona of fictional characters were most subject to ridicule.

The names Sheneneh, Rasputia, and Juwannaa were used to lampoon a type of Black woman popularized by male actors in drag on the shows *Martin*, *Norbit*, and *Jawanna Mann*. These and similar depictions hardened name associations into stereotypes of loud, hostile, unattractive, and masculine women, playing off enduring racist characterizations of overweight, dark-skinned "mammy" characters portrayed by blackface actors in the 19th and 20th centuries (Bogle, 1994). Unlike last names, or surnames, which are passed down to progeny through legal bonds such as parentage and marriage, many people assume that a child's first name provides a glimpse into the character of parents as the people who will presumably have the most significant influence on whom a child becomes.

Reactions to distinctively black names. In an article titled "Enough With the Stupid Names", a U.S. Federal Judge reportedly outlawed "ridiculous names black women are giving their children," citing problems with parents who "put in apostrophes where none are needed" and "think a 'Q' is a must" (Matthews, 2008). The article cited

Uneeqqi Jenkins, an “African-American mother of seven who survives on public assistance,” who had purportedly named her children Daryl, Q’Antity, Uhlleejsha, Cray-Ig, Fellisittee, Tay’Sh’awn and Day’Shawndra. The story drew wide reactions from readers, many of whom supported the judge’s decision, with one writing “the matter had "gotten out of control” and another suggesting unique Black-sounding names signaled mental illness in mothers (Zax, 2008).

While it was arguably reasonable to support the judge’s edict, the reasonableness of those reactions was the problem for a society that had been unwittingly provoked satire. The judge’s decision and the fact pattern associated with it were completely fictional. Consequently, satire had become a truth serum that exposed how deep-seated nameism had become in the mainstream psyche, so much so that there appeared to be no limit to how people viewed distinctively Black names, whether seen as ridiculous or unacceptable, or treated as a reflection on Black parents through a deficit lens. According to San Diego University researcher Dr. Jean Twenge, a child’s name is “a proxy for the parents’ philosophy on life in general” (Molloy, 2017), which became the subconscious gauge of one’s social potential and a trigger for implicit bias.

Implicit bias. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) coined the term “implicit bias” in a manuscript that attributed “memory influences” and “unconscious cognition in deliberate judgments” to stimuli or objects that activated trait inferences in a person’s mind (pp. 5-6). The authors described how single words, including names, could produce “spontaneous trait inferences” (Greenwald & Banaji 1995, p. 6) based on how the observer related to the object. Wilkerson (2020) wrote, “We know that the letters of the alphabet are neutral and meaningless until they are combined to make a word which itself

has no significance until it is inserted into a sentence and interpreted by those who speak it." (p. 42). Within an education context, implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes activated by the race and perceived socioeconomic status of students as indicators of academic potential. When these indicators color teacher interactions with students, whether or not they are perceived as biased, 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. 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).

Consequently, educators wield the more significant interpretative influence in power dynamics involving interactions with students and thus 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 though overt and subtle acts such as microaggressions.

Microaggressions. Power imbalances often become an aggravating factor that gives rise to behaviors by authority figures 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 several forms, the slightest being "microinsults" or subtle displays of disrespect toward another's culture. They can take the form of microinvalidations," or actions that create feelings of exclusion in an individual. They can also be expressed through overt and deliberate encounters are defined as "micro-assaults" (Sue et al., 2007).

This hierarchy of microaggressions is described by Young, Anderson, and Stewart (2015) as "everyday slights" that convey a sense of devaluation to a person caught within a system that privileges some identities over others, often along ethnic fault lines. 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

Microinsult	Microinvalidation	Microassault
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

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 circumstance 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?"

When these interactions and perceptions persist in the classroom, inner dialogues that throw one's real self and ideal self out of alignment can erode a student's self-esteem and drain the mental reserves that would otherwise be available to concentrate on academic performance. Affected students in these instances can become susceptible to regressing into the very stereotyped attitudes and behaviors that, in turn, appear to justify their stigmatization, such as an unwillingness to show effort or proactively participate in the learning process (Cohen, Purdie-Greenaway & Garcia, 2011). Consequently, the cycle perpetuates the "angry, nonconforming, underperforming Black student" stereotype that hovers between teachers' attitudes and students' reactions, making it hard to distinguish between which is the cause or effect. However, the outcome is often clear and manifests in data used to inform metanarratives about students of color who underperform yet have to wield a level of resiliency that does not show up in standardized tests or transcripts.

Justification for the Study

As I reflected on my own experiences as a student who constantly sought to undermine stereotypes in interracial learning environments, I came to appreciate the value of looking beneath convenient explanations for why students with certain names were least likely to appear in honors classes or be perceived as academically exceptional. I also sought to engage the question of why a student's experiences appeared to vastly differ from those who were perceivably given the benefit of the doubt, based on whether their parents named them Melissa or Mo'Nique. The answer to how students perceived nameism within this dynamic awaited discovery as it remained locked within the experiences of those who sensed it when it occurred, even if they could not give words to those perceptions as they occurred.

Mateos, Longley, and O'Sullivan (2011, as cited in Alford, 1988) said names serve two primary purposes: "To differentiate individuals from each other, and, simultaneously, to assign them to categories within a social matrix" (p. 2). Within this social matrix, names function as "invisible signals" of ethnic origin that do not require direct, visual engagement with a person for discrimination to ensue, making name-identity threat challenging to isolate under controlled conditions for study (Martiniello & Verhaeghe, 2022). Research has 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 establishes 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.

These factors speak to the profound nature of nameism and the problems it has presented for education systems and society. Goldstein and Stecklov (2016) described discrimination towards names as a consequence of a "signaling effect" that colored perceptions of one's cultural orientation by authority figures. By addressing nameism as a phenomenon of interest from the perspective of those who have endured it, the current study will add a new dimension to research on the consequences of name-identity threats and the overlooked perceptions that give it form within interracial learning environments. While the overarching issue was limited to the experiences of students with distinctively Black names in predominantly white classrooms as the unit of analysis, I anticipated the study's broader applicability in situations involving implicit bias, microaggressions, and other aspects of stigmatized identities in the classroom.

That said, nameism remains challenging to detect, much less confront, because a person does not have to be present to be victimized and, in most cases, may not even know that nameism has occurred. Mehrabian (1981) explained how nonverbal

communication, including a person's name, often conveyed impressions that a name bearer may not detect in certain circumstances. These impressions may trigger "stereotypical attribution" along varied dimensions such as perceived intellect or attractiveness (Young et al., 1993). The extent to which nameism has led to discriminatory outcomes has remained virtually unascertainable in light of its many triggers and modes of appearing. The current research study addressed this complexity by emphasizing how perceptions alone can give form to nameism and its consequences, not simply the colorable intent or motives of the offender.

Gaps in Knowledge & Research

The literature on stigmas and discrimination in education had long problematized Black culture itself as the reason many students fell short in their academic performance. Challenges to the idea began to surface ONLY fairly recently. Ogbu's (1987) theory on the role that Black culture played in fostering identities that were "oppositional to education" was later debunked by a counter-deficit school of educational research focused on gaps in the body of knowledge, as Tyson and Lewis (2021) concluded:

> Data on institutional and everyday forms of discrimination, for example, are often absent from existing national surveys, which leaves race as a variable to stand in as a proxy for an unspecified set of mechanisms or processes that generate differential outcomes (p. 472).

Baldwin (1980) previously criticized monoculturally informed definitional systems that assumed the authority to decide how Black people experience various phenomena that color their everyday reality. He concluded that attempts to describe how Black people found meaning in their experiences reinforced a distorted reality through

"experiential confirmations" packaged as objective, unassailable truths. Additionally, Kolluri and Tichavakunda (2023, as cited in Valencia, 1997) criticized the deficit lens in educational research that perpetuates a “culture of poverty” ideology and the notion that communities of color produced students who “adopt identities oppositional to education.” (p. 642). Meanwhile, as the authors pointed out, systemic factors such as disparities in access to education and quality instruction “are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school” (Kolluri & Tichavakunda, 2023, p. 646).

Other scholars assumed a macro view of the problem by focusing on research methods and philosophical assumptions used to create knowledge through a filtered epistemological gaze. For example, Carruthers (1972) criticized the tendency of scientific research to merge “the theory of knowledge and the theory of knowing into a single methodological solution” to legitimize classification-based oppression: “Time and space are in this methodology either minimized by elimination of qualitative distinctions or qualitative distinctions are converted into quantitative distinctions. This latter feature poses special problems for the social sciences” (p. 12). The problem, Carruthers (1972) concluded, is a self-serving philosophy of social progress that is “kept in reserve to explain qualitative differences in time” —such as cultural differences — that “lends itself to the exploration of most significant mysteries and problems (p. 12).

Accordingly, I noted the tautological reasoning in the body of knowledge that Carruthers (1972) criticized; specifically, how science was used to minimize the value of distinctively Black names over time. This devaluation took on a circular form, whereby the conclusion (Black-sounding names elicited discriminatory responses) became a mere restatement of the premise (some names appear blacker than others), often with little

regard for how blackness itself was used to justify racism rather than expose it as a social wrong. Consequently, Black-sounding names and their qualitative cultural distinctiveness, such as how they were spelled or pronounced, were deconstructed through rapid comparisons to names common to white identities.

"The various phenomena are ranked according to imagined or imposed objective values such as magnitude or complexity or "natural" arrangements derived from so-called systematic comparisons" (Carruthers, 1972, p. 14). Once stripped of the cultural richness that gave it value, a name instead derived its lesser value based solely on its notable absence in white-centered of white-adjacent communities of color. At the same time, name assessments were arbitrarily assigned ordinal values relative to a name's commonness in a given community, ergo, a spectrum of blackness. As a result, perceptions of name commonness became a gauge for how a person was valued based on the identity affiliation a name suggested. Nameism thus became a form of discrimination cloaked in reasonableness, which was reinforced in research over time as names served as "imperfect proxies for race," thus abstracting prejudices in research where names appeared to justify inequitable outcomes (Gaddis, 2017, p. 471).

The body of research abetted these perceptions primarily by de-centering Black perspectives and applying a culturally distorting filter, or the "White Gaze" (Gelman, 2004; Yancy, 2008). Author Toni Morrison characterized the White Gaze as a "judgmental eye" that checked, judged, and edited identity by imposing "master narratives on everyone else" ("Toni," 2019). As ethno-nativist impulses endured in the research and propagated through data, the pathologizing of Black cultural attributes, such as names and cultural tastes, was re-validated with each subsequent study.

By co-opting the authority of data and research, those who influenced the discourse had found a way to position blackness and its cultural indicators as defects in a person with an evidence base. Meanwhile, mainstream society could avoid confronting the broader contours of systemic and institutional bias, particularly in education research. By addressing the parts of research where the previously mentioned gaps were most salient, I aimed to clearly show the frequently internalized reactions that nameism caused in students. Specifically, I sought to uncover what lies beneath the systems and institutions in question by addressing gaps in how educators understood identity threats, such as nameism, and cultivate a new language of equity in education that reveals how students experience and internalize threats to their identity that remained undetectable until revealed in data.

Audience

Based on the previously discussed background, prevalence, historical context, and gaps in the knowledge record, the results of an investigation into experiences with nameism would presumably most benefit educators. However, educators do not move or think as a monolith. Nor could I assume the study findings and any recommendations would resonate with those who gave my research its inherent purpose. Ede (1984) posed several key questions that were helpful to my "audience analysis" for the study, which went beyond who I imagined the audience to be composed of and how they might receive the interventions that might evolve from the study. This analysis led me to delve into what inferences I could draw about the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of the educators I had hoped to reach and their role in giving meaning to the study. Drawing inferences involved considering organizational change and the implications for practice.

As Ede (1984) admonished: “We do not expect definitive answers to questions such as these. We do expect, however, that the resulting analysis will stimulate our understanding, enrich our vision, [and] help us avoid over-simplification” (p. 153). The study presents a point of entry for educators who directly engage students with distinctively Black names in interracial classroom settings. As American society becomes more racially intertwined, more teachers will likely strive to make tighter cross-cultural connections that decrease the incidence of bias or a climate of discrimination in their classrooms. The study also presents an invitation to a secondary audience that includes other school officials who directly engage students, such as team coaches, guidance counselors, and principals, who contribute to the dynamics of a learning environment.

Researchers conducting education studies might also find the study helpful to their self-reflections by becoming more aware of how their research gaze could whitewash findings that subconsciously or reflexively pathologize blackness. Additionally, education system officials who staff schools are presented with an opportunity to use what they can learn from the study findings to inform how they justify the need for greater diversity in largely homogenous schools. Schools as a whole may benefit from the strategic improvement of teachers who can help raise a school’s overall cultural competency.

Overview of Methodological Framework, Methods & Research Questions

Methodological Framework

Identifying the most appropriate framework in which I would conduct the study began with an assessment of a research approach that would best achieve my core aim: to describe the essence of nameism within a situational context that best represents how

students experience the phenomenon. While I was not inclined to predict the study's anticipated outcomes, the outcomes were foreseeably predicated on descriptions of experiences with nameism, and meanings derived from relevant experiences that were not experimentally examined or measured. I sought to address the limits on a general understanding of the phenomenon imposed by extant claims of objective reality or knowledge of the phenomenon derived from statistics and quantitative analysis.

While my research inquiry concerned the prevalence of nameism, this concern centered on inductively drawing assumptions from study data about the structures of nameism that could be inferred from personal experiences with the phenomenon. The premise for the study was grounded on a set of philosophical assumptions surrounding the nature of reality (the ontological question) and how knowledge is constructed (the epistemology question) (Creswell, 2009). The response to the first two questions constrained how I studied what occurred (the methodological question) pursuant to understanding various phenomena. The final philosophical assumptions addressed the tension between a value-neutral versus a value-laden approach to the research (the axiological question).

These three questions situated my research study within a guiding framework that was foundational to my research paradigm and approach to studying nameism as a problem of practice. Unlike positivist or experimental cases developed to prove a theory, my qualitative research design was organized around ways I could describe and interpret perceptions of encounters with name-identity threats based on the words used by study participants. This approach required an ontological "relativist" orientation that viewed reality as constructed through individual experiences. Relatedly, meaning was

epistemically derived through a "subjectivist" orientation that made space for alternative meanings that carried equal weights of truth within individual relativist realities. These perspectives align with my value-laden (as opposed to value-neutral) axiological aim for the study: to uncover the phenomenon's intrinsic elements, whose discovery will better the experiences of historically marginalized students in interracial classrooms.

Accordingly, I considered three approaches to qualitatively examine how these factors intersected in people's lives with relevant experiences: grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. While grounded theory and ethnography offered viable paths for engaging the phenomenon, my goal was not to develop a new theory that explained nameism or observe its influence on Black culture, respectively. Instead, I aimed to tap into the lived experiences of those whose names most represented the intergenerational social tension surrounding blackness and find meanings within those experiences, which aligned with a phenomenological research methodology. Dilthey (1979) asserted a view of reality that informed my own during the study: "[U]ndistorted reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness" (p. 161).

Equally important was for me to see beyond the easily explicable in research. "In our everyday lives, we do not problematize what we experience but take for granted that what we see is what it seems to be … falling in the trap of an absolute false-truth distinction" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 15). A false-truth distinction was precisely what I sought to confront by privileging the voices of those whose perceptions across varied social contexts were what made their truth most defensible. Dahlberg's description of the cautious nature of truth and reality clarified how a student's perception of identity threat was delegitimized based on what a teacher saw or chose to believe. When such situations

occurred, the power imbalance between the student and teacher and historically informed social norms were often filtered out in past research. 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.

Phenomenological traditions. 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 deciding which branch of phenomenology most aligned with the study's aim. My decision on which branch of phenome0nology to implement proved more difficult than I had initially anticipated, given the complex variations that seemed at odds with each other. The four categorical branches that I considered were the Husserlian Transcendental (Descriptive) approach, the Heideggarian Hermeneutical (Interpretative) approach, the Sartrean Existential (Humanistic) approach, and the Meleau-Pontyan (Empiricist) tradition.

In his seminal work on phenomenology titled *Ideas I*, Husserl (1963) emphasized first-person perspectives when studying various forms of experience and conscious activity that allow someone to "intend upon" or engage an object, such as a book or someone's behavior, through the senses. Heideggar (1962) parted with Husserl's focus on consciousness and descriptions, instead centering interpretation and how people ascribe meaning to "being" within their contextual relationship to the world. Conversely, Sartre (1956) embraced Husserl's conception of intentionality as it related to consciousness. However, Sartre considered the phenomenon, in its randomness and variation, the core tenet of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty (2012) departed from all three

phenomenological traditions by merging the body and consciousness into one inseparable means of experiencing the world.

Examining all four traditions proved to be a worthy intellectual exercise as I sought to understand better the history of studying human experiences through a phenomenological gaze. Each approach merited consideration based on the varied dimensions in which experiences with nameism could be usefully examined. 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 conscious when we redirect the reason a phenomenon occurs from varying vantage points of experience. Methodologizing the pursuit of the "why" became a matter of selecting the branch most aligned with my commitment to establishing truth value by adhering to a defensible framework of scholarly inquiry.

Short of a shared emphasis on dialogic engagement with participants and meanings extracted from phenomenal experiences, a consensus on conducting phenomenology as a methodological practice remained elusive. I worked through this challenge by noting variations in definitions for the same vernacular, such as "horizontalization" and "imaginative variation," two techniques defined and practiced differently across numerous studies. While my initial intent was to select one branch of phenomenology to employ in the name of methodological fidelity, I eventually came to terms with the notion that the research questions presented and the aim of the inquiry drove my phenomenological design, not predetermined methods.

Methodological purists, such as Giorgi (1985), had long regarded blending phenomenological traditions as an improper pathway to knowledge through scholarly inquiry. However, Giorgi's view was not universally shared among practitioners. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) demonstrated the utility of a hybrid descriptive-interpretative research design to study the cross-cultural experiences of Saudi students transitioning from their home country. The study focused on cross-cultural immersive experiences rather than a subculture within a broader culture, making their research a contemporary methodological blueprint for applying phenomenology to study subjective experiences across cultural divides. My study's focus similarly aligned with an emphasis on identifying the most salient aspects of the cross-cultural experience.

Accordingly, I opted to apply a similar hybrid phenomenological model to examine how experiences with nameism colored the self-conception and internalized perceptions of study participants in interracial learning environments. By moving between Husserlian descriptions of the phenomenon through participants' experiences and Heideggarian interpretations of the meanings of those experiences, I could co-construct the phenomenon's essence with study participants while bringing to the surface that which bounded their experiences. Based on this premise, I proceeded with the notion that what is true to a person qualifies as truth within the individual's lifeworld from a phenomenological perspective.

This truth includes how the psyche views objects and the experiential components that repeatedly "announce themselves to the conscious mind through … attention, perception, imagination, and memory" (Husserl, 1913). Truth, herewith, constituted a totality of the contents of an experience as they filter through similar subjective realities

(Schutz, 1962). My concern for the totality of these contents began with the parts of the experiences with name-identity threats that sat beyond the control of students and the consequences they faced whenever they were forced to "intend upon" or process perceptions of what was happening in their consciousness. These experiences were the least studied or understood within the phenomenon and thus commanded my interest. Finding meanings within those experiences through a sequential descriptive-interpretive phenomenological lens most aligned with my philosophical orientation, methodological justification, and chosen methods for the study, as I will next discuss.

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. The methods I selected for the study were based on techniques that gave me the most realistic view of relevant lived experiences that could be expressed in numerical or statistical data. The only way to grasp those experiences was to directly engage participants who could describe the phenomenon in their own words, as they lived it, and co-construct with me new ways of understanding their experiences enough to find graspable meaning in them. Purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were the qualitative methods that I selected to achieve the study's 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. My choice to employ a structured or unstructured approach determined whether I sought to obtain results that I could later compare across similar

studies or whether my focus centered on understanding the phenomenon within a tight contextual framing. I ultimately saw value in both goals and opted to conduct semi-structured interviews with study participants. Once the data were collected, I qualitatively analyzed the results using phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation methods, which are explained in detail later in the paper. In the next section, I outline Creswell's (2009) prescription for developing research questions through an adaptable, non-directional, and flexible approach to qualitative inquiry, followed by an explanation of how I constructed the research questions that framed the research study.

Research Questions

Once I had selected the appropriate research methodology and methods 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? After thinking through the history of blackness and how this history filtered through distinctively Black names, ideating on the right research questions to which my study would respond proved challenging. I intended to avoid the circular reasoning I criticized in past research by focusing on the study's main axiological underpinning.

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 was more than a mere synopsis of experiences with 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?

Two key terms within the questions, "perceive/perception" and "learning experience," require some elaboration. Starting with perceive/perception, Cantril (1968) defined perception as ''an awareness that emerges as a result of a most complicated weighing process ... tak[ing] into account a whole host of factors or cues'' (p. 5). Although students may share experiences in the classroom, these experiences are interpreted based on differences in how they "intend upon" objects within the experience and the "expectations of the perceiver" (Robbins, 1991, p. 129). Not every student with a distinctively Black name carries the same story, even with others who share the exact same name. Human perception is the tie that binds experiences with the same phenomenon, with mainstream attitudes and a shared history coloring the frame of reference used as "the initial phase of the attribution of meaning to the experienced phenomena" (Randolph & Blackburn, 1989, p. 89-92).

Regarding "learning experiences," Zerihun, Beishuizen, and Van Os (2012) emphasized the greater importance of what a teacher does in the learning process than the materials presented to students, with "overt behavior as an indicator of effectiveness" (p.

100). While a student's name, as a symbol of identity and background, may be dispositive to a student's academic potential in some instances, the story remains incomplete. As I moved through the study, I did not concede the objectivity or rationality of names as predictive when other characteristics, such as race, gender, teacher cultural proficiency, and other factors beyond a student's control, also colored the learning experience. "Learning experience," in this instance, refers to the sensory dynamics a student must manage as instructional content filters through the same receptors that activate perceptions of identity threat in its various forms.

The third research question was not contemplated under a presumption that the study would bear findings upon which educators could summarily act. Instead, the question was animated by a focus on what was known: nameism exists in society and is rarely confronted given its ubiquity and influence in the abstract. My limited competency in pedagogic practice did not equip me to posit ways teachers might improve their practice regardless of what the study rendered. However, my goal to mitigate the effects of nameism in the classroom began with the intention to deconstruct methodologies that problematized students based on what their names symbolize to others and present educators with the opportunity to build on any actionable takeaways.

Limitations

Limitations that may influence the study results start with the intersectional nature of identity bias and the unknowability of what lies behind its motivations, which is an inherent problem with nameism. For this reason, I privileged the perspective of people who were most likely to be on the receiving end of name-identity threats and thus were best positioned to give meaning to experiences with nameism. However, this led to

another limitation that also warranted consideration. The inherent limitations of the study's methodology included a reliance on participants' experiences as expressed in their own words. This approach lent itself to the possibility that meanings could become lost in translation due to semantics or simply misinterpretation. Relatedly, Giorgi (2008) highlighted the difficulty in drawing phenomenologically sound conclusions from the "natural attitude" of study participants:

> [T] he findings should be loaded with the discipline's orientation, which again means that some expertise is required in order to understand the results. The purpose of the research is not to clarify the experience that the individuals have for their own sake, but for the sake of the discipline" (p. 5).

While I agreed that methodological rigor was critical to ensuring trustworthiness "for the sake of the discipline," I slightly departed from Giorgi's take by seeing process fidelity as a function of the co-construction of knowledge with study participants, not a checklist of steps or assumptions about the limited capacity of study participants to understand and consciously contribute to phenomenological inquiry.

Another methodological limitation involved the relatively small sample size, which was typical in phenomenological research. Limiting the sample to six participants was adequate to reach a point of data saturation; however, this also foreseeably presented challenges to asserting the truth value of the study's findings as the results could not be generalized or easily replicated. However, the research questions called for me to investigate the breadth and depth of the phenomenon within a specific context, not to explore its generalizability. While this made it difficult to rule out plausible alternative

descriptions or interpretations of the data, the study provided a sound basis for future quantitative studies on the phenomenon's empirical prevalence.

Regarding the substance of the study, the intersectional nature of identity and discrimination of the basis of identity presented a limitation in terms of what actions and attitudes could be attributed purely to the signaling effect of ethnically identifiable names. The study dealt with this limitation through a methodological process centered on describing an experience's structures that are not situationally dependent. I used data obtained from a purposive sample of participants with similar ethnic-name identifiability and experiences to identify the structures of perceptions of nameism. Also, the study excluded surnames even though such names can signal ethnicity when coupled with a race-neutral first name. I elected to focus on first names nonetheless because parents have greater latitude to decide on name uniqueness and Black-identity expression through first names for their offspring.

