Enduring Effects: Name Mispronunciation and/or Change in Early School Experiences

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Abstract

A person's name(s) is typically tied to their family, culture, and sense of identity. Consequently, when a child's name is inaccurately pronounced, altered, or avoided, a host of adverse consequences may transpire. Although seemingly innocuous, this necessitates attention, as name mispronunciation and change perpetuate microaggressions ubiquitous for marginalized populations, often in school contexts. In reflection of this, an Intrinsic Case Study, underpinned by a Social Constructivist Philosophical paradigm, was conducted to assemble the experiences of three adults in Ontario, Canada, who had their names mispronounced or changed in early educational experiences. The findings of this research signify that name mispronunciation and modification are pervasive and that teachers are often central contributors to this phenomenon. Moreover, findings denote that discord between one's identity and cultural self is affiliated with name-orientated microaggressions. Participants of this study beseech teachers to denounce insensitive practices by pledging to accurately pronounce and honour each child's name and in so doing engender more favourable longitudinal outcomes.

Introduction

A person's name is tied directly to their identity and sense of self (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Each person's name defines their uniqueness and singularity (Ainciburu & Buttazzi, 2019) and is often reflective of gender, culture, religion, language, and heritage (Peterson et al., 2015). Problematic to this is that many chose to rename themselves and their children when immigrating to North American countries (Keller & Franzak, 2016; Thompson, 2006). This practice is closely tied to assimilation, where educational and societal pressures encourage name altering (Souto-Manning,

2007). Inherent to this is pressure for newcomers to englify, anglicize, or neutralize their name(s) to counteract name discrimination that is associated with harmful outcomes such as employment and hiring disparities (Behtoui & Neergaard, 2009; Khosravi, 2021; Oreopoulos, 2011) and compromised health care (Hyman, 2009; Pollock et al., 2015). This necessitates attention, as "when a child goes to school and their name is mispronounced or changed, it can negate the thought, care and significance of the name, and thus, identity of the child" (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 444). This is troubling, as research focusing on name mispronunciation and re-naming, most notably in relation to early schooling experiences, is scant. Hence, a Qualitative Intrinsic Case