Limitations aside, this research will benefit culturally informed pedagogic practice by amplifying the voices and privileging the experiences of individuals with distinctively Black names, whose experiences revealed how the phenomenon manifested across varying situational contexts. Additionally, by placing the phenomenon under varying perceptual lenses, the reader's intersubjectivity becomes a part of the research gaze through the perceiving, imagining, and judging aspects of the participants' experiences. While critics of phenomenology may find reader intersubjectivity as part of the process a significant weakness, the study's emphasis on decentering oneself to connect to someone else's narrative is precisely the point for making educators and researchers the study's target audience.

Review of Related Literature

Frameworks Informing the Study

Once I had established the research design and considered the study's limitations, the next step entailed constructing a conceptual framework to help guide the focus of the research questions within Cilesiz's (2011) "concept of experiences." Phenomenological concepts considered in the study were consciousness, objects that influence the consciousness, and the lifeworld in which a relationship between consciousness and objects takes form, all of which comprise the concept of experiences. This conception is where intentionality, or how one consciously "intends upon" someone's attitude or an interaction with another, makes people present within an experience. In this case, being present involved whenever nameism perceivably occurred in the classroom.

Determining the most appropriate theories for the framework required careful contemplation of how reality was constituted and how meanings were constructed in the literature. Doing so helped me understand what underpinned the phenomenon through the gaze of past researchers and how this influenced a general understanding of name-identity threat in their varied manifestations. Accordingly, I identified two theories that conceptually aligned with a relativist approach to employing the study's hybridized phenomenological framework: self-concept theory and symbolic interactionism theory. 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 "being" within a given moment.

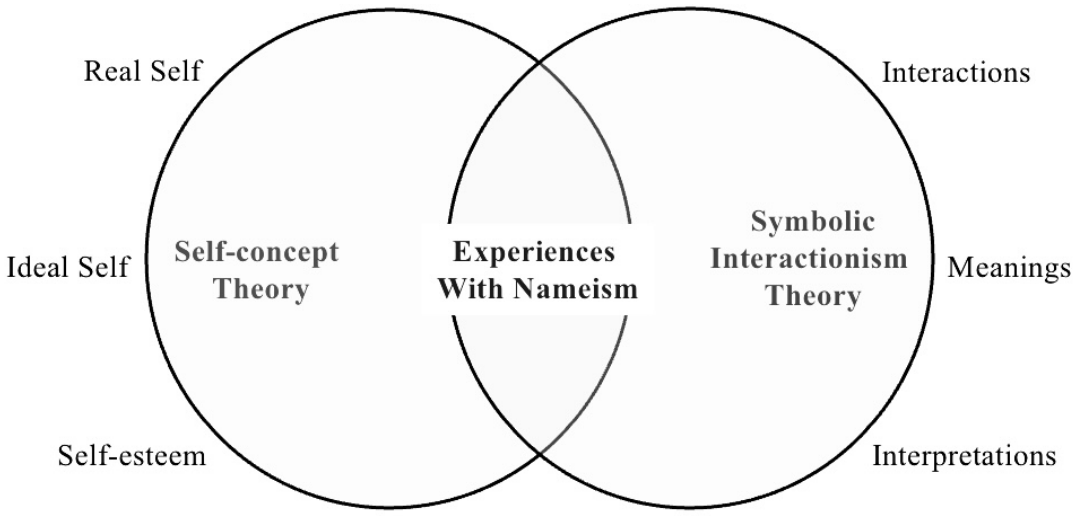
The selected theoretical framework merged each theory's interrelated elements, with experiences with nameism forming a nexus between the two. I viewed these

experiences as constructions that often happened through a combination of one's perception, as informed by the elements of self-concept theory, and the reflection of oneself that society contrived through interactions and behaviors, as elements of symbolic interactionism theory. The extent to which a person sees herself as she imagines others judge or perceive her is part of the "reflected appraisal" process that has proven to be determinative in the education process, according to the literature, with the remaining question being how nameism mediated roles, behaviors, socialization, and expectations (Rosenberg, 1979; Khanna, 2004).

Figure 1 illustrates the concentric relationship between the two theories relative to the phenomenon, followed by describing each theory relative to the phenomenon under inquiry.

Figure 1.

Theory-based Concept of Experiences



Self-concept Theory

Mabuza (2008) asserted, "The most important aspect of personality affected by personal names is self-concept … and it is 'learned' from the verbal and non-verbal messages given by significant people in their lives." Psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) framed the self-concept as a "gestalt" formed by three interacting dimensions:

1. Ideal self - a vision that informs who a person wants to be
2. Real self - how one currently sees and perceives oneself
3. Self-esteem - one's self-worth and self-perceived value

Epstein (1973) married self-concept theory and phenomenology through a "hierarchical arrangement of major and minor postulates" that defines a person by how one responds to objects that influence self-esteem. Objects include teachers' perceived attitudes and behaviors, culturally relevant education content and materials, and other influences on the version of "self" a student feels compelled to present. I use the following example to illustrate the application of the theory in the study.

When a student with a distinctively Black name meets other students and her teachers for the first time, her name may presumably describe who she appears to be in the minds of others. In some instances, that description may befit the child of an "unmarried, low-income, undereducated teenage mother from a Black neighborhood who has a distinctively Black name herself," as posited by (Levitt & Dubner 2006, p. 186). According to the theory, her self-conception will inform how she views and presents herself in the classroom. This posture may influence her attitude toward learning and how she views who she is to those around her, which could create a conflict between her real and her ideal self. The application of self-concept theory to the study focused on

describing any discernible difference between her real self and ideal self and how this perceived difference affected her self-conception while taking tests, interacting with school officials, and perceiving her social role in the classroom. The extent to which nameism acts as a forcing function for the need to negotiate one's identity bore directly on research question one: How do students with distinctively Black names perceive nameism in the classroom?

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

American philosopher George H. Mead (1934) conceptualized symbolic interactionism based on a belief that interactions with others derive from one's self-image, as with self-concept theory. Unlike self-concept theory, symbolic interactionism theory emphasizes the "self" as a derivative of language and how people communicate while fostering a social experience within an enacted environment. Blumer (1986) later emphasized how the "self" emerges from intersubjective social interactions that run along three dimensions:

1. How meanings orient attitudes through language
2. How meanings become inferred through interactions
3. How meanings change through interpretation

Cooley (1902) later incorporated the concept of a "looking-glass self" into the symbolic interactionism theory, encompassing the three elements within a figurative mirror that projects a socially constructed identity onto someone. Symbolic interactionism theory posits that human engagements are interpreted through exchanging meaningful communication or symbols such as names (Turner, 1988). Here, the self and the social ecosystem are enacted through symbols and interactions that define and influence roles.

For example, when widely shared meanings become imposed upon a person's distinctively Black name, language and interactions that reinforce those meanings become the looking glass through which the student will judge herself. The theory assumes she will respond to social drivers in her environment, such as behaviors and expectations in a classroom, according to the subjective meanings and exchanges she attaches to those elements. The current study explored how symbolism derived through social interactions shaped and altered the meanings and exchanges a student experienced. How these social interactions may have affected learning experiences implicated research question two: How do perceptions of nameism influence the learning experience of students with distinctively Black names?

Theoretical Framework Application

Stryker (1980) provided a foundational basis for joining the two theories through a phenomenological lens, where he described one's identity as but one element of a broader sense of self within a society. This conception aided my examination of synthesized perceptions of "self" vis-à-vis experiences with nameism through the dual application of self-concept and symbolic interactionism theories. Being present in an experience helps one appreciate the inseparability of self and environment as "components of meaning," according to Moustakas (1994, p. 28). As Husserl (1931) explained: "[W]e wait, in pure surrender, on what is essentially given to describe that which appears as such faithfully and in the light of perfect self-evidence (p. 260).

I was particularly interested in how internalized self-conceptions linked to symbolic meanings assigned to objects governed one's identity across various social contexts, such as classrooms with varied racial dynamics, where the common thread was

often required for a student to maintain more than one identity. An example would be maintaining a classroom identity, a home identity, and a peer identity, each mediated by a "salience hierarchy" whereby identity is consciously brought forth depending on the situational context (Stryker, 1980).

A problem arises when majoritarian narratives are imposed on people, leaving them "at the mercy of definitions negative to their image and interests" (Karenga, 2010, p. 410). For example, a student with an ethnically identifiable name may feel pressured to accept a nickname given to her by an authority figure or engage in "code-switching," where a shift in one's cultural expression aims to accommodate the interpersonal comfort of others to avoid unfair treatment (McCluney et al., 2019). At the same time, racialized definitional systems remain embedded without challenge in the fabric of American institutions such as education systems.

Related Research

The following literature review commenced with a keyword search in databases containing peer-reviewed research studies. I used terms synonymous with name identity, Black names, name discrimination, teacher attitudes toward names, and the impact of discrimination on students learning to identify relevant studies. Interestingly, neither the terms "nameism" nor "namism" came up in any of the research databases even though the terms appeared in non-academic web sources, such as a baby name forum where a user posed the question, "Is nameism the newest prejudice?" (Chibride4, 2012). While many academic studies I cited were conducted within an education context, some were broader yet applicable to education. I took note of the dates for each study and how contemporaneous sociocultural, economic, and political influences colored perceptions.

Sample size and characteristics were also critical to consider, particularly in studies with relevant findings from populations outside the U.S. Studies were deemed relevant to the current inquiry based on their linkage to self-conception or symbolic interactionism. My main goal was to identify research findings that ultimately contributed to understanding the name-identity threat in education from the perspective of students and teachers of all walks of life. After reviewing over 30 peer-reviewed articles, several themes surfaced throughout the literature, with three being the most salient. The three themes described a different function for names considered unique, unfamiliar, ethnically identifiable, or outside the acceptable norm in mainstream American culture. Based on the review, distinctively Black or Black-sounding names served at least one of three functions: (1) measures of social desirability, (2) indicators of proximity to whiteness, or (3) symbols of presumed deficiency.

Measures of Social Desirability

As a general matter, whether a name made a person more or less socially desirable was not necessarily about race or ethnicity in many instances, according to research. Laham, Koval, and Alter (2012) posited a "name-pronunciation effect" that associated people with easy-to-pronounce names with positive impressions left on others based on "phonological fluency" or how the brain processes impression formation. A name's aesthetic appeal, on its face, was often a factor in how socially desirable a person appeared. Today, an older woman with a perceived youthful sounding first name in the present context, like Kaylee, versus a much younger woman with a first name that seems to fit someone from a past generation, like Gertrude, might conjure up a different picture in someone's mind based on a social desirability standard having nothing to do with

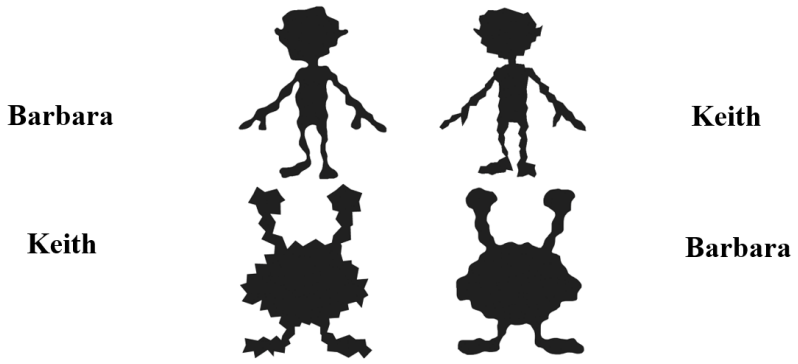
actual looks or persona. In such cases, the question becomes the extent to which a person who had encountered someone named Kaylee or Gertrude may defer to a memory associated with those names rather than the aesthetics of either name itself. Holden and Passey (2009) explained "social desirability" as a tendency to base self-perceptions on comparative descriptions of how others presented themselves.

Erwin (1999) studied the relationship between perceived attractiveness and a person's first name. The study empirically revealed that names functioned as a variable that either accentuated or attenuated the favorability of a person. Whether a girl is named Matilda, Melissa, or Mykiesha, or a boy is named Rupert, Richard, or Raheem, regardless of race or ethnicity, the name can determine how peers judge a person's perceived likability strictly based on whether a name seems contextually befitting. Sidhu and Pexman (2015) identified social desirability as an aspect of "sound symbolism," where distinct sounds conjure up certain kinds of information.

During their study, the researchers used real first names to investigate whether the Bouba/Kiki effect or a visual association between round- or sharp-sounding consonants and abstract personality qualities could be observed. Study participants were likelier to associate the round silhouettes with female names like Barbara and the sharp silhouettes with male names like Keith, matching "roundness and femaleness" and "sharpness and maleness," respectively, with each corresponding pair of silhouettes. Aside from the racial suggestibility of a given name and its mental associations, the name functions as a symbol unto itself that can influence how others view or characterize its bearer through sounds that give the name its soft or harsh appearance. Figure 2. Illustrates the imagery used to make the point in Sidhu and Pexman's (2015) study.

Figure 2.

Example Pairs of Bouba/Kiki Stimuli



NOTE: Example Silhouette Stimuli. Reprinted from *What's in a Name? Sound Symbolism and Gender in First Names* [image], by Sidhu & Pexman, 2015.

"Although in a strict sense, first names cannot be said to have meaning, they are different from nonwords [like Bouba and Kiki] in that they refer to entities in the real world," Sidhu and Pexman (2015, p. 16) concluded. "Sound symbolic properties of existing labels can have an impact on the shape and abstract personal information individuals will associate with those labels" (Sidhu & Pexman, 2015, p. 19). The extent to which peers associated names with specific attributes, such as visual appearance and personality, was also primarily influenced by prior experiences with a name.

This phenomenon, called the "Dorian Gray Effect," essentially programs a desirability calculus in a person's mind based on the impression left by a name relative to a person's face (Erwin, 1999). The Dorian Gray effect, or how a name shapes a person's face, links back to an earlier study by Colman, Hargreaves, and Sluckin (1980), who found that some names are more likely to be linked to negative associations than others through experiences with real or fictional people, such as actors in a movie. This notion

raises the second-order concern of how differences in one's enculturation create associations that become hardened into presuppositions under similar circumstances.

For example, the Dorian Gray effect will likely take on a racialized form for a teacher who grew up in a predominantly white community in the 1980s and '90s, whose primary exposure to Black culture was provocative political tropes that cast young Black men as "super predators" (Bogert, 2020) and television shows like COPS that presented "the dominant cultural depiction of how real policing works in America" (Deggans, 2020). Once name-identity associations became driven by sociocultural differences, stereotypes associated with the names of "suspects" and actors playing characters with Black-sounding names, such as the roles of Darrin and Shalika in the movie *Boyz n The Hood,* began to color real-life perceptions of seemingly similar people.

The added element of power distance becomes a third-order concern in instances where stereotypes influence social desirability, and social desirability determines access to opportunities. This name-identity dynamic becomes a point of entry for symbolic interactionism theory, whereby meanings through interactions infer a name's meaning, and those interactions function as a "looking glass" or mirror. In the classroom, those meanings can inform teachers' perceptions or the mental impressions one takes away when beholding an object, such as Darrin or Shalika's name on a class roster. Once an actual student named Darrin or Shalika begins to see themselves as they are depicted in the looking glass, as embodied in behaviors toward them, it creates a clash between symbolic interaction and self-concept, or as Smith (1931) poignantly asserted, "Our names are labels, plainly printed on the bottled essence of our past behavior."

Whether a perception renders a favorable or unfavorable verdict regarding a person's social desirability depends on a hidden calculation that manifests in how the perceiver, such as a teacher, interacts with the perceived student bearing specific attributes. When this dynamic happens among teachers who engage students of many walks, the literature suggests that "social coding" or labeling during teacher-student interactions can ensue (Zwebner et al., 2017). Social coding may partially explain how stereotypes evolve in a teacher's experience, as unfamiliar names or familiar names within a particular context become assigned to codes that bind unrelated experiences with categories of students, such as Black, white, rich, and poor, that become treated as predictive indicators of academic potential.

The social-desirability value of a first name was also highly correlated with popularity status among grade-school students when rating their peers. An early study by McDavid and Harari (1966) idealized the notion that names became "social handicaps" when they reaped unfavorable outcomes over time. The researchers used peer ratings, irrespective of family background or socio-economic status, to demonstrate the standalone power of a name to handicap or induce adverse reactions. How the student with such a name begins to view a situation exemplifies the application of self-concept theory, which juxtaposes three dimensions of a person's being: a vision that informs who she wants to be; how she currently sees and perceives herself; and (3) her self-worth and self-perceived value. When the rules of self-conception clash with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, as decided by society through interactions that reflect meaning, the consequences of social undesirability can be profound and long-lasting.

Twenge and Manis (2006) studied the association between socially undesirable first names and poor psychological adjustment in students. In the study, student satisfaction with a first name was a better predictor of psychological adjustment than whether a name was familiar and how others viewed it. This connection is critical to consider when student self-esteem, perceived social desirability, and the type of name one has are factored into academic potential, aside from the community or household from which a student came. Twenge and Manis's (2006) study helped make the point clear. After controlling for family background using a paired-siblings design, the researchers noted higher adjustment scores for the siblings more satisfied with their given name, translating into higher name desirability peer ratings.

Much of the literature surrounding the social desirability of names centered on how names shaped social desirability; however, two studies examined the human psychology behind determinants of social desirability. A study by Young et al. (1993) explored the effects of first names on perceptions of intelligence, popularity, and competency. The researchers found that merely knowing a person's name was enough to create a subconscious picture of expectations related to ethnic group membership or socio-economic status. Newman, Tan, Caldwell, Duff, and Winer (2018) took a different tack in their study on naming norms. The researchers used the same vignettes psychologists use to depict people engaged in behaviors and display characteristics. The study revealed that study participants judged names based on how they were presented, with the variance in name-person judgment illustrating the implications of name choice.

Within a classroom context, teachers are human and thus prone to the same vulnerabilities that come with being human. As seen in the vignettes, cultural

conditioning and situational framing play a significant role in how a teacher sets the conditions for deciding the social desirability of students' identities. Zweigenhaft (1983) said as much by concluding that negative perceptions of stigmatized names reflected the impulse and orientation of the offender, such as authority figures, whose attitudes and behaviors are the tripwire for nameism, not what a parent named a child.

Given the number of studies reviewed that did not include a race or ethnicity element, the evidence showed that nameism is a phenomenon that does not require racial or ethnic bias to manifest. However, like a wildfire that gets swept up into a tornado, the mix of name-identity bias and racism takes on a uniquely imposing character given the ubiquity of racism and the highly indiscernible nature of name-identity bias prior to being captured in outcome data and statistics. Norms and narratives mediate discriminatory acts that assault a person's natural identity, culture, and beliefs. As the literature showed thus far, this assault becomes the bond that hardens negative associations into stereotypes over time once applied to a class of people who share some aspect of cultural identity.

Bias or prejudice based on the presumed ethnicity behind a name raises the stakes by presenting unclear yet widely accepted rules of engagement, where reactions to what a parent names someone become the first arbiter of their social desirability. Kohli and Solórzano (2012) concluded that student experiences with racial discrimination typically involved microaggressions on the part of teachers that became significant factors throughout the K-12 education journey. How the symbolism of a name influences one's self-conception, as well as how parents might seek to control the social desirability of a child by its name, may depend on the extent to which institutional norms act as forcing functions that compel a student to recast her identity to raise her social desirability.

Indicators of Proximity to Whiteness

For this literature review, "whiteness" does not simply refer to the fluid social construct of race. Whiteness refers to the racialized qualities of a default persona in American society that traditionally has required no qualifier, unlike African American, Native American, or Asian American, and suggests, on its face, that white is unqualifiedly synonymous with being "American." Accordingly, Cotton et al. (2008) hypothesized that whiteness was treated as the "normative standard" in a study on first-name comparisons. Black people bearing white-sounding names were perceived as having a higher social status than those with Black-sounding names.

The often-unspoken danger of using proximity to whiteness as a measure of personality and intellect based on ethnicity came out in Busse and Seraydarian's (1977) seminal investigation on name-based discrimination. Names played a role in determining whether a child was born to parents who valued proximity to the default identity, with names as indicators. The difference between the names James and Jamel has little to do with the fact that one letter distinguishes them. The difference lies in what each suggests, with the one-letter difference between the names serving as linguistic off-ramps to differing meanings behind each name. James, a common and racially neutral name, strikes a different chord than Jamel, which appears exclusively in Black communities. While this difference alone need not necessarily be the only reason one name is more likely to elicit an adverse reaction than the other, a pro-white bias associated with the default American identity can resemble an anti-Black bias.

The question becomes whether the intent or the outcome determines the nature of the name-identity threat. This dilemma's effect on naming patterns provides a glimpse

into what many Black parents face when choosing a name for a child. In a study on the effects of naming patterns, Lieberson and Bell (1992) found that ethnic stereotypes affected the naming process, whereby differences in social taste within racially divided communities influenced a name's preferred aesthetics. The researchers concluded that a power imbalance mediated the emphasis on taste based on which superseded the other.

Colman, Hargreaves, and Sluckin (1980) studied reactions to particular names using familiarity and favorability scales. The researchers found that personal experiences influenced reactions to people bearing certain names, with ratings corresponding with "what is known about the objective prevalence of first names among the subjects' contemporaries" (pp. 114-123). In a later study, the same researchers attributed name favorability to the popularity of celebrities and variances in culture, social class, and region that "undoubtedly exert a powerful influence on the attractiveness of particular names" (Hargreaves, Colman & Sluckin, 1983, p. 400). A question remained as to whether the same "powerful influence" of proximity to whiteness has the same effect on teachers as seen in studies on the general population and, if so, the impact this had.

Starck, Riddle, Sinclair, and Warikoo (2020) investigated teachers' explicit and implicit racial bias and compared them to non-teachers with similar characteristics to examine the differences and similarities in bias both in and outside the classroom. Since many schools have clear policies on equity, equality, and non-discrimination, one might assume schools are where bias occurs less frequently. However, teachers and nonteachers held similar pro-white (as opposed to anti-Black) biases, with negligible differences between teachers and nonteachers (Starck, Riddle, Sinclair & Warikoo, 2020). In a multiple-case study, Carter (2019) studied perceptions among white elementary school

teachers and how attitudes toward race influenced their teaching practices. The researcher observed the patterned isolation of a Black student in every cohort observed during the classes taught by teachers who were predominantly white. While the case study alone did not prove a biased intent among the teachers, the study suggested a connection between outcomes and the extent to which engagements between teachers and students substantially differed along race lines.

Once names influence the dynamic, this may mean a Black student named James, relative to another student named Jamel, is more likely to receive a more charitable assessment of his academic potential at face value based on perceived proximity to the default white American identity. Building on this assumption was a study on ethnic name identifiability differences among twins and siblings, where name choice may have been less about a person's actual race, ethnicity, or even upbringing as the superseding concern centered on the assimilative intent of his parents as signaled by the chosen name. Thus, the proximity-to-whiteness question may come down to perceptions of whether Black parents have opted in or out of the puritanical "Grand American Design" (Berg, 1975).

Goldstein and Stecklov (2016) examined the benefits of hiding one's ethnic origins or being perceived as "acting more American" using a quantitative measure of ethnic distinctiveness. Their approach was very similar to Fryer and Levitt's (2004) Black name index, which empirically revealed that the "Americanization" of names was generally associated with structural assimilation, with social outcomes such as economic opportunity and vocational attainment being the rewards. The authors rejected the notion that distinctively Black names were symptoms of poverty and lack of education within ethnically concentrated communities. Their view countered the consensus in the research

that collectively asserted the oft-repeated “truths” and definitional systems used to mythologize Black culture and its association with limited intellect. To that end, Goldstein and Stecklov (2016) concluded that parents' “assimilative ambition,” as a measure of proximity to whiteness, influenced perceptions of their children's orientation, including their agency and future occupational potential, based on their choice of name.

Past studies on Black naming conventions were often based on circularly argued premises, whereby some names seemed blacker than others, and because blackness determined social value vis-a-vis proximity to whiteness, blacker names equated to lower social value. The term “acting white” finds resonance here as a proximity measure viewed as detrimental among Black peers and noteworthy among white peers judging a Black fellow student. Further complicating the matter is the reality that proximity to blackness has proven to reap better outcomes for Black students when their identities are perceivably under assault. Foster's (2008) study identified an empirical connection between racial identity and academic performance positively influenced by membership in stereotyped cohorts. These cohorts offered strength in numbers from which Black students drew support.

Similarly, Torres and Massey (2012) found that black students from segregated backgrounds were more likely to see other Black students “as a source of comfort and refuge from a white world often perceived as hostile” (p. 1). These findings suggest environmental and internal factors to students, such as perceived proximity to self-directed identities and enhanced self-perception, undercutting the notion that proximity to whiteness presented an advantage for stigmatized Black students. The extent to which Black-sounding names become an advantage in such cases is ripe for future study.

Symbols of Presumed Deficiency

The term "deficiency" refers to a presumption that names are a reliable indicator of a person's troubled backstory or holds clues to one's upbringing or family environment. The notion of presumed deficiency in Black students was a matter that had extended well beyond distinctively Black names in a 2014 study released by the American Psychological Association. In the study, Goff et al. (2014) revealed that authority figures were likelier to overestimate the age of Black children, leading to "unconscious dehumanization" that held them more accountable for infractions than white children who committed similar acts. Whether names that suggested a deeper commitment to Black identity had an impact was not part of the study but begged the question nonetheless.

Howard (2013) sought to provide historical context that framed how a presumed deficiency in Black people became normalized in professional literature, with titles such as *The White Man's Burden* (Riley, 1910), *The Negro Problem: Abraham Lincoln's Solution* (Pickett, 1969), and *What Shall We Do With the Negro?* (Escott, 2009) among several others. The study entailed a review of scholarly peer-reviewed articles published from 2000 to 2012 to examine the characterization of Black students within an education context. Black male students were often assigned "deleterious labels" and were "victims of persistent microaggressions," according to Howard (2013, p. 17, as cited in Solorzano, 1998). Howard (2013) also found that young Black students used "put-downs, lowered expectations, and doubting teachers" to resist the deficit narratives often imposed upon them out of a desire to prove teachers wrong about their potential (p. 20).

In an earlier study, Busse and Seraydarian (1977) examined ethnicity classifications based on names to explore whether social acceptability, beyond name likability, factored into presumed ethnic group membership. The study revealed that presumed ethnic group membership, as determined by first names, influenced perceptions of deficiency in personalities and intellectual characteristics. Williams, Coles, and Reynolds (2020) discussed ways in which research had perpetuated "deficit-centered narratives" that focused on academic underachievement among Black students and its influence on their experiences (p. 249). The authors defined "deficit rhetoric" as narratives that place Black students in conceptual categories under labels such as "at-risk," "disengaged," or "least likely to succeed" when rating academic potential, much like the findings in Howard's (2013) study.

Anderson-Clark, Green, and Henley (2008) used a School Achievement Motivational Rating Scale to de-abstract and depersonalize name discrimination by positioning it as an institutional phenomenon instead of one that required an actor to act individually on a prejudicial intent for it to manifest. The study validated the influence of "deficit rhetoric" on such behaviors (Williams, Coles & Reynolds, 2020). Figlio's (2005) study revealed the nature of the perceived deficiency that Black-sounding names often symbolized in the minds of educators by identifying presumed lower socioeconomic status as the basis for perceptions of deficiency. The study also outlined the role of teachers' expectations in student performance as a predictive variable in student outcomes, which meant faculty inherently expected less from students with names associated with lower socio-economic status and outcomes.

One of the more compelling parts of Figlio's (2005) study involved the outcomes of cohabitated twins with names that differed in racial identifiability. Names associated with lower socio-economic status influenced teacher bias, with all other conditions being comparatively equal between twins reared in the same household. This finding questioned whether Black-sounding names were reliable predictors of student deficiency based on presumptions about family socioeconomic status. Conaway and Bethune (2015) uncovered similar reactions to distinctively Black names in education through implicit association tests that were administered online. The study revealed adverse reactions to specific names as symbols of deficiency, with older, more experienced teachers more likely to harbor bias than younger teachers with less experience and more education.

This finding harkens back to the notion of social coding as a gauge for determining name acceptability based on past experiences, where teachers with more experiences had more instances from which they could assign codes to specific names. The findings suggested a relationship between lower education and longer tenures among teachers and a greater likelihood of name-based bias that could influence how teachers perceived deficiency in Black students. Consequently, the study also surfaced the possibility of teasing out nameism as a specific bias that, as seen in Milkman, Akinola, and Chugh's (2012) study, did not need direct contact with students to manifest and impact outcomes. Less direct contact also meant the perceived typicality of ethnicity was more likely to be informed by social cues instead of relationships.

Stelter and Degner (2018) investigated the influence of the perceived "ethnic typicality" of given names and an "other-race effect" that name associations had on negative perceptions of minoritized identities and related it to the perpetuation of group-

specific stereotypes linked to names (Holbrook et al., 2016). Similarly, Gaddis's (2017) investigation into naming patterns among Black and white families found that bias based on names was more challenging to detect as names became "imperfect proxies for race" and thus abstracted prejudice into a reality where such names appeared to justify inequitable outcomes (p. 471). Case in point, a study titled *The Causes and Consequences of Distinctively Black Names* (Fryer & Levitt, 2004), which suggested a free-standing pathology behind such names apart from systemic threats to Black identities triggered by "a semiautomatic set of negative beliefs (Diamond, 2018).

Discussion

By studying the extent to which social outcomes seem preordained based on the ethnic identifiability of names, I made a connection between deficit narratives and the assimilative intent of one's parents projected by a child's name. Understanding this connection added dimension to the role of a deep-seated aversion to blackness under the guise of racelessness. Unless this connection is linked to the history of blackness, the blackening of names, and reactions to Black naming conventions, as each was described earlier in the paper, seeing Black-sounding names as disruptions to a monoculture of conformity becomes more difficult. The synthesized findings from the literature review revealed this understudied reality as it had been lived by those who not only intimately understood the power of nameism but were also rendered voiceless in data and research

Appreciating the problem through the lenses of multiple researchers gave me a better understanding of how and why the phenomenon remains driven by unsettled ideals of blackness and whiteness in American society. Based on the literature, discriminatory attitudes and behaviors toward uncommon or unfamiliar identity indicators, such as

ethnically identifiable names, were not always considered socially adverse. The rightness or wrongness of a given act of bias or identity threat was often mediated under the color of generally accepted social norms, in some instances that were shared among members of Black communities. Whether the mechanism for nameism in its varied manifestations involved social desirability, proximity to white culture, an inherent deficit view of Black students, or some combination of these, the reality begs the question of where the problem lies: with distinctively Black names or with systems and social institutions that were not designed to embrace and support the identities attached to those names?

Action Research Design & Methods

The previous question was foundational to the next phase of the study, which entailed developing a plan to move from research to social action. Describing and interpreting experiences with nameism set the foundation for my value-laden axiological intent for the study. While value-neutrality had its place, my intent was steeped in examining the epistemic values that informed how I undertook the study, starting with the principle that one's reality is each's own. Moreover, no one reality should be privileged over another under a claim of defining an unassailable truth, which appeared to be a gap in the literature that I could and eventually sought to address. Analyzing the various ways a person's name functioned and its impact was essential to furthering discovery as it related to the prevalence of nameism.

After reviewing the literature, I viewed the existing discourse on distinctively Black names as the broadest expanse of how we understood why stigmas toward such names persisted. This understanding presented the body of knowledge on the topic as the limit of what could be known, as captured in the literature review, not what was possible

beyond conventional thinking or putative knowledge of uncommon names. Having said that, I could not overcome the limits of my professional competency in education simply by insisting I had found a better way. At the same time, I sought to discover what was possible going forward, beyond what mainstream society saw in identities associated with distinctively Black names, and how the discovery might benefit educators. Social psychologist and educator Kurt Lewin coined “action research” to describe scholarly inquiry undertaken to solve a problem within a given organizational context (McFarland & Stansell, 1993, p. 14).

Positioning the Study as Action Research

Action research was the ideal mechanism for moving through an iterative discovery process once I began to engage study participants. According to Sagor (2000), action research focuses on solving a problem by informing new approaches to teaching, learning, and engaging within education systems. Sanders (2016) described a future-orientation as a main advantage of action research, namely what could be versus what has been, and the practical benefits of problem-focused knowledge creation through opinion, argumentation, and motivation. Accordingly, the problem I sought to solve was defined by this approach to engaging the problem of practice through the research questions that would elicit relevant responses relative to the problem of practice.

Berg (2001, as cited in Newton & Burgess, 2008) described action research as a means of "assist[ing] practitioners in lifting their veil of clouded understandings and help them to better understand fundamental problems by raising their collective consciousness." Lifting the veil on how educators understood the conditions that lead to nameism required an openness to examine their own roles while encouraging minoritized

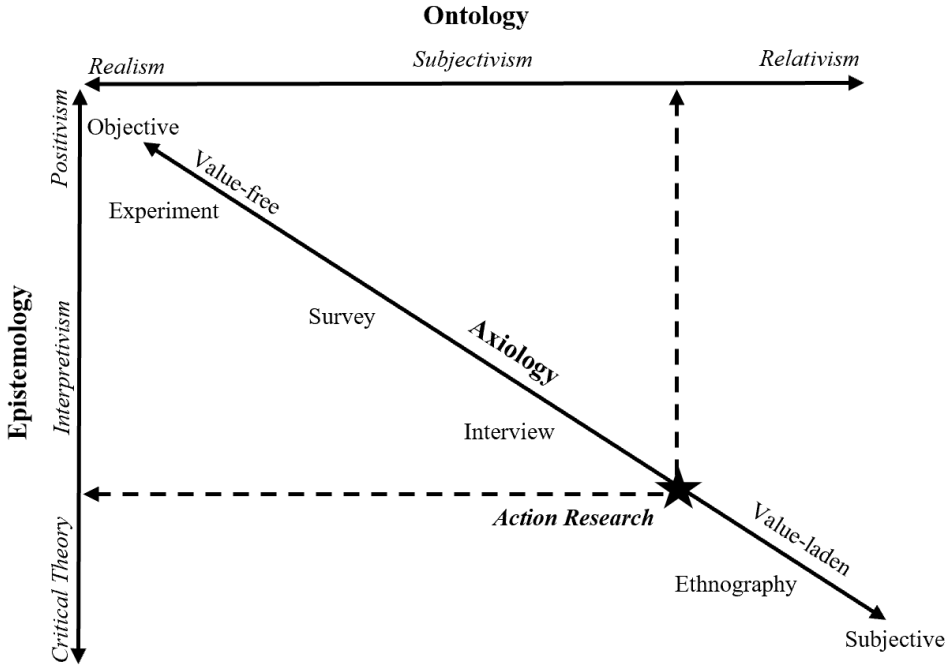
students to center their experiences. I employed the action research process to address the problem of practice, first by placing the phenomenon under the definitional dominion of study participants, for they knew an identity threat when it occurred even if they may not have had the words to describe it before my interviews with them. As described later in the paper, research findings were used to transform "knowledge into something meaningful" (Ferrance, 2020, p. 13) through the co-construction of an intervention drawn from the perspectives of former students.

"The experiences of vulnerable populations have largely been interpreted through the researchers' perspective, voice, and analysis. Their voices have been historically absent in traditional social science research, or the studies have been about them" (Martin et al., 2019, as cited in Groundwater-Smith and Downes, 1999). I addressed this issue by positioning the study along the numerous dimensions of scholarly inquiry. My study hovered between interpretivism and critical theory, as well as action research and ethnography, as I intended to study and interpret experiences, not confront the ideology sustaining the social structure or observe how societies and individuals functioned. That being said, I could not avoid the influence of these theoretical perspectives altogether given the inductive nature of my relativist-subjectivist, value-laden perspective. As such, my intended researcher perspective conceded "faultless disagreement" as a philosophical matter, whereby viewpoints can be valid for some and not others with opposed points of view regarded as "on a par" or equal truth-value footing (Marlo & Pravato, 2021).

Figure 3 illustrates how I positioned the research study as action research situated among the various research perspectives that will likely bump up against the study as debate and counterviews are not just anticipated but also welcomed.

Figure 3.

Action Research Position Paradigm



Note. Adapted from "Positivism vs Realism" by Sexton, M., 2003, Lecture Notes Presented at Research Institute of Built and Human Environment (BuHu) Postgraduate Workshop, University of Salford.

By privileging the historically unheard voices and lived experiences of those who gave the study its purpose, I demonstrated the value of participatory approaches to action research. "When PAR [participatory action research] is applied, vulnerable communities can understand the research process, why research is needed, and ultimately how we can produce it together" (Martin et al., 2019). I viewed this approach as the best means of giving form to nameism, as it was perceived by those most likely to sense it yet least likely to be asked to describe it, as my goal was to "situate power within the research process with those who are most affected by a program" ("Participatory action," 2015).

Population Selection

A pluralistic view of the phenomenon through participatory action research required integrating my inquiry and findings with history and extant literature through a process that respected the study participants' intersubjective vantage points (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). The meaningfulness of the study's results was intentionally derived from the participants' contributions, as it allowed me to isolate the essence of nameism across several complex multi-contextual experiences. I used purposive sampling to recruit and select participants for the study using the form shown in Appendix A. Also, I employed a combination of web searches and word-of-mouth referrals by educators to identify and select candidates whose lived experiences contained enough relevant details to extract thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon under inquiry.

Sampling procedure. The study's sample frame consisted of former students over 18 with distinctively Black names and experiences in interracial classroom settings where they either perceived nameism or maintained a sensitivity to the phenomenon's possible occurrence based on their names. I was particularly interested in study candidates whose experiences consisted of the purest instances or most unusual variations of name-identity threat in interracial classrooms, where the problem of practice appeared most acute. While the range of distinctively Black or Black-sounding names is vast, I opted to recruit participants with names that appeared in Levitt and Dubner's (2006) study on the prevalence of names in Black communities. The "Twenty Blackest Boy and Girl Names" used in the study are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3.

Twenty "Blackest" Boy and Girl Names

Twenty “Blackest” Girl Names		Twenty “Blackest” Boy Names	
Imani	Jada	DeShawn	Demetrius
Ebony	Tierra	DeAndre	Reginald
Shanice	Tiara	Marquis	Jamal
Aaliyah	Kiara	Darnell	Maurice
Precious	Jazmine	Terrell	Jalen
Nia	Jasmin	Malik	Darius
Deja	Jazmin	Trevon	Xavier
Diamond	Jasmine	Tyrone	Terrance
Asia	Alexus	Willie	Andre
Alyiah	Raven	Dominique	Darryl

Sample size. As the lead researcher, I relied on authoritative literature on qualitative research to determine the right starting point for the study on the questions of sample size and data saturation, namely the expected number of interviews before the data would likely render no new findings. Of utmost importance was striking a balance between interviewing enough participants to achieve the widest breadth of experience with the phenomenon possible while avoiding constraints on the time needed to conduct substantive semi-structured interviews with each study participant. While a critical mass of interviews was necessary, the depth and breadth of each interview within that critical mass were my priority.

Creswell (2009) suggested that as few as five interviews were enough to reach saturation in qualitative research. Kuzel (1992) suggested six to eight interviews in a homogenous sample, and Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants for phenomenological studies. Guest, Namey, and Chen’s (2020) bootstrapping analyses found “the most prevalent, high-level, themes are identified very early on in data

collection, within about six interviews," or about 80% data saturation. Romney, Batchelder, and Weller (1986) explained that relatively small samples may sufficiently represent a phenomenon within a particular context, depending on how familiar participants were with the phenomenon (p. 326). Based on the literature, I set the initial number at six interviews while reserving the option to add more participants should the first six prove inadequate to reach saturation. I selected six participants from the nine who were considered.

In selecting participants, I ensured that every essential element of the population of interest was accounted for within the sample, such as varying experiences with name-identity threat, attendance in predominantly white classroom settings, and coming to understand how the stories behind their names collided with assumptions based on their names. The sample was relatively homogeneous in 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. Table 4 outlines the demographic data on the study participants.

Table 4.

Demographical Profile of the Study Sample

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

Note. Mostly attended predominately white schools*

Research Role & Positionality

As the lead researcher for the study, I embraced accountability for what the study rendered. This accountability included an obligation to disclose my positionality relative to my worldview and the sociopolitical context that informed my research. I began the study with an understanding that educators face many challenges in their work. My professional experience as a military veteran, policy advocate, and federal emergency manager did not position me to advise certified educators in their work. I also did not anticipate what the study would render as I focused on why I conducted the study while remaining completely open to what I might discover.

I conducted the study because I viewed nameism as a symptom of a longstanding narrative on racial differences in the United States, which included education but extended to broader society. With that understanding, the value of my undertaking the study was as much about investigating my initial impressions of the phenomenon as what emerged through the research process. Among my most closely held virtues was a requirement that this research inquiry be fair and have the potential to make worthwhile knowledge. Worthwhile knowledge, in this context, is that which credibly re-centered the voices of students in interracial classroom settings who have historically lacked the agency to challenge negative beliefs about them, an experience to which I could relate.

Relative to my own everyday experience, I understood why people often assumed common names such as Michael or Jennifer made a person "seem" white, sight unseen, even when such names were attached to Black identities. This generifying effect of familiar names gave whiteness a place to hide within identities of color, which explained why some parents chose to avoid giving a child a name that signaled ethnicity. With this

notion in mind, my researcher's lens was colored by my situatedness as an insider with an emic view informed by American history through the Black experience. I consciously held this view in check by employing reflexivity throughout the study, which helped me to reconcile any fixed aspects of my identity that predisposed my sensitivity to name-identity threats. At the same time, a transparent reckoning of the study's broader social, political, and historical context was essential to better understanding the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Given the history of racism and its current sociopolitical implications, I prioritized and maintained a sensitivity to the experiences of study participants who shared their perceptions of unjust treatment in the classroom. I operated under the assumption that any social and emotional vulnerabilities could create tensions within the research process context. Ensuring positive participants' experiences during the study remained a priority as I conducted the interviews and subsequent engagements with care for their well-being above all else. Goodrum and Keys (2007) discussed the importance of anticipating a need for coping strategies and stress management to help participants regain control as part of the process.

Emotions tied to feelings of prejudice and discrimination were foreseeably pronounced in this study, given the subject matter. While asking participants to recount experiences that could move them emotionally during the interviews, I remained responsive to any needs that arose, which was critical to meeting the study's stated beneficence goal. In doing so, I encouraged participants to co-manage the interviews with me, which helped me establish mutually beneficial relationships with participants from the start of the study. This step not only aided me in obtaining good data and feedback but

also ensured that participants were treated and respected as individuals with a voice and agency throughout and after the study.

Additionally, I remained conscious of any "interviewer effect" indicators that could bias the study results, such as my gender, ethnicity, body language, age, and social status, or a false sense that they were obliged to primarily share “wound-based narratives” with me (Kerr & Dell, 1976; Cousin, 2010). When it was appropriate for me to share certain aspects of my experience as part of the trust-building process, I remained mindful of the suggestive nature of what I shared. As a routine matter, research can lead to misinterpreted findings and inaccurate results (Orb et al., 2001) and remains vulnerable to unintentional and deliberate deception. I employed a post-interview note-taking routine to preserve the essence of meanings in the transcription, including meaningful observations and pregnant pauses.

I later confirmed the accuracy of what I had recorded and captured in my notes. I interpreted the data using a review process to check the accuracy of the descriptive narratives each member of the sample provided. Member checks are crucial to a study’s credibility as "data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived with members of the various audiences and groups from which data are solicited" (Guba, 1981, p. 85). I gave study participants 30 days to review my translated descriptions of their experiences and respond with any changes to misinterpretations. Only one participant had questions about the process, and none of the participants identified any recommended edits or points of additional clarification.

Preserving participant confidentiality while taking notes and interpreting sensitive information remained paramount throughout the study. I maintained the security of

research records by using protected files and passwords. I also encrypted any data or information sent over the Internet while keeping paper-based materials in a file drawer under lock and key. Confidentiality was assured during data collection and analysis by anonymizing participants' identities. Throughout the study and before the final presentation of the findings, I redacted all possible identifiers within the data, such as the names of schools, cities, teachers, and family members.

Regarding the research process itself, I abided by the study protocol approved by the University of Dayton Institutional Review Board as part of my commitment to advancing truth and adding knowledge while avoiding error. Early in the study, I was granted permission to slightly adjust the research design to account for the difficulty in scheduling focus groups with participants who fit the sample frame. Instead of urging participants to make time for the focus groups, I believed I could achieve the same goal by conducting enough semi-structured interviews to reach an acceptable point of data saturation as prescribed in the literature on qualitative studies.

Finally, I honored my obligation to ensure I had the consent of every participant before each entered the study and that participants were well informed as they volunteered to lend their experiences and perspectives in the name of research. While each participant expressed enthusiasm from the outset, I noted portions of the interviews that consistently tapped into emotion or moments of deeper-than-usual reflection. Appendix A shows the invitation to participate sent to participants, describing the purpose and nature of the study. Appendix B contains the informed consent form that outlines the research study’s risks, benefits, and the choice to cease participation at any time and documents the participants’ consent by signature.

Data Collection Methods

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, "The data collection techniques used, as well as the specific information considered to be data in a study, is determined by the researcher's theoretical orientation, the problem and purpose of the study, and the sample selected" (p. 106). The problem of practice informed the purpose of the study, which was to give form to nameism through the perceptions of former students with distinctively Black names. Capturing data first required me to link the appropriate research methods, including the sampling approach, to desired outcomes and ensure that those outcomes implicated the research at the heart of the study. Table 5 outlines the study design relative to the research questions, methods, and desired outcomes.

Table 5.

Research Design

Research Questions	Method	Desired Outcome
How do students with distinctively Black names perceive nameism in interracial classrooms?	Semi-structured interviews	Increased awareness of the internalized aspects of nameism within targeted students
How do perceptions of nameism influence students' learning experiences in interracial classroom settings?		Greater mindfulness of the factors that contribute to perceptions of nameism in the classroom
How can educators mitigate the effects of nameism in their classrooms, given the subtlety of students' perceptions and experiences?	Participatory Action Research	Educators are equipped to address nameism and reduce its prevalence in the classroom proactively

Note: N = 6

Setting. I conducted the interviews virtually using a Zoom platform. The virtual interviews were conducted in participants' homes, most over a weekend, to accommodate their availability and competing work-related priorities. Even though I was invited into their homes virtually, I remained cognizant of my presence both in their living spaces and consciousness once we began the interviews, which was critical to creating a sense of collaborative inquiry into the phenomenon through their experiences. Being face-to-face during the virtual interviews allowed me to see facial expressions and bodily gestures. My direct contact with each participant placed me within close enough vicinity to understand how they experienced the phenomenon with their entire beings. I confirmed permission to record for each participant and started the interviews.

Interview structure. A 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. Descriptions were "thick" if presented "beyond mere fact and surface appearances" with enough detail, context, and "webs of social relationships that join persons to one another" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Descriptions that were "rich" alluded to "truthlike statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described" (Denzin, 1989, pp. 83-84). These two aspects of the data collected and analyzed heavily depended on the quality and relevancy of the responses from the study participants.

A semi-structured interview format also provided me with the best means of deconstructing deficiency-based definitional systems by having participants reconstruct the phenomenon, starting from within their pre-reflexive experiences, before giving meaning to perceptions driven by external attitudes and behaviors. I structured each

interview with the intention of "moving from descriptions or explanations of experience in general to descriptions of particular, singular lived experience" as part of the phenomenological reduction of participants' recollections of nameism to the "pre-reflexive dimension of experience" (Høffding & Martiny, 2015). Appendix C shows the script that illustrates how each concept was incorporated.

During the interviews, active listening on my part was critical to staying in the moment as I mentally co-scripted alternative realities that helped add dimension to the experience. During the process, I prompted participants with phrases such as "Help me understand what you mean" and "Please provide another example" to ensure clarity and accuracy in what I heard, as well as to give thick, rich "texture" to the descriptions of perceived experiences. While dialoguing with participants about their experiences using the interview script in Appendix C, I went to great lengths to avoid questions that were leading, binary (yes or no responses), or otherwise signaling any preconceived notions about their experiences. I remained intent on attaining descriptions in their own words during the context elicitation process.

I used a modified version of a 3-step interview method prescribed by Seidman (2006) to complete the data collection:

1. Personal narratives framed the situational context for each discussion.
2. Reconstruction of each participant's experiences with the phenomenon and the role of relationships and social structures in the dynamic.
3. Participants' reflections on the meanings of those experiences.

I integrated these 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 (see Table 6).

Table 6.

Phenomenological Interview Process

Interview Structure	Contextualization	Apprehend the Phenomenon	Clarify the Phenomenon
Researcher Approach	Acceptance of participants' natural attitude	Reflexive critical self-dialogue	Active listening and engagement
Method	Descriptive questions and narratives	Focus on modes of appearing	Imaginative variation

Not only did establishing the interview structure help give consistency to how each interview was conducted, but the structure also helped me identify points of data saturation during the interview and analysis phases. My goal was to ascertain when a critical mass of data provided enough information from which I could draw conclusions and whether further data were likely to add value to the study's findings.

Contextualization. According to Husserl (1970), objects within one's lifeworld, which can be anything from a book to a teacher's observable behavior, stand out against a backdrop of context as personal stories give descriptive meaning to such objects. Therefore, to examine a participant's particular experiences with objects relative to nameism, I also had to consider the context within which their experiences found meaning. I sought to make each context explicit through active listening and descriptive questions about perceptions and how each saw bias and perceived discrimination. During the interviews, my approach as the researcher entailed meeting the study participants where they were on their terms while engaging in reflexive dialogue with myself as I actively listened to them describe their experiences.

I sought to gather direct quotes as they described their experiences, as things were presented to them in their ordinary, everyday being in the world, or what Husserl (1982) described as the "natural attitude." As I observed and sought to sustain the natural attitude of each participant as they described what it was like to experience discrimination, I took note of points in the interview where I saw participants ponder their experiences in silence until they achieved articulable clarity on what happened at the moment. This clarity helped take the interviews beyond descriptions of what Høffding and Martiny (2015) referred to as "idiosyncratic experience" to grasp the "invariant structures of experience" that bound one participant's intersubjective truths to another.

My questions did not start with the experience of an episode of nameism, as this would have prematurely isolated the phenomenon within the participant's lifeworld and limited my understanding of its context. Instead, I started the interview with questions that helped me glean the circumstances that situated their experiences, such as the racial

makeup of their schools, family socioeconomic background, and views on life as a student. Contextualization enabled participants and me to co-reconstruct each experience as they narrated descriptions that provided openings for further questioning. By probing deeper whenever the interview led to thick, rich descriptions of what participants observed, felt, and thought prior to internalizing their perceptions, I hoped to identify recurring structures of those experiences that enabled the "comparison of this context to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated … in order to make judgments about fittingness with other contexts possible" (Guba, 1981, p. 86).

Apprehending the phenomenon. The next phase in the interview process involved understanding the phenomenon within the context framed by each participant's responses. This process shifted focus from a broad inquiry into participants' lives toward the experiences that specifically engaged the research questions. I began to explore those experiences with descriptive questions related to how each perceived different types of bias and discrimination in the classroom. Given the phenomenon's many "modes of appearing," I reflected on how nameism took form with apparent and hidden contours that made it difficult to describe using one definition. During this round of questions, I sought to apprehend the phenomenon by leading the discussion with questions that centered on the dynamics that often created conditions for nameism to occur. As we proceeded, it became clear that participants had perceived nameism in several ways and with varied effects, which I approached with critical, reflexive self-dialogue.

This moment was the point in the study when bracketing my presuppositions became critical to factoring in contradictory aspects of experiences reported by participants that bumped up against experiences reported by other participants, such as

disagreement over what made a name more “Black sounding” than other names. “Bracketing,” or what Husserl (1913) referred to as "epoché" (Greek for “suspension of judgment”), entailed confronting biases or presuppositions that could impede my ability to allow the data to lead me instead of leading the data. While I could not wholly divorce my thoughts on the phenomenon from the history and legacy of racism in America, I remained fixated on letting the voice of the study participants outline the narrative. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) referred to this conscious state of mind as "deliberate naiveté," or remaining open to whatever the interviews revealed.

Clarifying the phenomenon. The final and perhaps most challenging step in the interview structure involved clarifying the phenomenon's obvious and hidden contours. I undertook clarification of the phenomenon through imaginative variation or examining phenomena within the conscience through imaginary perspectives and an aggregation of meanings that surfaced during the interviews. Husserl intended this process to “describe the experience of consciousness” by revealing “the structures of experience more distinctly” (Turley et al., 2016, p. 1). For example, I asked participants to consider whether their names would be viewed differently in schools with varying racial makeups and how they imagined Black-sounding names differed in interpretation when attached to a person of a different race or ethnicity. I intentionally designed the questions to elicit thoughtful, descriptive derivations of the experience once imaginatively altered by context and perspective.

Although imaginative variation was not traditionally used in the interview process, according to Giorgi (1985), Turley, Monro, and King (2016) effectively demonstrated the benefits of using imaginative variation during interviews by mentally

walking participants through hypothetically modified versions of their lived experiences. In doing so, the researchers could separate the contextual elements of an experience from varied situational contexts, thereby illuminating any shared experiential components. I found this approach enlightening and invaluable to drawing out the essential elements of the phenomenon that consistently reappeared in every iteration. This approach also allowed me to peer into the thought processes of the study participants and examine how each similarly and dissimilarly "intended upon" the objects in their consciousness that appeared to inform their perceptions of name-identity threats.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once all six interview recordings were completed, I downloaded each onto a secured laptop hard drive. Then, I transcribed the recordings using NVivo software. The transcripts were anonymized to ensure participants' privacy, including any mention of other names and references to specific cities, states, and the names of schools. I ensured confidentiality by giving each participant a pseudonym, with links to identities only I knew and intended to use throughout the data analysis process. I ensured the security of the recorded transcripts by using encrypted, password-protected files. As with the semi-structured phenomenological 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. In doing so, I extracted meanings and the structures of reported experiences using bracketing and bridling, two approaches prescribed by Janek (2018), to confront any bias and the impact of my social identity on the study through a self-examination process to begin the analysis.

Researcher self-examination. Moustakas (1994), like Husserl, sought ways to separate consciousness from the senses by "bracketing" out influences on the natural or everyday attitude that might otherwise prevent one's ability to grasp an experience's essence beyond its immediate context. I also elected to apply a complementary approach to bracketing called "bridling." Bridling refers to "the restraining of insider pre-understandings of phenomena… [and] helps 'slacken' the firm intentional threads that tie us to our experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). This meditative process helped me find reflexive restraint when pulled toward discoveries during the study, much like pulling the headstall on a horse so a rider can redirect its orientation, hence the term. Consciously slowing down the shifting contours of the phenomenon as they were occurring allowed me "to maintain a grip on assumptions as opposed to allowing assumptions to grip the self or the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2010, p. 403).

Bridling presented an interesting counterweight to bracketing, which is likely to be most problematic for phenomenological purists, such as Giorgi (2008), who decried "the lack of proper exposure to sound phenomenology" as evidenced by the spate of intermixed methods he had reviewed across various dissertational studies. However, Stutey, Givens, Cureton, and Henderson (2020) addressed the methodological tension that bridling presented across all phenomenological traditions by asserting the virtues of "preunderstanding" the phenomenon and "adopt[ing] an attitude of working through being 'in resistance'" (p. 147). I found the notion of "working through being in resistance" through the bridling process to be highly illuminating as I revisited the deeper animating purpose behind my interest in the topic, as outlined in my positionality statement.

The bracketing-bridling process also proved critical to reconciling my inner contradictions as I engaged the phenomenon under inquiry. The co-application of bracketing and bridling was especially helpful when I encountered outliers during the interviews. For example, two study participants disagreed with the premise that their names were distinctively Black. Rather than try to convince them otherwise, I saw it as my responsibility to bracket any presuppositions I brought into the interview, which included my stance on their names. This responsibility was coupled with an obligation to bridle any newly discovered possibilities that could prevent me from remaining open to appreciating the influence of other factors besides nameism.

Phenomenological reduction. As I began engaging the data, I started by cleaning any errors in transcription, missing information, and inaccuracies that could be accounted for by simultaneously listening to the audio recording. The exact words spoken by participants were preserved to the greatest extent possible, including verbal ticks such as the word "like," which frequently signaled moments when participants had to think deeply while composing responses. Moments of occasional uncertainty in response to questions like "What does 'blackness mean and why does it remain negative?" held my interest as I watched each participant wrestle with the question before responding.

Several parts of the transcripts and recordings had captured moments when participants thought aloud or appeared to struggle with their inner contradictions, which were contextualized by tonal changes, facial expressions, and pregnant pauses. Once the transcriptions were thoroughly anonymized and cleaned, I began the data analysis phase by applying Moustakas's (1994) three-part framework, as outlined in Table 7.

Table 7.

Framework for Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological Reduction	Eidetic Reduction	Universal Description
Horizons	Imaginative "Possiblizing"	Essence of the Phenomenon
Relevant Meaning Units		
Thematic Clusters	Structural Descriptions	
Textural Descriptions		

I continued the data reduction process by looking for linkages between hidden meanings and recurring themes as participants described them within a given context. As participants perceived or reflected on the presence of an object within their consciousness, such as an attitude or behavior that may have constituted a symbolic interaction, the meaning was derived from their experiences. While some aspects were consciously noticed, perceived, or otherwise "intended upon" by their consciousness, other aspects of the experience were not directly intended upon in the pre-reflective moment yet were recognized "either by recall or anticipation, as belonging to the object intended upon by the consciousness" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 5, as cited in Husserl, 1965, p. 150). Moments such as these were captured as "horizons" to ensure I did not prematurely overlook any critical feature of the experience.

Horizontalization. While "horizontalization" itself was not part of Husserl's vernacular, according to Giorgi (2008), Husserl did describe the process of surfacing, questioning, and reexamining horizons during the data reduction process. Moustakas (1994) admonished the researcher to remain receptive to every statement of experience

identified in the transcripts and assign equal weight to each (p.122). Hence, regardless of relevance to the research questions, I considered every statement or "horizon" of the experience salient to the study at this initial stage to ensure that no critical detail was inadvertently excluded. Moustakas (1995, as cited in Giorgi, 1971, pp, 21-22) wrote, "[T]he horizon is essential for the understanding of the phenomenon because the role the phenomenon plays within the context, even if it is only implicitly recognized, is one of the determiners of the meaning in the phenomenon" (p. 293). Accordingly, I aimed to grasp the meaning of every horizontal statement that appeared in the transcripts and presented some clue or information that had the potential to contribute to a collective understanding of the phenomenon.

Invariant constituents. Once the horizons were collected and organized, I applied Moustakas's (1994) two-part test for each horizon to determine whether it qualified for conversion into an invariant constituent of the experience with nameism (p. 120): (1) Was the moment of the experience necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding the phenomenon; and (2) Was it possible to abstract and label it? The horizons that met these requirements were retained as invariant constituents of experiences with nameism within the sample. Horizons that were overlapping, repetitive, vague, or did not meet the two-part requirement were removed from the dataset. The horizons that stood out as core situational elements of the phenomenon were retained. As I looked for invariant constituents of the reported experiences with nameism in the sample, I further reflected while re-listening to the recordings as participants embraced their distinctively Black names. Within their individual contexts, each participant talked through the ubiquitous nature of racism, exceptionalized their experiences as Black students in predominantly

white classrooms, and carefully delineated the differences between name types by their definitions and descriptions.

Thematic clusters. Once I identified the invariant constituents, I clustered the verbatim excerpts into core experience themes. These clusters formed a common theme or "essence" that bounded discrete units of meaning to each other within the context of each participant's experiences. While specificity and rigor are desired in most research studies, a fair amount of "artistic judgment" was unavoidable in phenomenological research. According to Moustakas (1994, as cited in Coliaizzi, 1978), the researcher becomes "engaged in something that cannot be precisely delineated, for here he is involved in the ineffable thing, known as creative insight" (p. 288). Most important at this stage was my commitment to staying true to the context provided by the participants as I continued bracketing and bridling my thoughts, moving between each with an open mind to look for how the units of relevant meaning naturally clustered around themes.

Textural descriptions. After I had identified the most salient themes, I proceeded with composing narratives of each participant's experience, with rich, vivid details that gave thickness, or texture, to "thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, [and] situations that portray what comprises an experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) explained the importance of narratives in research: "We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events yet allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, in addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts'" (p. 8). Accordingly, I used narratives to create a "realm of social constructivism" to capture the complexities and nuanced understandings necessary to appreciate the significance of what participants

experienced (Ntinda, 2019). This epistemological orientation was essential as I transitioned from the Husserlian descriptive to the Heideggerian interpretive phases of the analysis to examine the phenomenon's various modes of appearing through the process of imaginative variation, or eidetic reduction.

Eidetic Reduction. Husserl (1931) conceptualized the next phase of the process as examining phenomena within the conscience through "eidetic reduction." Eidetic (meaning related to mental images) reduction began with the mental act of reimagining an experience with nameism across various situational contexts through imaginative variation. Each time I imagined nameism occurring under varied circumstances, I separated the inessential elements that were situationally dependent from those that appeared no matter the scenario. Examples included how perceptions might compare and contrast if the observer was in third grade versus high school, whether the learning environment with the same student-teacher dynamic was in person versus virtual, or if the genders of all involved were switched around.

The essential elements of experiences with nameism were those features or structures of the experience that consistently appeared within varied interracial learning environments. Moustakas (1994) explained, "The task of an imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (pp. 97-98). As was the case during the phenomenological interview, I sought to describe how participants experienced their consciousness and demystify what gave those experiences their structure (Turley, Monro & King, 2016, p. 1).

Berghofer (2018) described the imaginative variation process as a toggling between immediate (perceptual) and inferential (intuitive) justification, such that one can experience seeing a black laptop on a table and imagine seeing a black laptop on a table with the same epistemological rigor. This link demonstrates the relationship between "consciousness and the givenness of objects in its various modes" (Berghofer, 2018, as cited in Husserl, 1984, p. 424; Husserl, 2002, p. 152). In doing so, Berghofer (2018) elevated the legitimacy of subjective experiences, in part, by decrying the virtues of "process reliabilism," which claims that a belief can only be justified "if and only if a reliable process forms the belief" (p. 125).

Moustakas (1994), who shared Berghofer's counter view, outlined the following four-step process that I applied in the current study to give form to the subjective experiences of participants as a legitimate foundation for truth:

1. Identifying structural meanings within the textural meanings
2. Recognizing underlying themes or contexts that give rise to the phenomenon
3. Considering the role of universal structures in the phenomenon's emergence
4. Describe the invariant structural themes that facilitate the phenomenon

Once the interview participants confirmed that the "textural" aspects of their experiences were accurately captured, I approached the interpretive turn in the hybrid study design. At this point in the process, I moved from a purely descriptive phenomenological gaze to an interpretive one. This turn meant that I would move away from bracketing to allow myself to consider how self-concept theory and symbolic interactionism theory applied to a cross-sectional analysis of experiential structures, such as time, space, causality, and interrelations, in each participant's experience. Exercising

consciousness within the "sphere of the imagination" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 263) required me to think imaginatively about how nameism could manifest differently yet present with the consistency to recognize it when it occurred in one's perception.

I achieved the state of imaginative variation by converting the participants' "unsensed" experiences into structures that were held together within the realm of possible occurrences, or what Zander (2002) called the "act of possiblizing." Moustakas (1994) described what happens during the imaginative variation process: "[T]he world disappears, existence no longer is central, anything whatever becomes possible. The thrust is away from facts and measurable entities and toward meanings and essences; in this instant, intuition is not empirical but purely imaginative in character" (p. 98). In the next section, I describe how the amalgamation of the imagined experiences was used to identify the structures in which the objects of participants' consciousness were contained.

Structural descriptions. According to Husserl, the structure of an experience is layered with three essential characteristics: (1) the act (the dynamic between the content of an experience and the interpretation that colors the appearance of a real or imagined object); (2) the content itself (formed either by sensation leading to perception or fantasy leading to the imagination); and (3) the object (what appears to be present when having an experience) (Budek & Farkas, 2014, p. 11). Moustakas (1994, as cited in Ihde, 1977, p. 50) explained, "[O]ne moves from that which is experienced and described in concrete and full terms, the 'what' of the experience, 'towards its reflexive reference in the 'how' of the experience'" (p. 50). In other words, the union of the texture (the apparent aspects) and structure (the nonobvious aspects) was necessary to form the essence of the phenomenon of interest that animated the purpose of the study.

Each experience shared by the six study participants added texture to the fabric that comprised the holistically derived essence of nameism as it appeared in the sample. My intention for the semi-structured interviews remained focused on attaining a pluralistic perspective of the phenomenon through a confluence of relevant history, my own experiences, and a participative process to address the problem of practice.

Steps Taken to Ensure Trustworthiness

Once I had completed the data analysis phase of the study, I took time to audit the trustworthiness measures I had documented during the data collection and analysis processes. Because qualitative research is inherently less generalizable than quantitative studies, the strength of my study's results relied on the extent to which the reader finds the experiences of study participants through their voices plausible. The study's generalizability, within that context, was achieved through the study's level of detail, sampling strategy, and researcher transparency, where the truth value of the results was defensible based on the integrity of the process. I ensured the process's integrity through the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The four criteria are credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

According to Stahl and King (2020), "Credibility asks the 'How congruent are the findings with reality?'" (p. 27). Given my relativist-constructivist orientation, I ensured the study's credibility, first and foremost, by focusing on findings that objectively reflected each participant's contribution to the study verbatim. I also documented my reflection practices in a reflexivity journal to establish and track my progress as I used the bracketing, bridling, and memoing processes when shifting between the recordings and transcripts to preserve the "meaning making" integrity of the data. I scheduled periodic

check-ins with my committee chair and committee members to obtain feedback and additional insights as findings began to take form. These measures ensured the study's credibility and dependability.

Additionally, I consulted with peers to ensure my sense-making of the data was sound in anticipation of future peer review, in addition to debriefs with my dissertation committee to review my precision of practice during data collection and analysis. I ensured confirmability by maintaining an audit trail that detailed critical steps and decision points in the data management process that might influence the study findings. Additionally, the study's transferability was assured through my use of thick, rich descriptions of participants' experiences for comparison in future studies. This feature enhanced credibility as any contextual inferences I identified were thoroughly documented in a research journal for reflection. The trustworthiness measures outlined in Table 8 were employed to ensure the data supported the main points drawn in the study, the defensibility of the research design, methodology, methods, and the study results.

Table 8.

Trustworthiness Measures

	Reflexivity	Memoing	Peer Debrief/ Check-in	Audit Trail	Thick, Rich Details	Process Fidelity	Member Checking
Credibility	X	X	X				X
Transferability					X		
Dependability			X			X	
Confirmability				X		X	

Reflexivity Statement

I was in the earlier phases of the current research study when I heard former President Donald Trump publicly refer to then-newly confirmed Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Ketanji (pronounced Keh-tän-gee) Brown Jackson as "Kuh-chān-gee" to the delight of attendees during a rally in Anchorage, Alaska (Sharp, 2022). While one could argue the slight as forgivable given the uniqueness of Justice Brown Jackson's first name, it was the second time the former president, a white man in authority, appeared to use intentional first-name mispronunciation to invalidate a political opponent of color. He did the same two years prior when he repeatedly mispronounced the first name of then-vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris, also a Black woman, adding that she was "not competent" and an "insult to our country" (Cathey, 2020).

My reflection on these memories had little to do with divining the intent of the former president. What I found most illuminating had nothing to do with him *per* se. That there was no groundswell of rebuke or public outcry in response to these high-profile moments of nameism, as I have described it herein, suggested that racialized name-identity threat was far more acceptable in mainstream society than I had imagined. I also concluded that attacks on name identity were how power sought to assert itself. This notion led me to question whether nameism was mostly about perceiving deficiency in a person based on ethnic-name identifiability, as the research had suggested. Or was nameism about how the social order held itself together by pressuring Black identities to yield to an Anglo-centered monoculture? Where one comes down on either side of the equation will likely depend on two aspects.

One centered on the lived experiences of those involved. The other aspect was concerned with who holds the power to decide. Given my sensitivity to the racial dynamics involved in those two instances, they served as a mirror for a society whose countenance was reflected in the consequences of nameism, in many cases unbeknownst to those who were impacted, according to research. This reflection further led me to consider how the names of my four adult daughters might have influenced their social outcomes. While all four grew up in the same home, graduated from high school, and were accepted into college, it just so happened that my two youngest daughters, who have racially ambiguous names, will graduate from top universities. Conversely, my two oldest daughters, whose names appeared in Levitt and Dubner's (2006) "Blackest Names" list, faced greater challenges in their socioeconomic pursuits than their younger siblings.

While I did not view this as evidence of the consequences of nameism, it begged whether anyone could rule it out given how often nameism appeared unchecked, even when it blatantly occurred. As I moved through the study, I realized the extent to which distinctively Black names carried forth the intergenerational weight of a proud yet embattled, Black-centered existence. This realization answered the question of why parents, such as me, still gave their children Black-sounding names despite the risks. At the same time, a "Black name" paradox culminated with another unsettled question: who bears the greater culpability — parents or society — for putting children behind the proverbial eight ball in life because of what their names symbolize? While I did not undertake the study to address this question of culpability, the results revealed a far more complex answer than one might have assumed, including me. The complexity started

with the attitudes of several study participants toward distinctively Black names and what they symbolized, including negative feelings toward names that seemed "too Black."

This revelatory aspect of the study compelled me to place a modicum of accountability for perpetuating nameism on several participants themselves, as I saw it. Brown, Sellers, and Gomez (2002) described negatively reflected self-appraisals as "unrelieved irritants" that compel Black people to strive for a sense of balance while coping with an internalized sense of inferiority that "leads to despising the status holding them back" (p. 58). While I was not inclined to give society a pass on its role in perpetuating nameism over time and in research, I found myself needing to reconcile the tension between how likely participants viewed their names, as well as how the similar names of others, as "unrelieved irritants" that held them back. As I investigated further, the question turned on the notion that blackness, in itself, was acceptable, but blackness "to an extreme" seemed undesirable yet hard for several study participants to describe.

Accordingly, I noted two conflicting streams of consciousness that seemed to explain the impulse toward nameism I had unexpectedly encountered in the study. One stream appeared to be a reactive inquiry focused on the broader social structure, where participants pondered, "How does society see us?" The other stream came across as an assertive inquiry driven by a Black-directed self-governance structure, where the question became, "How do we see each other?" These two questions were foundational to inquiries into Black-centered cultural studies, according to Carr (2020), who asserted that societies "have shaped the lessons [Black people] have learned to the unique circumstances of the societies they have found themselves in" (p. 7). This notion rang true within the study participants' perceptions, as the study's results revealed.

CHAPTER TWO:

RESULTS OF RESEARCH

Qualitative Results

I collected qualitative data for this study through 1-hour semi-structured interviews with former students with distinctively Black names according to Levitt and Dubner's (2006) "Blackest Names" list. Six recorded interviews were completed using Zoom video conferencing software and transcribed for analysis using NVivo Transcription software. Three other participants, two women and a man, initially accepted the invitation but later declined without offering a reason. The transcripts were anonymized using other distinctively Black names to ensure the privacy of the participants' identities and the confidentiality of what we discussed. I refer to the participants as Ebony (age 26), Imani (age 35), Nia (age 32), and Jada (age 22), who identified as women, and Terrell (age 38) and Deandre (age 39), who identified as men. All six participants identified as either Black or African American. I interpreted the results of the phenomenological reduction process using participant Ebony's interview as an instrumental case study to provide insight into how I studied the phenomenon in its natural context (Stake, 1995).

Single-case Narrative: Participant Ebony

Ebony's description of her experiences provided the most relevant case study on nameism and, thus, gave the reader an example of how my application of phenomenology helped illuminate the invariant constituents and structures of her experience. Her interview transcript rendered several horizons, within which aspects of an object in her experience (i.e., a thing perceived, such as behaviors) could be considered a constituent

of the phenomenon upon recall during the interview. Shown in Table 9 are key excerpts from her interview that met this standard applied across all participants' experiences.

Table 9.

Excerpts from Ebony's Interview Transcript

Horizons	Units of Relevant Meaning
"… just because you've heard that a Black person acts like this or just because her name is that way, she's about to be ghetto…"	Perceptions of nameism created concerns over stereotype threat
"…growing up, a lot of my white teachers … or I mean, my black teachers will get my name right the majority of the time, but any of my white teachers or different races would mess up my name … they'll call me like different things or even things that aren't even remotely close to what my name would be"	Self-perceptions of her name as difficult led her to expect nameism in the classroom
"… they might think I'm ghetto. I don't know … I've done that before … Yeah, a black ghetto girl … honestly I think that's the way if you were to just hear my name, even for myself, like all the people that I know with my name … has that type of vibe to it."	Associations between names, behaviors, the recurring term "ghetto" as the imprecise measure for some names
"… just seeing names and they just assume that the person … you can see a name and just assume that this type of race or that they're dumb or whatever … and it kind of has an effect on how you think before you even meet that person … in your head of who that person is going to be …"	Hidden aspects of nameism led to assumptions of what happens in the mind of someone who judges others based on names

The most salient horizons in Ebony's interview were those most relevant to the research questions. They also met Moustakas's (1994) two-part test requirement, as discussed in the Data Analysis section of this paper. Once I noted the units of relevant meaning, the next step entailed finding connections between the units to form themes

within the experience that implicated the research questions. As I continued to move between bracketing and bridling to fix the analysis's contextual focus on the research questions, two central themes of Ebony's experience surfaced, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10.

Central Themes Derived from Ebony's Interview

Units of Relevant Meaning	Central Themes
Perceptions of nameism created concerns over stereotype threat.	*Relative to Research Question #1:*
Self-perceptions of her name as difficult led her to expect nameism in the classroom.	Perceptions of nameism are perpetually carried in mind and are complicated by the impact this can have on self-conception
Associations between names, behaviors, the recurring term "ghetto" as the imprecise measure for some names	*Relative to Research Question #2:*
Hidden aspects of nameism led to assumptions in the mind of someone who judges others based on names	Reactions to nameism can be anticipatory or directly triggered by either colorable or perceived name-identity threats in the classroom.
	Relative to Research Question #3:
	Perceptions about how students feel they are perceived remain largely unspoken and beyond the awareness of teachers who either allow the problem to perpetuate or perpetuate it themselves

Textural description of Ebony's experience. I extracted two central themes from Ebony's interview transcript to frame a textural description of her perceptual experience with the phenomenon. The horizons that culminated into the themes contained the phenomenon's essence, as Ebony experienced it through a pre-reflexive lens where the phenomenon was not apparent at the moment and may never have been but for

phenomenological reduction. As the following textural description of her experience showed, nameism occurred under conditions complicated by perceptions, self-dialogues, assumptions, and interpersonal engagements that colored her thoughts on what was actually occurring as she saw it:

> Ebony's experience with nameism began with the frustration of having to vacillate between her self-conceived identity and the one that was socially constructed for her based on societal reactions to what her parents named her. Wanting to navigate life as her authentic self was often disrupted whenever she had to switch identities because "they might think I'm ghetto," thus feeling trapped by the stigma, or what Amiri Baraka called "the ghost." This entrapment was most exhibited and experienced in moments when she told me "You're not trying to seem black because … when you're going to get jobs or whatever [they] don't hire you because of your name." One of the most salient aspects of Ebony's experience was the swift association she made between the term "ghetto" and a type of blackness that she could only describe as "eccentric," whereby a name had "that type of vibe to it." She attempted to characterize the distinction between her name and specific name constructions that were unusual yet considered typical in Black communities in the imagination of a monocultural mainstream society.
>
> Interestingly, Ebony remarked, "Just because you've heard that a Black person acts like this or just because her name is that way [doesn't mean] she's about to be ghetto…" to make the point that a name should be no basis for judgment. However, in the same breath, she admitted, "Honestly, I think if you were to just hear my name, even for myself … most of the people that I know

who have the same name as me do kind of go along that path" meaning act consistent with stereotypes about Black people as loud and hostile by nature. While her self-conception seemed impacted by the frequency of insults to her name, she thoughtfully explained how the power of a name to define a person is so natural and profound that she even catches herself doing it at times.

However, she appeared to draw the line at "just seeing names" and making assumptions about "this type of race or that they're dumb" or "has an effect on how you think before you even meet that person." Later in the interview, Ebony expressed no interest in negotiating her identity in the classroom despite facing constant nameism. She even noted the uniqueness of her name as an advantage. When asked about why she believes the stigmas perpetuate, she responded, "When people see my name, they already know like 'Oh, she's a black girl' or 'I think she's from some type of ethnic background' or whatever" based solely on the fact that "it's not a basic name and it's something you may have to take a second to pronounce."

She admitted that she frequently used "code-switching," or conforming to dominant cultural norms to feign commonality or downplay membership in a stigmatized ethnic group. She did so in response to anticipated nameism in certain circumstances. She talked through the mechanics of nameism in her own words: "[Y]ou see a name, and you see that it's spelled in a certain way … you don't know what ethnic background, but you could kind of tell, or you have a picture in your head … it's not always 100% sure but you can kind of gauge what type of person that is." Because her schools were often predominantly white, Ebony

resigned herself to expecting nameism to occur, concluding, “I just knew I had a different name. I already knew, like, people pronounce it differently and were just going to have a hard time with it.” Given the ubiquity of nameism in Ebony’s experience, she considered it the norm. So typical, in fact, she would sometimes excuse it depending on her relationship with her teachers.

However, she pointed out how the problem often fell along racial fault lines in her experience: “Growing up, a lot of … my black teachers would get my name right the majority of the time, but many of my white teachers or different races would mess up my name … they’ll call me like different things or even things that aren’t even remotely close to what my name would be.” When asked how she handled the problem, she replied, “Sometimes they’ll correct themselves, or sometimes they’ll just forget, and I’ll just have to correct them. I think some people just really don’t care to know your name … especially the subs[titute teachers].” How this colored her learning experience as a student had to be considered among the many stressors to which she simply had to adapt.

[end of description]

Once I had completed the textural description of Ebony’s experience, I emailed my interpretation to her as a trustworthiness measure by ensuring the descriptions of her experience were accurately captured in her own words and within the intended context. The same practice was undertaken for the other five participants as well. Once I had assurances from all participants that my descriptions accurately reflected their experiences, the next step involved interpreting the phenomenal character of each

participant's experiences through imaginative variation. In brief, imaginative variation entailed reimagining the same phenomenon, as described by participants, through varying lenses to clarify its various modes of appearing to one's perception through consistent structural descriptions across experiences.

Structural description of Ebony's experience. The experiences each participant shared with me were reimagined directly or through consciousness, with past experiences as a frame of reference for each new experience. This mental exercise allowed me to "possiblize" alternative situations by imagining how the phenomenon might have played out for Ebony with teachers of other races or had participants identified by a different race with the same name. In doing so, I could contemplate the nonobvious structures of her experience, or "conditions that must exist for something to appear" (Moustakas, 2015, p. 98), such as time, space, or power differentials, as described in the following structural description:

> The structures that gave form to Ebony's experience with nameism evolved through her relation to authority figures in the classroom and were mediated by her consciousness of identity and the symbolism of her name. Regarding consciousness of identity, Ebony was acutely aware of the benefits of maintaining a malleable identity when faced with situations where the aesthetics of her name proved to be a liability. She was conscious of how certain teachers read her and seemed to have a vicarious sense of what they saw in her, which enabled her to manipulate perceptions of who she was in the minds of others while being frustrated at having to do so at all.

When caught in those moments, she conceded the upside of surrendering her authentic identity even as she took pride in her name, as if her existence was more of a performance than her actual being. This concession left her to wrestle with being "that one black person in the class, and everyone's looking at you for reaction" whenever tensions lurked. For Ebony, the symbolism of ethnically identifiable names loomed more prominent than the immediate situations in which she found herself. As a student with a distinctively Black name that she admitted "has a certain vibe to it," she became a conduit for the judgment of society where black-sounding names were concerned.

When she expressed concerns that "they might think I'm ghetto," she embodied the "looking glass self," an element of symbolic interactionism, where society's reaction to her colored the reflection, she saw. In a moment of either honesty, self-doubt, or a combination of both, she admitted, "I've done that before … Yeah, a black ghetto girl … like all the people that I know with my name … I won't say for everyone, but most of the people that I know who have the same name as me do kind of go along that path."

How she related to people in authority may have been her attempt to project an illusion of what she believed they wanted to see, or what she wanted them to see, that became an avatar of her existence designed to stave off the assault on the pride she had in her name. "I just look at it as a name, I guess … it's my identity," she concluded. Whether the roots of the identity she embraced came from a place of struggle or hope for the future, she seemed content to curate the

identity she needed to get by whenever necessary to avoid the stereotypes she assumed colored the minds of her teachers, which could affect her success.

[end of description]

While these results do not find their value in terms of their generalizability, that is neither the point of the structural description nor the goal of phenomenology. Within the specific context of Ebony's case, perceptions gave structure to her experiences that brought the teacher's bias into view for her, whether actual or figmental, as she interpreted what was happening through the lens of her past experiences with nameism. The extent to which the thick, rich descriptions of her experience "ring true" (Shenton, 2004, p. 69) establishes the value of her voice as she brought to bear "abundant, interconnected details, and possibly cultural complexity" (Stake, 2010, p. 49).

These details included Ebony's pessimistic view on how others perceived the potential and character of those who shared her name and how this added yet another contour to her struggles that also appeared in other participant interviews as key themes across the study sample. A key takeaway for me was the complexity of the dialogue in her mind, replete with guesses and presuppositions that appeared to compete for her attention as she also had to process being a young person in a learning environment. This cacophony of inner dialogues was a shared feature of the phenomenon across the study sample as it threaded through several key themes. In the next section, I outline the three most salient themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with study participants as described in their own words, followed by my interpretations.

Key Themes Across the Sample

The analysis phase of the study concluded with a composite description of the phenomenon as captured within the sample. The composite description synthesizes the most salient and relevant meanings that gave form to the phenomenon, without which the phenomenon would not have occurred in each participant's experience. This description constitutes the phenomenon's essence, defined by Husserl as "the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 100, as cited in Husserl, 1931, p. 43). The essence of experiences with nameism gives the phenomenon its character and staying power across time and space, from classroom to classroom, interaction to interaction. Husserl (1931) called composite descriptions of phenomena "the establishment of a knowledge of essences" (p. 44).

The composite description of experiences for the six participants culminated in the situated narratives below. These narratives point out an essential aspect of the experience that was consistent across the interviews: despite the power of nameism to affect the course of one's life, as data and research have shown, it was a bias rarely considered or perceived by participants, even in situations when perceptions of prejudice on the part of teachers were apparent. While nameism was often rooted in attitudes teachers brought to the classroom, a second grader and a high school sophomore were not likely to perceive bias the same way, even if the offender's intent was the same.

I concluded that variance in the ages and grade levels of targeted students presented a possible barrier to understanding the phenomenon, making culpability much more challenging to assign. As mentioned in the study's limitations, the intersectional nature of a person's identity, in general, also makes a particular bias or prejudice in a

situation difficult to discern. For this reason, nameism often had to happen over time and to too many people before becoming manifested through data and research. 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 their experiences across situational contexts revealed three main facets: power-perception dichotomy, forced-chameleon effect, and identity hyper-consciousness. In the following sections, I discuss each theme as it was captured in the interview transcripts. All three were expressed differently by each participant. However, there were factors in each experience where name-identity threat was either in question or was inductively presumed to have occurred based on previous experiences. During the descriptive and interpretive processes, I used verbatim quotes from the participants, including pauses or filler words, to preserve each quote's context.

Power-perception dichotomy. According to Symbolic Interactionism Theory, an object being perceived, such as a name, does not derive its intrinsic meaning in a vacuum. The meaning of a name emerges through interaction between social actors, in this case, students and teachers, such that an interpretation of the interaction bears forth the meaning. This theory, as it applies to nameism, precisely outlines the problem. Whether a name's contextual meaning made it a measure of social desirability, an indicator of proximity to whiteness, or a symbol of deficiency, as discussed in the literature review, the question became who gets to decide and who mediates the decision when a power imbalance exists. An imbalance of power is inherent in the education process by virtue of the teacher's role as an authority figure during interactions with students in the classroom.

Despite nameism's prevalence, this power imbalance, upon recall, made it difficult for the former students who participated in the study to question perceptions of bias whenever it occurred. The extent to which a participant could not question a teacher's motives had created a dissonance in the minds of participants, who were consequently left to question their perceptions even when an affront to their name identities seemed apparent. Consequently, the uncertainty of perceptions of bias was a factor that fueled the dynamics within the experiences that participants reported during the interviews. While not all participants recalled experiences where their distinctively Black names were the obvious impetus of a perceived assault on their identities, "Jada" discussed her teachers' actions that signaled intent in her mind whenever teachers mispronounced her name:

> 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]

"DeAndre" articulated how he envisioned the thought process unfolds in individuals, such as teachers, who use name association to create a first impression. He then concluded with who he believed assumes the burden of confronting a false impression once set in one's mind:

> So, I think the first thing they're saying to themselves is 'How do I pronounce the name right?' It's difficult. Before they even say the name, though, I think their

> initial thought is, ‘This person is definitely not white, ‘… and then from there, a trickle-down effect happens. Their brain is processing based on similar names they heard. ‘What is that name associated with?’ I think it comes down to that, and then whatever they arrive at, they base all of those different facts on how they view that individual from their perspective. Until the person being judged can slowly start to chip away and say, ‘I'm not part of that mold.’ [lines in 582-592]

Jada and DeAndre’s points speak to the “guessing game” the participants had to play, as students with Black-sounding names, where they had to determine, “Is this happening to me because I’m me … or because I’m Black?” Because there was likely no assurance or confirmation either way, the answer often became lost between a teacher’s authority and a student’s perception. Jada offered her thoughts on how the dynamic was likely to differ based on the ethnicities of the students and teachers involved:

> I feel like it might impact a student more if they were in a white environment rather than a black one. I feel like a student might be more likely to correct somebody in a black environment rather than a white one. In the white environment, that student might just get used to being called the wrong thing and just allow it to kind of alter and impact the way that they learn as well … because they may go in thinking that already, that the people around them don't understand them. So, it's kind of hard to make those connections and ask for help. This could ultimately affect their learning trajectory. Whereas if they're surrounded by more Black people, they might be more likely to make those corrections to whoever's mispronouncing their name or connect to other students in the class who may be

going through the same thing and able to hold the teacher more accountable. [lines 361-370]

Jada's assessment, while no mystery as research had well-established improvements in the academic performance of students of color when paired with teachers who share their ethnicity, highlighted the often-underappreciated importance of self-governance among members of the Black community. This finding was especially true when a power imbalance existed, leaving a student to surmise whether a teacher's attack on her identity may have happened and what may have motivated the bias or microaggression. This question became even more compelling when the behavioral signals were considered against the backdrop of a legacy of racism in American society.

Each participant in the study described an awareness of racism in society at a reasonably young age. However, none could recall overt racial hostility in school, particularly involving teachers. Instead, their collective views on racism were informed mainly by vicarious experiences through what they saw on television and social media. "Imani," who not only reported no direct exposure to racism but also did not see her name as distinctively Black, did express her racialized unease in some situations:

> I was one of six Black people in my graduating class, so much more hidden racism. It wasn't blatant. There's probably places where it's just .. in your face, and … at times, I didn't feel safe at the school, but … it was never like anybody called me the n-word to my face or anything crazy like that. [lines 429-435]

"Terrell" described the way names might trigger bias in a person based on specific aspects of first impressions that quietly conveyed defect in a person: "I think people automatically try to put some type of face with the name … Whether that face has facia1

features or not may be a question, but they try to put an image with that name" [lines 158-159]. "Nia" offered an example of how nameism might play out for a fictional student with a distinctively Black name she made up to make the point:

> So, if the teacher brings a student to the office for behavior problems and says, 'Oh yeah, 'Daquarius' is having this problem in my class,' I think it's, it's common to just be like, 'Okay, well … let's bring him,' and automatically he's a troublemaker. I definitely think … it's a thing. [lines 579-583]

Terrell and Jada used the same one-word signifier, "ghetto," which appeared to represent the height of deficiency where Black stereotypes were concerned, mainly (although not exclusively) when people or other races judged Black identities. Terrell explained:

> I think in the eye of the person perceiving the name, I believe there is a connotation that links back to things like 'ghetto' … things that are unprofessional … things that are not refined … because it's not the type of name they are used to. [lines 294-296]

Jada also weighed in on how race-based bias colored first impressions using the same characterization:

> They're probably regarded as 'ghetto' without even getting to know them. You might think based off their name since it's … inherently black … and sometimes black is associated with 'ghetto' still for some reason … you may think that those people with those names are more so 'ghetto' than others. [lines 316-319]

The combination of unvalidated perceptions of bias and an awareness of the legacy of racism in participants' minds contributed to a heightened sensitivity and consciousness of how names can mediate behaviors and experiences, a core tenet of Symbolic

Interactionism Theory. It also heightened a general sensitivity to what each participant envisioned and what was expected regarding behavior, manner of dress, and attitude. Nia expressed how it made her feel to be labeled based on her identity as the experience was processed in her pre-reflective consciousness:

> I felt like sometimes I was a burden in those moments … and I can't even say I could put it in those words at that time. I think this now because I'm an adult. I've worked with kids … and I kind of reflect back on my time in school where I was like, well, I wasn't really a problem child.' [lines 224-227]

While few can deny the social progress achieved in American society, those eager to move on or downplay the lingering and profound impact of racism appear to suffer a cognitive dissonance in the collective view of the study participants. Racism was inextricably linked to persisting reactions to symbols, starting with race, skin color, and personhood and ending with community, family, and name.

Forced chameleon effect. Chartrand and Bargh (1999) described a chameleon as "a person who changes his or her opinions, ethics, morals, and behavior to please others [and] behaves in a manner so plastic, shallow, and two-dimensional that it is like witnessing an act." While this definition was contextualized around a psychological perception-behavior link and social interaction, the concept began to resonate in more nuanced terms during my interview with a few participants. For one, the notion of a "chameleon effect" began to resemble the concept of "double consciousness," as I understood it. Du Bois (1987) defined double consciousness as the social condition in which Black people sought to maintain a self-determined Black identity while confronted with the pressure to fit into a white-centered society in the name of survival.

The chameleon effect was an appropriate analogy for the study because of its relationship to self-concept theory and the interplay between the “real” and the “ ideal” identity. This real-versus-ideal dynamic was powered by name identity's malleable and highly situational nature. Specifically, the power rested in a name bearer’s ability to shift the perception of a perceiver by changing the appearance of a name without changing its actual meaning. However, the decision was not solely up to the chameleon, the student with a distinctively Black name, on when and where these appearances became camouflaged into their surroundings as they reflected what they saw.

When nameism occurs in the classroom, one could make the case that the environment forces a person to adapt by using name identity to blend in, hence, a Forced-Chameleon Effect. Within the sample, this effect appeared when names were constantly mispronounced or shortened to make them easier to pronounce. In some instances, students were given nicknames without consent. These actions were commonly perceived microaggressions that surfaced in DeAndre’s interview:

> It's either, it's pronounced differently. They don't take time to enunciate the name properly. They're quick to ask me, ‘What's your nickname?’ You know, I still go by DeAndre. Like, that's what my parents named me. I've always had this sense of pride like my name is what my name is, and that's what you call me. I've heard Davon. Damon. Where they’re just not even trying. [lines 384-391]

Nia and Ebony voiced similar sentiments about teachers' lack of effort to get their names right and how this frustrated them. Whether this feeling was frequent across experiences, where social interactions pressure Black people to blend into whiteness through

intentional name manipulation, may make for a good topic for future study. Terrell illustrated how those he associated with gave rise to the forced chameleon effect:

> That was when I felt that I was perceived as a good person, a good Terrell in the classroom with grades and results. But if Terrell interacted with that group of [Black] people that they believed would naturally fall into the assumed category … that's when they didn't really treat me the same. [lines 232-235]

I found Terrell's to be the most enigmatic of all the interviews, given the litany of contradictions his interview presented. As we were truncating years of relevant experiences in the classroom into our 45-minute interview time slot, I listened most intently during the middle portion reserved for apprehending the phenomenon, where the focus was on modes of appearing as I engaged in critical self-reflexive dialogue. Terrell talked about the various labels that seemed to either attenuate or accentuate the blackness of his name depending on who was around him and the purpose for blending in.

However, I could not always tell whether he or the environment controlled the blending. This question sits between the research questions, where perception and learning experience are the focus, and how Self-Concept Theory and Symbolic Interactionism Theory asserted control over one's identity conception. Rather than attempt to interpret, I ultimately bridled my anticipation and listened as Terrell gave words to his experience:

> I felt at times that my name was kind of … put aside because, 'oh, well, he is Terrell,' but he's also, like, the smart kid … a nerd too, like us.' Whereas on the other side, it's like 'Yeah, he's cool Terrell, but like, a nerd.' So, he's cool … but he's still a nerd." So, I think there was definitely a connotation of 'Terrell' and

> ‘nerd,’ or smart kid, not being the same, but I was an exception for both sides. [lines 254-259]

I had deemed it critical to thicken the texture of this particular aspect of his experience, given the language implications and what was not being said as much as what was. I had already positioned the term “ghetto” at one end of the spectrum and now contemplated whether “nerd” was considered the polar opposite term. If so, this aligned with two findings from the literature review where names functioned as indicators of proximity to whiteness and measures of deficiency, coupled with Brown, Sellers, and Gomez’s (2002) description above of negatively reflected appraisals as “unrelieved irritants.” Terrell’s further insights helped my understanding of his conflicted experience:

> I specifically remember I had my academic friends in that circle, and I had my jock friends that I hung out with. And [the jocks] used to make fun of me, ‘Oh yeah, Terrell is so smart. He's a nerd, which kind of hurt because I was one of the guys. We're hanging out and talking, and you're putting me down because I'm doing well in school. And then on this side, people were saying, ‘Yeah, Terrell's so smart, but he's just another athlete too.’ I'm like, oh my gosh, this is like two worlds colliding in, like, a bad way. So yeah, that was always a struggle to deal with because I felt like I had to move fluidly between both. [lines 241-249]

I then asked him whether he ever went to school with another person with the same name and whether he had observed the same or different treatment for the other Terrell:

> Yes, I knew a guy named Terrell, a Black guy as well, and I think the biggest difference was in the context of how the teachers treated us. They met us both at one point in time, not knowing us other than the name. But after that, there was

definitely a different level of interaction. You can say it was because I was more inclined to excel in school. Or I was actually entertained and enjoyed the environment. But the teacher involvement was noticeably different between himself and myself … and that, in my mind, at such a formative age, drives so much development. Because it's the person you spend six hours a day with every day, and an authoritative figure … having that interaction and not having it, I think was very influential in our respective development cycles. [lines 310-322]

Nia's response to another question illuminated Terrell's point on the influence of authority figures on student development. As she described her experience, it helped fill a gap in my understanding of how Terrell may have internalized what was happening:

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]

Later in the interview, she returned to the point, as if it took some time to work through her pre-reflective consciousness to find the words today that she did not have back then and could see the experience more clearly in her consciousness. She continued:

If I challenged something, it was I, again, not being able to place the words then, but now that I think about it now, emails to my parents and the adjectives used … or the descriptions used, you know, 'difficult' … I just remember … being told that I was difficult. I'm like, 'I don't have a lot of problems at all.' And … in this one instance, where I'm just kind of challenging you or asking a question for clarity or just to understand why … I'm just trying to figure out … and I think it's common … I think those words [difficult, a problem] if you don't look like me,

> can come off as … just a normal word to use or it's too common to use … when you look like me, and you have questions or things that you want to understand more, and you're just challenging, you're seen as being 'difficult.' [lines 394-407]

Identity hyper-consciousness. In this section, the theme implicates Cooley's (1902) conception of a "looking-glass self," wherein one's sense of self is based on how a person believes others view her, with social interaction serving as the looking glass, or mirror, used to measure self-worth. This section also intersects with Self-Concept Theory, which posits that identity comprises an ideal self, an actual self, and self-esteem as a measure of the alignment between one's actual and ideal identity.

While Symbolic Interactionism Theory and Self-Concept Theory share a focus on how people conceptualize their identities, each offers a different way to achieve it. External social interactions guide the former, and the latter moves through internalized self-perceptions, with names being a mechanism for either, thus creating a sense of hyper-consciousness of one's Black-sounding name to detect and avoid social identity threat. Imani voiced a sensitive inner conflict as we discussed the process through which Black people perceive unique Black-sounding names and their associated identities:

> Rappers' names, like Future's name is Navidius. I would never think that a white person's name could be 'Navidius.' Names that are, like, very much down south, from the hood … I don't know why, but me and my friend used to make up 'ghetto' names, like 'Quantarius' and … [pause] … I'm calling it 'ghetto, and that's very wrong. I shouldn't call it ghetto. [lines 385-391]

As the researcher, I took great care not to react to what I considered an episode of nameism, given the sensitivity of the moment. "Ghetto" had become a sensitive

buzzword during two interviews by this point, and my goal was not to signal too much of an interest given the immediate contriteness Imani displayed after using the word. My interview with Jada included how she objectively defined “ghetto”:

> It's not just for Black people. But most people will correlate the word to Black people, and it'll be associated as a negative thing mostly. And I think you would associate that with people being overly loud or rambunctious … like a negative adjective. [lines 322-325]

Setting aside the definition of the word “ghetto” for a moment, I then asked her what made a name perceived as “ghetto” in terms of its construction. She explained:

> I really think it might depend on what letters are put together … we're to a point where you can kind of infer that a person is not white. I feel like that's the first thing that you think … and then you kind of just go from there cause you're not really sure … but you're like, this person isn’t Caucasian. [lines 267-270]

I asked Nia the same question. She responded, “A lot of apostrophes. That's been my experience … a lot of apostrophes or like interesting ways to spell it” [line 609]. DeAndre had a similar response:

> 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]

Jada offered her perspective on the same question:

> I would say names that end with '-von' like a 'Javon.' I'm thinking about students that I have interacted with in the past, like a Kiron …the type of names that seem Black … names like Monique … I feel like I'm not gonna see anybody with the name 'Monique' that is not black or is not very likely to seem black. Names that end with '-isha' as well. [lines 254-258/285-289]

Terrell provided an interesting take on his name:

> I learned early on that my name was a black name … just hearing about Terrell as a name that black people have … it's a common name in the black community … quite frankly, if you Google search Terrell … you're gonna find some pictures of people in mugshots, people arrested, all kinds of stuff well before you get to my LinkedIn profile. [lines 137-141]

My interview with Terrell took an interesting turn worth noting when he cited stigmatized names that came across to him as distinctively Black. After I asked him for an example, he responded:

> Like a 'DeAndre' or 'Avion'… names that are a little bit less traditional in the sense that they're not the typical syllables that get strung together … and then stereotypically anything with the 'La-' or 'Da- in front of it definitely seems to stand out [lines 125-128]

Before my interview with Terrell, I had interviewed the participant, whose name happened to be DeAndre. DeAndre offered a different view of his name based on its unique construction:

> DeAndre doesn't fit the [black sounding] boxes. It may just check maybe one or two, but not them all. So, I was able to at least display … something that was

> different and maybe help [white people] unlearn some things that they may have learned or thought that was fact about Black people that really isn't true … I always tried to pride myself, even when I was young … to be a representative of us, you know … That we're not all like that. [lines 171-176]

I later compared Terrell's assessment of "DeAndre" to DeAndre's perspective on his own name. As a result of these dueling views on the same distinctively Black name, of which neither participant was aware, I, as the researcher, was left to reconcile these opposing appearances of the object, the name DeAndre, being perceived. This ambiguity served as an example of how perceptions of a distinctively Black name can be split between two or more reality assumptions. Working through this contradiction required me to suspend my wonderment at the conflicted interpretation between two Black men of similar ages and backgrounds (both were in their late 30s and happened to be the sons of military veterans) so that the horizons, or the full range of appearances within their experiences, were available to me as I sought to understand how name judgment presented itself differently in the experiences of two relatively homogeneous participants.

However, this was not the only significant contradiction in the study. Imani presented details of her experience that contradicted patterns and explanations from the other five interviews, starting with the assertion that she did not see her name as distinctively Black. Nor did she see her name as connected to her identity or what she looked like, as she commented, "because there are people that don't look like me that have my name" [lines 224-225]. Her viewpoint added depth to my analysis by shifting the storyline on how we came to understand names as "distinctively Black" by their popular meaning and putative symbolism.

Study Findings

The most challenging aspect of the interview process for me involved clarifying the phenomenon's obvious and hidden modes of appearing through imagination variation during the interviews and data analysis process. My imagination played a critical role in examining how perceptions of identity threat were constructed when the threat, as an object within the consciousness of participants, was sensed. Regardless of whether these perceptions were triggered by an imagined reality or sensed based on what was real versus merely possible, the object was "intended upon" by participants. Intentionality in these instances involved a "sensed" set of real-world consequences in the study participants' lives. Applying a phenomenological gaze to their sensed experiences, what participants believed, perceived, and imagined, relative to the phenomenon's various modes of appearance, mattered.

Husserl (2005) described the imagined modes of appearing as "phantasy," where "inactuality," whether through the memory of past experiences with the threat, made space for a real sensory experience. At this point, I began to wrestle with myself over the purpose of the study. Was it to convince other people that the perceptions of marginalized people were real and should, therefore, be accepted as a common truth? Alternatively, was it to blunt the effect of marginalization on people by using the study to rationalize the role centeredness played in amplifying the perception of an identity threat? Hearing study participants talk about the validity of stigmatizing certain distinctively Black names left me with a dissonance that placed nameism in a light I had not anticipated. That said, I was not ready to set aside the culpability of a society where each participant was enculturated to see blackness in a certain way.

"The history of the object itself [became] the object of possible knowledge" (Husserl, 2001, p. 634). Case in point, DeAndre told stories of how he perceived racism in its various modes of appearance. In one instance, he recalled a white person exceptionalizing him as an "articulate" Black person; in another, someone assumed he was a weed smoker. At first, I questioned whether validating those acts as intentional racism mattered. As the interview continued, however, it occurred to me that it did not matter whether a person intended to act with racial malice toward him. His imagined experience had what Husserl described as "sensory content," where the means of access was intuitive yet genuine. Even as the contents of DeAndre's experience may have differed when racism was imagined versus willfully imposed on him by an actor, it was the various ways racism amounted to an attack on his identity that made it the object of his intuitively informed awareness of the threat.

Perception being reality, Friend et al. (2011) found in a survey among Black fifth-grade students that being socialized to expect discrimination affected student academic performance. As a phenomenological matter, perceived or imagined racism colors the contents of one's consciousness where "the intention aims at the thing itself" (Husserl, 2005, p. 192). Essentially, Husserl argued that the imagination was more than a mere repository of mental images; it also housed the simulation of possible realities, where memory also informed the imagined content from which the consciousness perceived an identity threat. DeAndre's experiences spoke to the temporal nature of intentionality and how memories of past experiences with identity threat informed the "noema," or the meaning behind a perception. These meanings gave structure to the content of DeAndre's consciousness and became imagined into reality.

Given my commitment to an ontological perspective that saw reality as relative, I resolved my fore-cited dissonance by avoiding the temptation to prove that perceptions of nameism in students were real and should be seen as such to educators. This resolution was perhaps the most critical takeaway for me as each participant shared the burden of being trapped within their imagined yet actual realities due to the looming threat of racism, with its structures embedded in the norms, behaviors, and interactions beyond their control. Nameism is one component of prejudice among several that operate within a dynamic where reactions to age, gender, religion, sexuality, personality, appearance, background, and a host of other variables factor into a highly complex attitudinal and behavioral equation, whereby participants often resorted to Occam's Razor, or the simplest explanation for what appeared to be taking form in various ways: racism.

Forms of racism expressed through nameism. While racism was the most straightforward and arguably the most logical assumption to consider given its ubiquity and prevalence, observing it through its various strains became far more complex when based on a pre-reflective self-awareness among study participants. The notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is related to the idea that experiences have a "subjective 'feel' to them, a certain (phenomenal) quality of 'what it is like' or what it 'feels' like to have them" ("Phenomenological," 2019). The American Academy of Pediatrics identified three forms of racism that young people may experience in situations: structural, personally mediated, and internalized (Trent et al., 2019).

Starting with structural racism, this form involves legal, educational, 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 younger students. 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 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 in 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 than 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 what 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. However, in three of the interviews, study participants appeared to disparage some names as "ghetto." They validated the legitimacy of seeing unique Black names through a deficit view. One particular example involved online name searches that stigmatized ethnically identified names when Terrell cited how often his

name was associated with criminal records and stories online. Stereotype threat became the "ghost" to which Baraka alluded whenever 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's findings.

Despite the number of variables that might explain bias among teachers and in broader society, perceptions of subtle forms of racism most 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 maintain at any given time readily. The extent to which each theme identified in the study aligned with a form of racism at the micro, meso, or macro level speaks to the taken-for-grantedness of nameism when buried in data and research or so deeply embedded in the fabric of the social structure that it became common sense. So common that study participants did not have to see clear evidence of nameism to sense an assault on their identities.

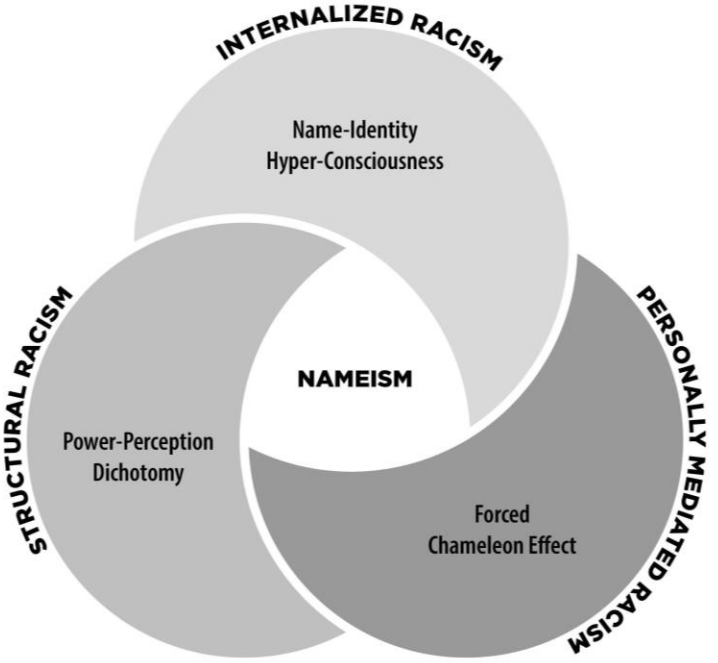
Merely sensing the potentiality for nameism often occurred among study participants by comparing the signals in the present to what they had previously sensed in past experiences. The problem, as Comas-Díaz and Jacobsen (2001) described, is that the threat does not have to be imminent or even real for the mental threat-detection mechanism to take effect: "Because of the pervasiveness of racism, many people of color are socialized to be vigilant in ambiguous social situations … Racial vigilance increases intuition, fostering the development of a "sixth sense" for detecting racism. The racial sixth sense can misfire, however, resulting in a lowered threshold for the perception of

racial indignities" (pp. 247-248). When racism is cloaked in ambiguity, it can lead to cognitive dissonance among targeted students, like Ebony, who described the pressure of being forced to rationalize the conflict between what she saw and heard against what she felt and feared in a given moment with a teacher.

Filling the void left by silenced voices in such instances were deficit narratives in the research that consistently ascribed the problem to "the vagaries of haphazard assimilation by individual members of minority groups" (Tajfel, 1982, pp. 11-12), such as the "unmarried, low-income, undereducated teenage mother from a Black neighborhood who has a distinctively Black name herself," as posited by (Levitt & Dubner 2006, p. 186). Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between the themes that surfaced in the study and the associated forms of racism through reported experiences.

Figure 4.

Key Themes from the Study



Universal Description of the Phenomenon

By design, a phenomenological research approach culminates with the "intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1995, pp. 99-100). A description synthesis forms the phenomenon's essence by reducing the dialogical data captured within the sample. I extracted the essences from what Sartre (1965) referred to as the "concatenation of appearances" (p. xlvi) provided by the study participants in their own voices. The essences represent a resting point, not the destination, in this pursuit of knowledge on experiences with nameism.

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). The following universal description of nameism was composed by amalgamating the participants' experiences:

> The power of a name was often brokered within the interactions of students with distinctively Black names and circumstances involving predominantly white learning environments. The degree of blackness in a name was of little import relative to how participants grew up and the attributes of their Black communities. Tropes such as the "unmarried, low-income, undereducated teenage mother from a Black neighborhood who has a distinctively Black name herself" were often used as a pretext for devaluing the potential of a Jamal or Keisha. However, the stereotypes attributed to people with distinctively Black

names were invalidated in the study, except possibly in the imagination of those whose biases and prejudices could not otherwise be explained.

Some participants suspected motives were encoded within subtle behaviors that served as reminders of racism's ubiquitous presence. Thus, being aware of one's Black name identity made it much easier to move fluidly between identities when required by being as malleable as the phenomenon itself. The most surprising revelation was the extent to which participants appeared to self-govern judgments on blackness by unspoken consensus, with guarded, harsh practicality. I concluded that this subconscious reaction to name-identity threats was meant to absorb the stigma for those caught within it based on a parent's choice to create names where an apostrophe or affix commonly used in Black-sounding names made their appearance unconventional in the mainstream.

Most poignant was my conclusion that reactions to perceptions of bias in its many forms, including nameism, remained largely harbored in the pre-consciousness of targeted people. In most cases, there were often no words to give form to one's perceptions, which left people to wonder," Is what's happening to me happening because I'm me, because of my race, or because of my name?" Each possibility presents a different question of attribution to explain such behavior, making nameism an understudied yet ubiquitous form of prejudice that could appear wherever one's name became the leading interface with society, whether or not a person was present to experience nameism firsthand.

[end of description]

How the Study Addressed the Research Questions

I identified the invariant textural-structural aspects of nameism that remained constant across experiences through the study's design and framing by the research questions. To accomplish this, I first needed to see each experience with nameism as part of a gestalt or a coherently occurring moment rather than a series of randomly occurring variables converging at a single point in time. During the study, I saw the phenomenon within a sociohistorical continuum that revealed multiple modes of name-identity manipulation, which informed the "golden thread," or primary line of argument for the study (Correa, 2018, as cited in "Secretary-General," 2012). This line of argument was led by a pursuit of the essence of nameism framed by the 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?

Research Question #1: Starting with the first question, while participants were aware of their distinctively Black names and how society might view them, as well as the ongoing struggle to confront and eradicate racism in U.S. society, nameism and its manifestations went largely unconsidered. Even those participants who recalled seeing or hearing teachers repeatedly struggle with their names seemed to move past the notion without much thought at the moment. However, attacks on their identities left some caught within the "sense of double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1987) — between a trueness

and “twoness” of self — which were quietly internalized for the most part. Whether this quietude was helpful depends on whether one chooses to applaud resilience in Black students who experience the tensions or decry the fact that they had to be resilient in that way. Relatedly, the data suggested a sense of internalized oppression among several participants, where biases and prejudices toward blackness rose to what Liebow (2016) called "infiltrated consciousness" that appeared to perpetuate nameism within the sample.

Research Question #2: Turning to the second question, most participants appeared to develop emotional resilience to distorted meanings imposed upon their name identities by knowing the origins of their names. So, when any hint of nameism occurred in the classroom, four participants seemed more motivated to defy stereotypes or avert racial presuppositions about them through academic excellence. The two remaining participants voiced frustration at dealing with bias and how this created a disconnect between them and the teachers with whom they had felt constant yet silent tension. Disconnects such as these, which started the moment a teacher appeared to make no effort to get a name right, expanded the wedges between a student’s real self and ideal self, with perceptions of lowered expectations filtered through the “looking glass.”

According to the study’s results, what often got reflected went beyond identity threats by stoking the consequences of the undue pressure of a student’s simply “being” in those 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 Black student may be one of the very few in the classroom. While not every student will have the same perceptions or harbor the same unspoken anxieties, the common thread appears to be an expectation to have to contend constantly with racism.

Research Question #3: Taking what can be learned from the study and applying those lessons to a real-world context entailed finding ways to help students with distinctively Black names give voice to their own backstories, particularly in interracial classroom settings. Since teachers hold positions of authority in those spaces, empowering students first requires giving teachers the time, space, and tools to understand the problem and appreciate the benefits of addressing it in their classrooms. Identifying nameism as a problem that has never been acknowledged, much less addressed, will require an organizational assessment to avoid a "solution in search of a problem" perception among teachers. The study responded to research question number three by facilitating the co-construction of an action plan devised to educate teachers on the nuances of nameism through participatory action research.

Action Research Plan Development

Berg (2001, as cited in Newton & Burgess, 2008) described action research as a means of "assist[ing] practitioners in lifting their veil of clouded understandings and help them to better understand fundamental problems by raising their collective consciousness." As I continued to reconcile the learning curve I faced as a non-educator seeking to provide professional educators with new and valuable knowledge about a problem of practice, I approached the action research process as an iterative experience whose destination remained unknowable until I arrived. What could be learned and applied based on the study's findings was rooted in the participants' subjective experiences and, therefore, initiated a process where my contribution to the scholarship might not start with all the answers but would position educators to ask better questions.

Because my research findings offered no promise of producing a typology for an ideal classroom setting in which nameism could be confronted, I needed to reassess what outcome amounted to success for the study. 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 effectively confront nameism in the classroom. 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.

Key concepts. My most important goal, no matter the context, was to deconstruct the definitions systems that forced students to prove their way out of deficit models that often became their starting points in the classroom based on their distinctively Black names. Thus, the following action plan sought to re-purpose what the study participants contributed as an invitation to co-construct an actionable solution to the problem of nameism, starting with its de-abstraction. De-abstracting experiences with nameism, as the phenomenon under investigation, started with responding to the third research question by idealizing what educators can learn from and act upon based on the study results. Two conceptual frameworks aligned with the action research's intent were funds of knowledge and an ecology of equity, both of which are discussed.

Funds of knowledge. The first aspect of the phenomenon of interest addressed by the action plan concerns countering the deficit thinking associated with students who are stigmatized in interracial classroom settings because of their names. A "funds of knowledge" approach to pedagogy originated in the early 1980s when students of Mexican origin in Arizona were presumed academically limited by their families' "migrant" statuses in the American education system. Only after teachers visited the students' homes did they appreciate the value of their vast skills, knowledge, and competencies forged in their communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). By appreciating their backstories firsthand, those teachers saw students from migrant backgrounds as assets in the learning environment instead of liabilities, based on the unique social capital, or rich, culturally based "funds," that strengthened the efficacy of their teaching approaches (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). The funds of knowledge provided a conceptual model for confronting perceptions of nameism in interracial classroom settings by ascribing value to the backstories behind distinctively Black names.

Ecology of equity. The second aspect of the phenomenon of interest addressed by the action plan involves the concept of an "ecology of equity" idealized around creating the conditions for a coherent culture of learning to ensue by "developing systemwide structures that generate knowledge for practice and strengthen the quality of relationships among people that promote learning" (Jaquith, 2020, p. 2). This idealistic approach to pedagogy strives to cultivate advocacy for equity at every level of the education system through consistent, systematic, equity-oriented shifts in beliefs and practices that emphasize preserving student agency throughout the learning process. Like the students from migrant families who helped form the basis of "funds of knowledge" in education,

the former students who participated in the study benefitted by owning their backstories in a way that allowed them to define who they were at the center of their narratives.

Action Research Plan Components

Finding ways to create the conditions for a funds of knowledge" and "ecology of equity" to ensue in the classroom entailed creating an ecosystem around students that problematized inequity instead of who those students were to those who judged them by their names. This outcome would rely on teacher awareness and an organizational context that allowed for "repositioning the students to be at the center of the learning work" (Jaquith, 2020, p. 9). The action plan put the "funds of knowledge" and "ecology of equity" concepts into practice in three steps that culminated in the action research phase of the study. The steps begin with the development of a program theory. Next, I selected the most appropriate evidence-based interventions for identity threats to address nameism in the classroom. Finally, I outline an action plan for implementing the intervention with outcome measures and a logic model. Each step is described in the following sections.

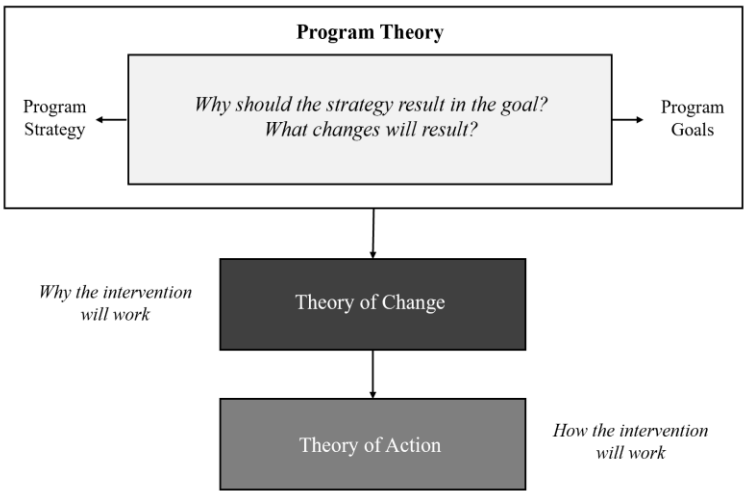
Step One: Develop a program theory. Developing a program theory for the action plan first entailed identifying the specific problem to be solved. Chapter One and the current chapter of this paper provided the overarching framing for the problem being addressed from a historical and empirical perspective. The next step entailed implementing the "action" phase of the action research process. This phase was initiated as I contemplated the necessary components of the action plan and the causal, conditional, and open-ended factors necessary to achieve the anticipated outcomes, which involved ways to identify and mitigate the effects of nameism in the classroom.

A program theory poses questions that pursue responses to the "why" and "how" of solving a problem of practice. Articulating a program theory was crucial to realizing my purpose for undertaking the study and how I should answer the research questions that grounded my inquiry into nameism. I developed the program theory for my action research based on how I imagined educators could benefit from what the study participants shared during the semi-structured interviews. Turning this knowledge into actionable findings began with considering the practicality of the proposed interventions once nameism is recognized as a problem of practice. "Programs are constructed over time within a process largely anchored in people's patterns of functioning or designed according to their perceptions of what seems to work" (Birckmayer & Weiss, 2000).

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the Program Theory used for the study and its relationship to the Theory of Change and Theory of Action for the study.

Figure 5.

Program Theory Model



Note: Adapted from the University of Dayton. (n.d.). *EDU 975 – T8. Week 4 Lecture. Analysis of Implementation* [PowerPoint Slides]. Canvas Student V .6.22.1.

Theory of change. Clark and Taplin (2012) defined a Theory of Change as "a rigorous yet participatory process whereby groups and stakeholders in a planning process articulate their long-term goals and identify the conditions they believe have to unfold for those goals to be met" (p. 1). Relative to the current action research, I applied a Theory of Change by co-constructing an intervention model that framed the conditions needed to achieve the desired outcome: a marked reduction in name-identity bias. The model included a causal framework that connected the anticipated outcomes to an intervention and assumptions based on what the study participants contributed during the semi-structured interviews and my subsequent interpretations.

Step Two: Select appropriate interventions. As a measure of theoretical or anticipated efficacy, a "most likely" threshold for the action research-derived approaches required an evidence base. Evidence of practical approaches to confronting name-identity biases in the classroom was researched and assembled through a second literature review focused on identifying past interventions that could be incorporated into the current action research for consideration. Several interventions that were ideal for addressing the problem of practice were identified based on a set criterion. Out of the 20 interventions I considered, I selected four based on a best-fit test relative to the research question and a combination of efficacy, practicality, level of engagement, and fitness for use within a range of student age groups as a synergistic whole. The selected interventions that fit the criteria were (1) value affirmation, (2) perspective-taking, (3) cross-group engagement, and (4) public-facing community commitment. Each intervention is described in the following sections in terms that are relevant to the focus of the current study.

Value affirmation. Cohen and Sherman (2014) demonstrated the efficacy of having middle-school students complete short "value affirmation" exercises before tests. This intervention allowed students to preempt the "specter of a negative stereotype" (Cohen & Sherman, 2014) triggered by both perception and the students' past experiences with various forms of discrimination. The researchers found that students who were "self-affirmed" were more coachable through setbacks in the classroom and less likely to see a poor grade on a test as a significant impediment or influence on their long-term sense of self-worth. As a result, the same students approached test retakes with greater confidence in their potential and were less likely to become consumed by the implications of perceived failures or academic setbacks.

***Perspective taking*.** In a study, Todd, Galinsky, and Bodenhausen (2012) had students externalize their perceptions of others through "perspective taking." Using a randomized perspective-taking intervention, the researchers encouraged participants to imagine themselves in the role of others and answer questions by visualizing or taking another person's perspective in the narrative. This approach demonstrated the effectiveness of disrupting the perpetuation of stereotypes through intentional perspective sharing and perception management. It also proved effective in fostering empathy between students of diverse in-groups.

Cross-group engagement. Sorrells's (2016) study addressed in-class bias by examining in- and out-group social dynamics. The researcher tested the application of an "intercultural praxis intervention model" that incorporated critical reflection, thinking, and action into cross-group discussions facilitated by teachers. The teachers were tasked to foster engagements focused on perceived cultural and power differences in the

classroom. By tasking groups of 4-5 students to apply the six model elements (inquiry, framing, positioning, dialogue, reflection, and action), the exercise helped students discover their cultural frames and understand how positionality among group members factored into perceptions. The exercises also provided opportunities for teachers to observe dynamics between students that were most likely to come into play.

Community commitment. A Santa Clara County school district recognized the impact on students whenever a teacher changed or mispronounced an uncommon name. As a result, the county's Office of Education launched a "My Name, My Identity" campaign in partnership with the National Association for Bilingual Education ("Why," 2016). The campaign's objectives entailed bringing awareness to the importance of respecting one's name and identity in schools, with the key measure being the number of community members who pledged to pronounce students' names correctly and promote awareness of name-identity threats and their consequences throughout the district. The "My Name, My Identity" campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of efforts to counter the prevalence and impact of nameism through an explicitly stated, public-facing commitment to change.

Step Three: Implement the interventions. The culmination of the four interventions described above formed the foundation of a Theory of Action. A Theory of Action begins with a hypothesis on a likely result if evidence-based actions or strategies are implemented to address a problem (Aguilar, 2020). Accordingly, I outlined specific actions to address identity bias in other classroom contexts using each of the four interventions to engage the problem each confronted. Notably, each intervention focused on re-contextualizing deficit narratives at different levels of engagement. Through the

action research I had undertaken, I envisioned starting the engagement from the individual to the community or organizational level as part of a "systems theory" approach that incorporated funds of knowledge and ecology of equity into pursuing an ideal, threat-free learning environment. The application of systems theory helped organize the intervention's context, casualties, and functions within a structure that was "more than a sum of its parts" (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Appendix D conceptualizes a systems-theory view that incorporates the elements of the study and its findings in a framework that illustrates the cascading relationship and pathways between the framing elements, mediating variables, objects of the experience, and intervention strategies developed through action research in the study.

Outcome measures. An evaluative readout on the three key focus areas, context, implementation, and outcomes, will provide the target audience, namely teachers and faculty looking to confront name-identity bias in the classroom, with an assessment of the most critical areas of the intervention to consider. By co-constructing an approach to confronting nameism, participants and I are accountable for any anticipated outcomes by virtue of our shared representation of the views of future students who will ostensibly benefit. However, educators, school authorities, and researchers ultimately wield the most significant influence on cultural competency in education. More importantly, educators in the classroom are best positioned to ensure "social equity is incorporated into syllabi through a critical reflection on what materials and perspectives are assigned and how they are communicated" (Irazarry, Evans & Meyers, 2023). The goals of the collective intervention include establishing contextually derived measures of success ideally determined by a community of practice within the organization in the interest of shared

accountability. This shared accountability recognizes the multidimensional nature of experiences with nameism, as the study revealed, as a phenomenon with manifold modes of appearing. I anticipate the greatest measure of success early on: an organizational culture open to investigating the phenomenon through a collective self-reflective lens.

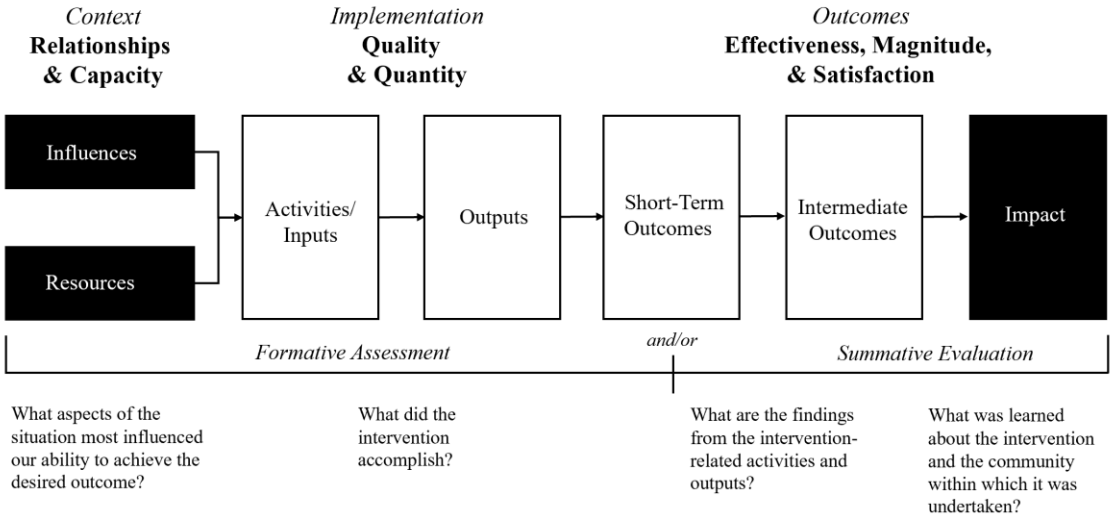
Logic model. Once I had arrived at a theory of action that adequately described why each intervention component was expected to work, the next step entailed describing a sequential order showing the anticipated outcomes through a logic model. I used a logic model as an evolving framework for presenting ideas on the critical elements of an action plan to address nameism in the classroom and the anticipated outcomes. The logic model gave me a visual representation of an intervention process structure, workflow, and the sequentially dependent activities involved, allowing me to visualize the causal relationship between the planned activities and the intended results. Crane (2010) posited that a qualitative logic model is "based on 'best case scenario' examples gleaned from purposive sampling" that present plausible outcomes for the targets of the study.

"Evaluators often draft logic models based on an understanding of the program. Then, stakeholder perceptions of assumptions, activities, and outcomes are added until a comprehensive program theory emerges" (Crane, 2010, p. 900). The Theory of Change and Theory of Action described earlier comprise the conceptual program theory that will ideally take illustrative form within the logic model. This process entailed designing an approach to addressing the problem of practice based on the particulars of the phenomenon as identified in the study sample. The particulars include structures of the experiences reported by participants and extracted through phenomenological and eidetic reduction processes.

The logic model provides a blueprint for translating the study's findings into actions or from theory to praxis, with praxis defined as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (Freire, 1968). In this case, the structures were the objects within the consciousness likely to appear in stakeholders' experiences with nameism, such as attitudes, behaviors, organizational culture, and other discernible aspects that research study participants reportedly intended upon when engaging the phenomenon. Those objects were the focus of my logic model's critical components regarding inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts (Giancola, 2021). Each of these components, in relation to one other, operates as a systems approach to change that creates an "architecture for the accumulation of learning" (Craike, Klepac, Mowle & Riley, 2023), as illustrated in Figure 6 and described in the following sections.

Figure 6.

Intervention Logic Model



Note. Intervention Logic Model [Image]. Adapted from Logic Model Development Guide (p. 36), by W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004. W.K. Kellogg Resource Directory.

Inputs. The available resources and surrounding influences used to implement the action plan are its inputs (Giancola, 2021). Before determining what resources and influences are needed to carry out the activities, it is essential to determine whether adequate capacity and relationships make the intervention contextually appropriate for the setting. Inputs, such as student and teacher pre-tests that measure awareness of name-identity bias and attitudes towards uncommon names, are ideal for setting a baseline for the education milieu and school culture.

Activities. Giancola (2021) described the activities of a logic model as planned interventions. The research questions and study findings informed the current action plan's focus on learning efficacy and student self-image, giving form to the inputs described in the previous section. The inputs are then applied to the following activities: name-value affirmation, perspective-taking exercises, cross-group engagement, and community commitment building. These activities comprise the plan's key measures: student perceptions, learning environment, and teacher awareness.

Outputs. Outputs are the byproducts of the activities implemented throughout the action plan (Giancola, 2021). Outputs from the current action plan activities include teacher observation notes, written feedback from students about the exercises, or similar formative assessment tools. Both activities and outputs are used to track the qualitative (attitudes) and quantitative (prevalences) progress of the activities, including any aspects of the intervention that may need mid-course refinement.

Outcomes. Outcomes are similar to outputs; however, outcomes are the short-term and intermediate anticipated changes attributed to the action plan (Giancola, 2021). According to the logic model, the outcomes of the current action plan relate to any shifts

in school culture, such as changes in inequity tolerance or awareness. Outcomes are measured based on effectiveness, magnitude, and satisfaction through instructional rounds, where observations are debriefed and shared among members of a professional community of practice established to aggregate the results of the overall effort.

Impact. Aside from goals and anticipated outcomes, there may be intended and unintended impacts of the proposed intervention, such as parents who disagree with discussions on race and identity among grade-school students regardless of context and intent due to concerns over guilt. Even though studies show children of European American descent display less bias toward African Americans after receiving history lessons about racism (Hughes et al., 2007), race-sensitive curricula have become the target of lawsuits and book bans in education systems across the U.S. (Schwartz, 2023).

Action Research Plan Timeline

The timeline for the action plan ideally begins at the start of each new school year, when students and teachers first establish baseline expectations of respectful engagement. This standard should be an established part of the curriculum in the first semester. It may require a workgroup of faculty and staff to develop a plan for how the school can orient its efforts to meet the needs of historically marginalized students in largely homogenous learning environments. As the school year unfolds, a community of practice could conduct and report the results of formative assessments, per the logic model in Figure 6, as the interventions are applied and determine whether promising pedagogic practices or lessons learned have become known. As the community of practice continues its work, mid-year and end-year summative evaluations should inform the execution of refined interventions for the upcoming year.

CHAPTER THREE:

ACTION/INTERVENTION/CHANGE PROCESS

Action Plan/Intervention/Change Process Descriptions

I infused the origin story of blackness into the narrative behind distinctively Black names because I recognized the roles that names have historically played in testing our society's progress in harmonizing race relations or the lack thereof. As the study revealed, however, much of the work also rested with those who held the most significant stake in achieving progress yet felt the most disempowered. The real value of the study may be, at best, how reliably the proposed intervention creates the conditions for a critical dialogue on nameism. Ultimately, the efficacy of the action research will be determined by whether the four approaches markedly reduced the prevalence of name-identity threat in classrooms where the intervention was applied. Lifting the veil on the problem starts with positing the benefits that will accrue to educators based on the study's intent:

1. To normalize a respectful classroom dialogue around the significance of names and naming conventions across different cultures by applying funds of knowledge.
2. To provide teachers and faculty leaders a platform to facilitate anti-bias and empathic behavior through open, multiple-level, in-school engagements that foster an ecology of equity.

The purpose behind these objectives is less about driving prescriptions for action and behavior. Instead, the purpose focuses more on shaping a framework through which teachers can think about the identity-driven aspects of student learning. Such a framework invites professional educators to undertake what Freire (1970) referred to as

informed action" that reconciles theory and practice. According to Freire (1970), seeing and thinking differently is inextricably linked to provoking social change whereby the "oppressed" do not repeat the mistakes of their "oppressors." It thus leads to a lasting morally and intellectually grounded change, where distinctively Black names and identities are respected as assets in the learning environment as part of fostering a funds of knowledge and ecology of equity in interracial classroom settings.

Description of the Action Plan

With the previously mentioned objectives established, the action plan specifically entailed the implementation of four student and teacher-led class activities. My intention for the proposed intervention is to allow students and teachers to co-establish classroom rules of engagement, much like I did in the co-construction of the intervention through participatory action research. Given my role as a recipient of a K-12 education, not a provider, I turned to the expertise of peers who were experienced educators. I particularly benefitted from insights that helped me better understand how identity differences among students and teachers influenced dynamics in the classroom, how often they had seen what the study participants reported experiencing, and the perceived efficacy of the four proposed interventions.

The most consistent feedback I received validated what the participants reported during the semi-structured interviews. I also came away with a better understanding of what would make a proposed evidence-based action plan viable, which primarily centered on the importance what the plan sought to deliver in tangible terms, such as the development of in-class facilitation guides that promote safe, open discussions on matters of race, culture, and identity. The recommended timeline for the proposed intervention

spans an entire school year, during which the effects of the sequence of interventions described in the following sections at various levels of engagement ideally remain under observation and are periodically assessed for effectiveness in addressing nameism.

Description of the Intervention

The action plan was animated by my intention to synergize the benefits of the four interventions described in the previous chapter. Each intervention was selected based on its evidence-based efficacy and potential to address name-identity bias at multiple, interdependent levels of engagement in an appropriate organizational setting. Given the complexities involved in nameism, as outlined throughout this paper, a multi-tiered approach seemed necessary to account for nameism's various "modes of appearing" in the lives of students with distinctively Black names. The four-phase sequence of interventions described below involves activities that will ideally build on one another to achieve funds of knowledge and an ecology of equity in interracial learning spaces.

Phase One: The first activity explores the association between understanding the meaning of one's identity and psychological well-being, as mediated by a sense of belonging to one's in-group. "Students with high levels of identity affirmation are more likely to have higher self-esteem, self-concept, academic achievement; fewer mental health problems; and positively cope with and respond to everyday discrimination" (Ghavami et al., 2011). Rowe (2008) explained micro-affirmations as "tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening" (p.46) that will ideally foster effective name-identity affirmation. Micro-affirmation 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 as a foundation for the next step.

Phase Two: Once students can demystify the stories behind their first names and locate their in-group identities through name-identity value affirmation, the next activity involves modeling counter-nameism behaviors. Examples include having teachers take the time to pronounce each student's name correctly and assigning students randomly to pick another student's name, spell or pronounce it correctly, and discuss what they learned about a peer's name. This exercise will encourage empathy by having students take the perspectives of others but also reduce feelings of isolation by making every student feel valued through inclusive behavior involving all students in the class (O'Brien et al., 2014). This exercise will help bring funds of knowledge to the surface by having students and teachers take note of the value of the experiences behind a person's identity.

Phase Three: The third activity acknowledges that members of various in-groups may not immediately appreciate what each has in common with other in-group members or the value of apparent differences. Once name-identity affirmation and 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 celebrate both differences and previously unnoticed similarities will help peers "feel recognized as individuals" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p.182) without resort to essentialism. This exercise will allow teachers to explain the negative influence of assumptions and stereotypes that exaggerate truths or mythologize particular group identities. At this phase, an emphasis on the importance of seeing names as symbols

defined by the name bearer rather than what society imposes will be paramount to cultivating an ecology of equity, as described previously in the paper.

Phase Four: The final activity bears school-wide implications that aim to reinforce the lesson learned through the first three activities. To raise organizational awareness of the importance of respecting one's name and identity in the classroom, in-class activity results are reported by faculty to stakeholders and used to raise awareness through an organization-wide campaign led by students with the guidance of faculty. This effort will challenge school community members to pledge to honor names, the stories behind them, and commitments to eradicating nameism. The number of pledges will measure the scale of commitment within a school.

Key considerations. Each component of the proposed intervention incorporated a different approach to the problem, starting from the individual level and moving to the inter-social or organizational level within an education system. The anticipated outcomes correspond with each approach to addressing nameism in the classroom at the various tiers where nameism took place, as illustrated in Table 11 below.

Table 11.

Activities & Engagement Levels

Level of Engagement	Individual	Interpersonal	Inter-group	Inter-community
Primary Audience	Students	Students and Teachers	Teachers	Students, Teachers, and Researchers
Intervention	*Phase 1:* Name-Value Affirmation	*Phase 2:* Perspective Taking	*Phase 3:* Cross-Group Dialogue	*Phase 4:* Organizational Commitment

As I have acknowledged throughout the paper, I selected a domain of research in which I made no claim to having the expertise to advise educators or purport to know what is best for their students. Analyzing how each of the interventions was implemented and whether they had collectively achieved their aims is best defined by considering the impact each might have had on the study participants based on their reported experiences. More broadly, I considered how the body of knowledge might have differed had the community of education researchers exercised a greater awareness of the function of names as indicators of social desirability, measures of proximity to whiteness, or symbols of deficiency in the literature. Additionally, I contemplated my understanding of nameism as a problem of practice with the three critical areas to consider in determining whether the proposed interventions worked as intended: context, implementation, and outcomes.

Context. Context is defined by how the intervention functions within the targeted community's socioeconomic and political environment. Context implicates the role that relationships and capacity play relative to the viability and efficacy of the intervention, which heavily depends on the availability of the necessary resources and whether influences are positive or negative. Factors influencing whether the intervention is accepted for assessment in a particular school involve relationships that can foster faculty's willingness to acknowledge the problem. As an aspect of context, capacity factors involve the availability of time in the curriculum, resources such as funding and materials, and faculty who have the time to see the implementation through to completion. Contextual indicators for the intervention are student perceptions, learning environment, and teacher awareness, each built around the focus of the three research questions that grounded the study.

Implementation. Implementation examines how activities are executed according to the planned qualitative and quantitative outputs linked to the intervention's desired results. This aspect of the evaluation might consider survey results, pre- and post-test scores, reflection assignments, and teachers' notes on class observations during class activities and discussions that indicate the intervention's progress and may inform whether adjustments need to be made. This phase of the evaluation provides the narrative of short-term outcomes from the activities and why eventualities occurred. When the intervention is applied in other situational contexts, this aspect of the evaluation will likely see the most significant variation from situation to situation.

Outcomes. Outcomes from the intervention are measured in terms of effectiveness (Did the intervention work?), magnitude of impact (How many people were impacted?), and satisfaction (How do those impacted feel about it?). At this phase of the evaluation process, goal-setting frameworks in education align activities and desired outcomes within the professional teaching practice based on summative assessments. The key questions become whether the research questions were adequately addressed, whether the problem of practice was resolved, organizational change and leadership practices, and the implications for future practice and research.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The research study proceeded with an emphasis on "student identity" as central to experiences with nameism, with "attitudinal catalysts" and "behavioral mechanisms" determining the structures of the experience based on the categorical "blackness" of a name. The effort to explain culturally directed names as an aspect of social identity formation among Black students in interracial learning environments, without implicating

the problem-framing elements, left the narrative incomplete in the body of related research. Specifically, the study findings suggested that student identity served as the locus of control when name-identity threats occurred, with the question being whether control was internal to the student or external to the environment. This question embodied the tension between the student's resort to a culturally directed versus a socially constructed identity when confronted with identity threats.

The study results also revealed that internal reactions leading to the assertiveness of Black identities, and the consequences that followed, were ascribable to external influences rather than mere nonconformity or counter-assimilation. Consequently, the conflict between an "ideal" and "real" social identity took a noticeable form during the participants' interviews as shared culpability for the prevalence of nameism consistently surfaced through their descriptions of name-identity threats. As objects of experiences with nameism, these interactions often became obfuscated by the contradictory meanings and interpretations of "blackness" that several participants sought to reconcile.

Relatedly, the phenomenologically derived objects of the reported experiences with nameism included "teacher awareness" (or lack thereof) and the "learning environment" as critical influences on how those students were perceived, with power-perception dichotomy, forced chameleon effect, and name-identity hyper-consciousness as corollaries that embodied how those students reacted. These external and internal aspects of the phenomenon implicated self-conception and symbolic interactionism theory as virtually cross-negating assumptions that plausibly explained the power of nameism to take form while remaining undetected, except within the consciousness of those students.

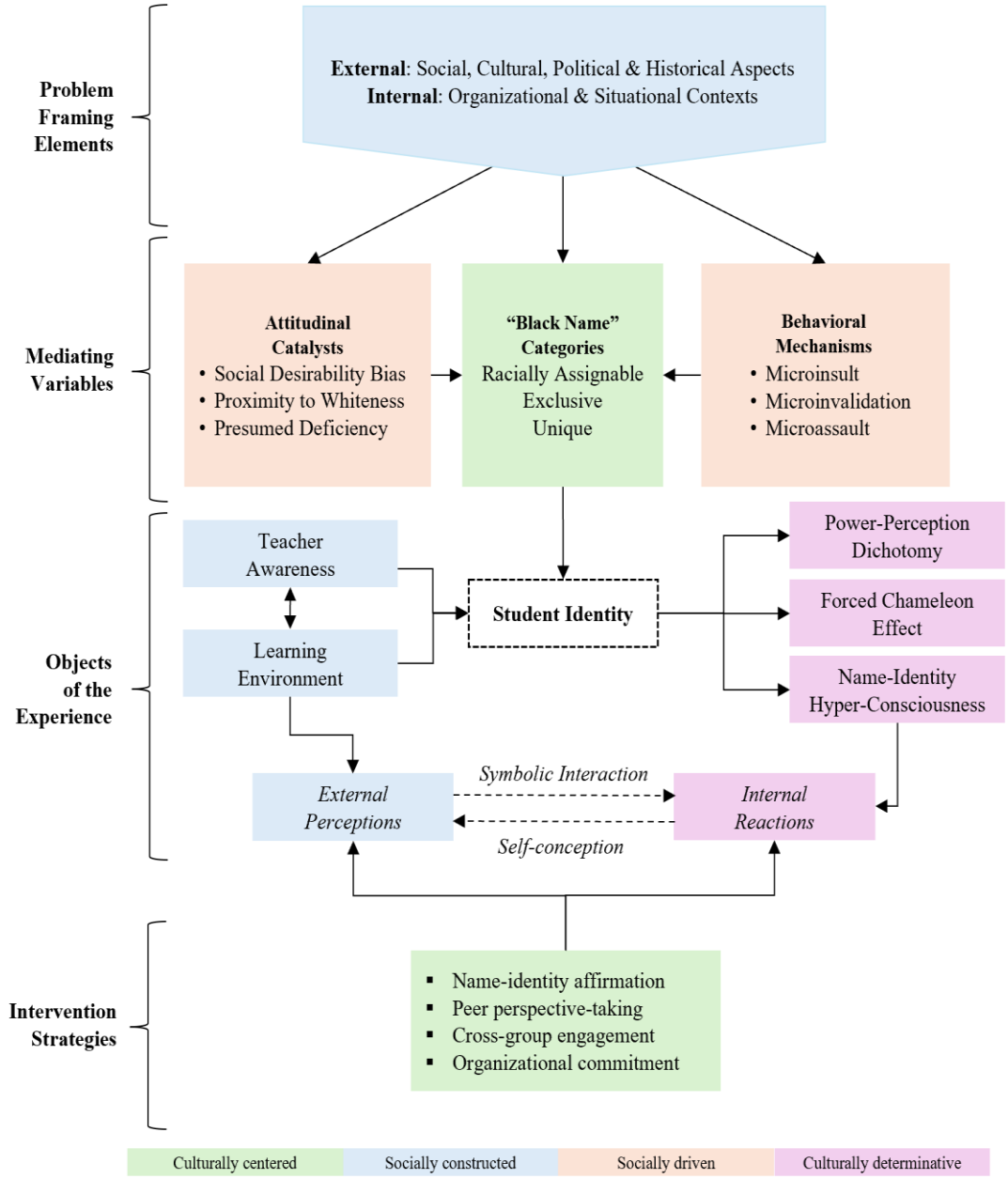
It is within the consciousness, or a sense of double consciousness as described by Du Bois (1987) where these students could sense the threat but often could not give words to what they had perceived, compelling them to adopt or submit to an identity-salience hierarchy. The goal of an identity-salience hierarchy, thus, be understood as occurring along a two-dimensional continuum where the desire to avoid name-identity threat (symbolic interactionism) forms one axis, and the desire for self-identity and determination (self-conception) comprising the other axis. In classrooms where a low cross-cultural competency or an unawareness of cross-cultural tensions persists, the elements of symbolic interaction (interactions, interpretations, meanings) are conflict with identity formation and thus lends to a conflict between one's variegated sense of identity (real self, ideal self, and self-esteem). The dual focus on symbolic interaction and self-conception helped to unravel ways in which this conflict manifests between external perceptions and internal reactions.

Here the study implicates nameism as expressed through social desirability bias (low threat of racism/individual focused), presumed deficiency (high threat of racism/group focused), or proximity to whiteness (cost-reward pressure to assimilate). When examined as a gestalt, phenomenal experiences with nameism can be best understood as emergent and structurally dependent, not appearing in one's consciousness as isolated perceptions. Based on the study results, the structures of these experiences are dependent upon situational context-creating linkages and the fluid interplay of various parts of the phenomenon: elements, variables, objects, and intervention strategies. These parts comprise the culturally oriented, socially constructed, socially driven, and culturally determinative aspects of experiences with nameism.

Figure 7 outlines a conceptual framework as described above and illustrates the differentiated parts of the gestalt and their relational linkages.

Figure 7.

Conceptual Framework for Experiences with Nameism



Description of the Change Process

Maxwell, Sharples, and Coldwell (2022) defined research as "engaging with research evidence, including both considering and acting to create changes in practice in education." In this case, the change is a learning environment where marginalized students are far less likely to encounter nameism once the proposed intervention is implemented. When viewed as an intervention with parts that make it a system, I proposed that name value-affirmation statements, perspective-taking exercises, cross-group interactions, and organization-wide commitment could work synergistically to meet the aim of fostering a funds of knowledge and ecology in classrooms where nameism is most likely to occur. To that end, I saw change in this context as less about practice and more about philosophy, at least initially.

Unintended barriers to change can be teachers' attitudes toward change itself, students' discomfort with any of the proposed exercises, or a lack of interest from senior leadership. The bold and perhaps provocative assertions about the role of American history in laying the groundwork for the persistence of nameism are not likely to be met with a unanimous agreement in many education and research circles. However, the revelations from the study that suggested a shared accountability for nameism's persistence, which included students themselves, offer a safe space for examining this multifaceted problem and democratizes culpability among all parties who may also share a common desire to address the root of the problem. Schein (2004) wrote, "In most organizational change efforts, it is much easier to draw on the strength of the culture than to overcome the constraints by changing the culture" (p. 362).

An analysis of a school or classroom‘s readiness to address name-identity threat as a problem of practice should include approaches that enhance an understanding of an organization’s readiness for change, as Weiner (2009) explained:

> Organizational readiness for change is a multi-level, multi-faceted construct. As an organization-level construct, readiness for change refers to organizational members' shared resolve to implement a change (change commitment) and shared belief in their collective capability to do so (change efficacy) (p. 1).

Although these aspects of organizational readiness for change will differ even between similar organizations, Weiner (2009) recommended accounting for task demands, resource availability, and situational factors when evaluating readiness. Organizational readiness for the proposed interventions will likely be higher in schools where teachers are empowered and comfortable initiating changes through new tasks, demonstrate proactive and consistent efforts when change efforts are adequately resourced, and are inclined to cooperate with faculty leaders during change efforts. In some instances, it may be necessary to reframe the problem to ensure the proposed change addresses existing concerns relevant to the particular organization rather than viewed by faculty as a top-down, generically applied solution in search of a problem.

As described herein, the goal is to move classroom culture along a dynamic progression where students and teachers methodically incorporate a collective awareness of attitudes and behaviors that create the conditions for nameism to occur. Risks and unintended impacts must also be anticipated and addressed throughout the change process to ensure timely measures are taken to mitigate their influence on the desired outcome. Foreseeable threats to the change process include time restrictions in the

curriculum schedule that may cause teachers to deviate from intended protocols as they are developed with each iteration of the proposed interventions.

Being cognizant of relevant policies and external influences, from parents to policymakers, will also be crucial. A case in point is that an increasing number of states and education systems have outlawed diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Kelderman, 2023; Rufo et al., 2023). Given the current socioeconomic climate, I anticipate that putting theory into practice through efforts to confront name-identity threats will likely face challenges within organizational contexts and amid change dynamics where it is, ironically, most needed yet least likely to succeed. For this reason, assessing an organization's readiness for change and leadership practices will be critical to speculating on the action plan's viability within any given organizational context.

Analysis of Implementation

Organizational Change Analysis

Organizational context will be critical to consider when implementing approaches to confronting nameism. Any anticipated outcomes must align with a problem recognized and perceived as remediable through the proposed intervention co-constructed through the current participatory action research. Cross Young and Nenonene (2014) spoke to the need for programs that give educators a "realistic understanding of students and families who are different from themselves before they enter into their classrooms … [and] how their perceptions affect their expectations of what students can accomplish" (p. 3). Baker and Weisling (2022) advanced a similar view with an emphasis on the social drivers of disparity in education:

> Teaching is inherently political, and teachers bring their personal socialization into every classroom. Now, with every aspect of public education under attack, a global pandemic laying bare long-standing inequalities, and facing a social reckoning and significant turning point, it is critical that our educators do the work of unpacking their beliefs and actions toward their students.

Throughout the research study, I have come to appreciate the importance of providing educators with tools that help them unpack beliefs and actions toward their students. More importantly, doing so had to be predicated on an articulable problem to be solved within their respective organizational contexts. I started this thought process by positioning the problem as largely unnoticed by teachers and unreported by affected students. Even in nameism's most overt forms, such as constant misspellings, mispronunciations, or unwanted nicknames, participants reported being caught between heightened vigilance by a teacher's behavior and never being sure whether their perceptions were valid.

Cohen and Sherman (2014) posited, "Such vigilance is understandable and even adaptive given the current and historical significance of race in America" (pp. 342-343). However, social identity threat, defined herein as an "awareness that one could be devalued based on one's group," was shown to create anxiety and stresses in students that militated against their academic potential the longer those feelings persisted. In these situations, Lee (2019) advocated for the creation of "brave spaces" for students where they can critically address experiences with racism in interracial education settings without inhibition: "Brave spaces privilege the thoughts and experiences of all

participants and encourage a 'challenge by choice' atmosphere, all working toward critical, student-centered spaces" (p. 104).

For example, as teachers implement value-affirmation statements and perspective-taking exercises with students, periodically shared reflections on what teachers learn from students who exercise the prerogative to challenge respectfully can lead to new ideas or adjustments that make classroom engagements more fruitful. For those teachers who may not see or reap the value of such interactions immediately, having this feedback included in periodically shared reflections with colleagues may ensure the entire effort does not suffer attrition based on a few shortcomings (Kelly, 2012). Senge (1990) wrote, “We tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system and wonder why our deepest problem never seems to get solved.” To avoid this result, teacher feedback, whether through critiques, observation notes, or objective confirmations of efficacy, will be invaluable to monitoring process fidelity and adherence to the protocols as intended within a given context.

In instances where process fidelity was not strictly followed yet reaped interesting or positively unanticipated results, such as how the intervention may have improved the learning environment along other identity intersections, the teachers should note these developments for future consideration. Equally essential to capture are aspects of the intervention where process fidelity was strictly followed yet could be linked to negatively unanticipated results. Anticipating the need for transition time before an ecology of equity and funds of knowledge take effect will allow teachers to address any challenges with undertaking the proposed intervention activities and assessments in their classes. As the conditions become more favorable for the proposed intervention, implementing the

various approaches may feel less compulsory as teachers adapt the activities to their respective situational contexts.

Continued information sharing and the sustained interest of leadership during cultural evolution efforts, such as instances where an organization has committed to eliminating nameism, will be critical to evaluating progress. Change is part of a growth and renewal process that progresses and must factor in the intersubjective perspectives and experiences of those affected by the change. Thus, the "human factor" becomes the most consequential aspect of change to consider when executing the intent of the intervention, from negative attitudes to limited participation to poor communication on the need for change without considering its relevancy to the local organizational context.

Reflection on Leadership Practices

Dimmock (1996) said, "Similar to other organizations, organizational change in schools is any alteration, betterment, improvement, restructuring, or adjustment in the processes or contents of education in schools." This notion drove the current participatory action research as I sought to address name-identity threats in the classroom through the contribution of study participants. Transitioning phenomenological study into action research required understanding how education systems evolve and why many well-intended interventions failed. "When the organization is to conduct changes, it is relevant to analyze the role of knowledge as a facilitator of change, not as an output of that change. Knowledge can also be seen as generating the actual change processes" (Maula, 2006). How leaders generate and leverage knowledge is essential, as the proposed interventions will only be as good as the fruit they bear.

My expectations as a parent of school-aged children, coupled with my earlier experiences as a fifth grader in a Lorain, Ohio school, helped me idealize how equity-informed leadership might look if I was tasked to socialize the implementation of interventions for confronting nameism in a school. In the classroom, this meant considering the benefits of scripted and dynamic interactions between teachers and students centered on dialogic engagements as part of a broader organizational commitment to fostering funds of knowledge and an ecology of equity. Lessons I had taken from past leadership experiences included the importance of avoiding the imposition or appearance of imposing strict penalties or constant top-down supervision when leading change efforts.

Kondakci et al. (2016) spoke to the importance of fostering a culture of continuous change by empowering ordinary organizational members who can best facilitate knowledge sharing at every level of engagement in the learning space. Håkonsson et al. (2012) asserted that while leaders ideally create the structures that mediate continuous organizational change, they do not initiate the change. As noted by my colleagues in education roles, delegating the responsibility for initiating the change to teachers does not absolve senior faculty of their responsibility to lead. On the contrary, organizational leaders with formal authority are also responsible for "packaging knowledge" relative to the change. O'Donnell, O'Regan, and Coates (2000, as cited in Bradley, 1997) noted that "most approaches to packaging knowledge tend to emphasize the output of knowledge and information and pay less attention to the way it is constructed" (p.191).

Thus, essential to communicate was how organizational leaders conceived the proposed mechanism for confronting nameism and what made it worthy of implementation. The current action research serves that function by creating an imperative for education leaders to consider: What each leader can do to get at the root of nameism in interracial learning environments. Absent a solution, the problem will perpetuate exponentially with each kindergartener bearing a distinctively Black name and throughout a lifetime of seeking an identity within the American social structure. Given that the results of the study are context specific and will likely raise more questions than answers, the practice and future research implications bear reckoning.

Implications for Practice & Future Research

I sought to address the problem of practice by identifying best or promising practices educators can explore and employ in their classrooms. Pursuant to this goal, I proposed four evidence-based interventions through which teachers in interracial classrooms can address name-identity threats and behaviors that lead to perceptions of nameism in students who are likely to internalize what they perceive. The knowledge generated by my research included insights into the inner dialogues that study participants shared during the semi-structured interviews. These insights helped me examine whether specific organizational contexts would foreseeably support or impede the expansion of knowledge on the phenomenon. Although discussions around implicit bias and microaggressions in education are becoming increasingly common with the expanding societal focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, race disparities in education remain a challenging problem. In the following sections, I address several implications for current practice and future research.

Implications for Practice

Teachers play a critical role in making spaces conducive to student learning and growth in the classroom. According to Irizarry, Evans, and Meyer (2023), they carry out this role in three ways: by enculturating norms, values, and expectations in students; (b) by fostering productive social engagement among students; and (c) by facilitating reflective practices that help students raise their collective consciousness of the world around them. “In these roles, educators are literally on the frontline working as agents of integration of diverse perspectives, issues, people, cultures, and information, as well as facilitators of sense-making” (Irizarry, Evans & Meyer, 2023, as cited in Anttila et al., 2018). The proposed intervention supports the role of teachers as front-line agents of equity in learning and seeks to inform their discretionary pedagogic approaches with tools that position them to confront underlying or hidden messages in learning spaces.

The first significant practical contribution of the study entailed a much-needed examination into how students processed and internalized perceptions whenever their identities appeared to arouse microaggressions on the part of teachers. Given how little research has been devoted to isolating pre-reflective experiences with identity threat in students who know a perception exists but may not understand why, this information is critical to the body of knowledge. Further examining these pre-reflective experiences will allow teachers to design programs and interventions based on targeted students' perceptions. Programs may address how these students feel when cautiously and constantly forced to interpret those teachers’ actions that resemble past experiences with identity threats in their manifold forms.

The second significant contribution involves placing teachers in a position to derive similar interventions or in-class activities that highlight the value of belonging as one's whole self rather than trying to fit in based on a desire to avoid name or self-identity threat. This study responds to the call made by Gaddis (2017) and others who decried the use of names as "imperfect proxies for race" and the "Black name index" as problematic when used to reduce the meanings of Black-sounding names to data points (p. 471). Consequently, an inaccurate idea of being "Black" in the classroom is propagated. This lack of insight has led many teachers to aim to look the part by undertaking performative activities that display the patina of equity but fall short of cultivating a lasting and meaningful equity mindset.

Conditions such as these often result in appearances eventually belied by educational data and research on implicit bias and educational disparities over time. This point leads to the third important implication of the study. The implication stems from the problem with name-identity threat relative to society's mirror, or looking glass, which gets held up to a student and reflects a socially constructed identity. The dialogic connections facilitated through the proposed interventions were intended to add a dimension of the reflection that often went unseen outside one's family, community, and ethnic peer group. Opening students' and teachers' minds toward each other will allow learning and development to co-occur by making classroom cultures more malleable as students organize their experiences around how they relate to one another.

A fourth implication addresses the history of scapegoating a student's parents when authority figures constantly misuse a name. Rather than recognize the role of institutional racism as a potential accelerant that predisposes some teachers to commit

nameism, such as those older, less educated, white teachers in predominantly white classrooms with very few Black students, academia and research have perpetuated a "deficit view" involving Black-sounding names and social outcomes. The study seeks to disrupt the cycle by proposing two fundamental questions that educators might critically reflect upon in their equity-oriented practice goals: (1) What is the current nature of the organizational context relative to addressing name-identity threats in my classroom; and (2) Does my organization have the cultural and leadership support that will allow me to confront name-identity threats in my classroom effectively? These questions stand on the premise that each teacher chooses the pedagogic character of their engagements with students in their classrooms.

Dr. Aaliyah Baker, Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Leadership at Cardinal Stritch University, deconstructed the notion of pedagogy as a means of social liberation through an ethnocultural lens, describing the concept as student-centered, value-laden intentionality that resides in a person's "particular psychological, emotional thinking … a developing system of thinking about how we might do something different" (Black Family, 2020). Accordingly, the preceding implications for practice were derived with great respect for the plight of educators who must navigate a host of challenges with each new class of students, particularly those who must do so in interracially imbalanced classrooms.

Implications for Future Research

The first implication for research involves the sampling strategy for the study and what it helped reveal through semi-structured interviews with six former students with distinctively Black names. Hypothesizing the statistical generalizability of the study's

findings, such as in-group reactions to Black-sounding names and the strength of the relationships between how names function and one's self-conception, may help the body of research elaborate on the myriad ways a name can reveal more about dominant culture hardwiring than the individual affected by it. This implication also includes the unsettled tensions between how students internalize experiences with nameism out of uncertainty and the generally accepted social constructs that impose meanings onto their experiences.

By problematizing blackness in research through an emphasis on naming patterns in socioeconomically impoverished communities, as cited in *Freakanomics*, the story on blackness was far too often picked up in the middle and, thus, the beginning largely disregarded or forgotten. My study sought to reset the narrative by associating mainstream social attitudes toward blackness with the demand for one's right to an unapologetically Black identity, in the name of dignity on the one hand, intergenerational survival on the other. Adding this premise to future research on name-identity threats will add new and historically relevant dimensions to what we currently understand about the effects of power imbalances, social isolation, and internalized reactions within homogenous schools and classrooms presenting interracial dynamics.

Additional research implications involve the role of technology in human-curated automation bias. As machine learning increasingly defines the education space ("Artificial Intelligence," 2023), algorithmically derived biases toward stigmatized names and identities will likely worsen absent intervention. "[T]he first challenge in asking an algorithm to be fair or private is agreeing on what those words should mean in the first place—and not in the way a lawyer or philosopher might describe them, but in so precise a manner that they can be 'explained' to a machine" (Kearns & Roth, 2019). The extent

to which the current study's findings explain underlying bias may translate in an AI context through values-based research that builds on what is learned from a broader and more diverse array of intersubjective experiences that de-privilege whiteness.

The current study also demonstrated the benefits of using a phenomenological approach customized to the aim of a study and the researcher's positionality. As the nature of racism and implicit bias has evolved, so must approaches to studying them as phenomena, as demonstrated by how automation bias gave racism a new place to hide under the cover of acceptance knowledge. Acceptable knowledge has long been mediated by unexamined assumptions among scholars and researchers about Black students and their families, communities, and social rules of engagement surrounding Black culture. Collins (2019) called this a "camouflage for epistemic power in which those who are empowered and privileged within an interpretive community … dictate the rules for what is considered acceptable knowledge." In contrast, Ihde, D. (1977) referred to a "playfulness" in phenomenology" that bears serious and purposeful implications in the formation of ontologies (p. 123).

On that premise, the study settled whether nameism was best studied with explanatory intent or through a field of reported experiences that can be described, with the latter being my choice. This choice aligned with my decision to decenter "taken-for-granted knowledge" based on a hierarchy of realities and instead apply a "plurality of realities" approach that allowed for "common-sense" realism, physical, intuitive, and phenomenal realities that bear equal or equitable truth value (Chwistek, 1948). I achieved this aim by privileging epistemologically variegated experiences, where individuals saw their varied realities with their "whole body" (Ihde, 1977), not just the consciousness.

Conclusion

The research study results revealed that experiences with nameism in the classroom were driven mainly by two sides of the same master narrative. On one side stands the authority figure who may find it difficult to ignore what society assumes about Jamal or Lakeisha, whose name suggests a problematic backstory. On the other sits the student who did not choose her name or what his name signals but may feel compelled to adopt a situationally malleable identity to accommodate the perceptions of others. This forced choice speaks to the power of the rhetoric and mythos of racism to infiltrate the psyche of those whose identities become absorbed into master narratives that "offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience" through storylines that absorb all other stories (Andrews, 2002).

Implications for Organizations

Classrooms with interracial dynamics present society with an ideal "collaboratory," defined by Cogburn (2003) as an organizational form where "social processes … and agreement on norms, principles, values, and rules" shape new expectations for its members (p. 86). New expectations start with determining whether the existing culture tends to subconsciously foster an impulse toward "whitewashing" or favoring pro-white expressions of identity (Gray, 2019; Wright, Carr & Akin, 2021), making the situation ideal for interventions such as those proposed in the study. Whitewashing can reveal itself through findings that empirically correlate ethnically identifiable names with how students are perceivably assessed, critiqued, engaged during class discussions, and referred to by their given names.

The nature of the findings will determine which approaches to mitigating the psychosocial cost of nameism for impacted students are most appropriate and to what end. Approaches can range from passive measures, such as simply calling for greater awareness of the issue, to more active measures, such as implementing a multifaceted plan of action most appropriate for the school or classroom's sociopolitical context and readiness for change. I realize that not every educator in a school or classroom with interracial dynamics will see experiences with nameism as a resolvable problem of practice. The study's value to educators will ultimately hinge on the practical utility of the findings and whether they see value in curbing nameism's influence on the consciousness of those who silently or unwittingly pay the psychosocial cost.

A journal article titled "*Schools Do Not Have to be a Microcosm of Society*" idealized classroom settings as opportunities to confront conditions where a student sees him or herself "as only a 'face in the crowd' caught up in social morass and not knowing how to cope with it" (Campbell, 1976, p. 52). While the morass can take on many forms, how students establish their identities from the earliest moments of their social being in the classroom can bear lifelong implications. For students with names that announce their blackness, the social morass all too often involved the "danger of the single" story, as described by Adichie (2009):

> All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with it is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Nameism became a way of deconstructing black identities by reducing names that suggest blackness through parodies and caricatures that perpetuated stereotypes and sweeping generalizations. Whether at the top of a student's graded essay or on a class roster of new students, a name alone can activate presuppositions about a student's story that remain hidden within the confines of an educator's consciousness. By the time the discovery appeared in data and statistics, the damage was done, and the struggle continued for students whose names placed their real identities in conflict with their socially constructed personas.

How the Study Responded to the Problem of Practice

Over time, nameism became less evident with the increasingly abstract nature of nameism, where a person did not need to be aware or even present to be victimized. Classrooms present an opportunity to confront the persistent socio-structural intentionality that created the conditions for nameisn to normalize and evolve. The preceding research study responded to the problem of practice by challenging educators to see beyond the artificiality that nameism relies upon to perpetuate and confront it with an equal or more significant measure of intentionality than that which stigmatized Black identity and culture. While the danger of the single story appeared more likely to surface when a teacher and student engaged from differing ethnocultural perspectives, the phenomenon may be probable but does not have to be inevitable. Classrooms that present interracial dynamics have the potential to reset the rules of social engagement on cultural differences. By consciously influencing positive general perceptions toward Black-sounding names, educators can attenuate the effects and prevalence of nameism, a term nonexistent in the social or education research vernacular before this study's publication.

Accordingly, nameism must be recognized among educators as a relevant problem of practice, where success is measured by the observable effect interventions 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 negatives 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 and broader society, starting from the earliest moments of students' social being.

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APPENDIX A:

Invitation to Participate

Research Project Title: *A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Students with Distinctively Black Names in Interracial Classroom Settings*

- You have been asked to participate in a research project by Sherman Gillums Jr. from the University of Dayton in the Department of Education and Health Sciences.

- The project aims to explore the interracial classroom experiences of former students with distinctively Black names.

- Answering the questions during a semi-structured interview will take about 60 minutes.

You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and stop participating at any time.

- You will not be compensated for your participation.

- All of the information you tell us will be confidential.

- If this is a recorded interview, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording, which will be kept in a secure place.

- Only the researcher and faculty advisor can access your responses if this is a written or online survey. If you are participating in an online survey, we will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.

- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Sherman Gillums Jr., University of Dayton, email@udayton.edu, (XXX) XXX -XXXX

Aaliyah Baker, Ph.D., University of Dayton, email@udayton.edu, (XXX) XXX – XXXX

If you feel you have been mistreated or have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email IRB@udayton.edu or call (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

APPENDIX B:

Informed Consent

Title of Research: *A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Students with Distinctively Black Names in Interracial Classroom Settings*

Principle Investigator, Affiliation, and Contact Information: *Sherman Gillums Jr., MS University of Dayton, email@udayton.edu, (XXX) XXX-XXXX*

Additional Investigators and Affiliations: *Dr. Aaliyah Baker, University of Dayton*

Institutional Contact: *IRB@udayton.edu or call (XXX) XXX-XXXX*

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the classroom experiences of former students with distinctively Black names, as identified in past research, and compare and contrast those experiences between people with similar experiences.

2. Description of the Research: When entering the study, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form. You will then be asked to participate in a virtual, recorded face-to-face interview. After completing the interview, you will be asked to verify your responses and any meanings you intended once the transcripts have been analyzed.

3. Subject Participation: I estimate that six (6) participants will enroll in this study. Participants must have attended school in an interracial setting and reported past experiences with discrimination in the classroom. Your participation will involve one Zoom interview with me, approximately 60 minutes, followed by the option to participate in a focus group to confirm responses.

4. Potential Risks and Discomforts: Questions about any experiences you may have had with racial bias or discrimination may present discomfort or trigger painful memories. I will make mental health resources available to you if necessary.

5. Potential Benefits: People who participate in this study may have a better understanding of the impact of discrimination in the classroom based on ethnic name association and how learning institutions might address the problem.

6. Confidentiality: I want to interview you "on the record" to convey your thoughts and experiences about the topic of interest. I will keep your name separate from your words; I will not use your name in any quotations or reports of my findings; and I will omit or obscure any identifying details. Your responses are completely anonymous. No personal identifying information or IP addresses will be collected.

   Data will be transcribed using NVIVO qualitative research software. Results will be shared with faculty in the academic unit. I will store audio recordings and any electronic or printed transcripts in encrypted files or locked, secure locations. Once the data has been fully analyzed, it will be destroyed.

7. Authorization: By signing this form, you authorize the use and disclosure of any records, observations, and findings found during this study for education, publication, and/or presentation.

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8. Compensation: Subjects will not be compensated for participation in this study.

9. Voluntary Participation and Authorization: Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study, it will not affect any relationship you may have with the University of Dayton or any benefits to which you are entitled.

10. Withdrawal from the Study and/or Withdrawal of Authorization: If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw from your participation at any time without penalty. Any data collected before withdrawal will be included in the study with your consent.

11. Cost/Reimbursements: There is no cost for participating in this study. The investigator will not reimburse any expenses resulting from participation in this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I understand I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.

Name of Participant:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Person Obtaining Consent: Sherman Gillums Jr.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: The Principal Investigator must keep a copy of the signed, dated consent form, and a copy must be given to the participants.

APPENDIX C:

Semi-structured Interview Template

Review with the participant before starting: Purpose of study, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and 3-part interview structure:

- Personal narratives to frame the situation context for the discussion.
- Reconstruction of experiences with the phenomenon and the role of relationships and social structures in the dynamic.
- Reflections on the meanings of most salient experiences as they relate to the research questions.

Context elicitation:

How would you characterize your upbringing?
How would you describe the demographic makeup of most of the schools you attended?
What are your best and worst memories of being a student?
What kind of influence did your teachers have on you as a student?
What are your views on racial discrimination?
Explain the indicators of racism in your view.
Have you ever faced racism? (If yes) Describe.
Explain how you first became aware that racism existed.

Apprehend the phenomenon:

How did your parents come to choose your particular first name?
Have you ever seen teachers have problems with a student's ethnically identifiable or black-sounding name? (If yes) Describe.
How do names influence how a person is treated or regarded?
How did your first name influence how your teachers saw you?
Describe an encounter where your teachers had problems with your name.
How did you view other students with black-sounding names?
What makes the name black sounding?

Clarify the phenomenon:

Describe how nameism might occur in predominantly white and predominantly Black classrooms.
How would your experiences with nameism affect your decision on what you would name your child?
If you were a non-Black teacher, what would you think of a student with your first name?
What similarities and differences in experience do you think other students who share your first name have?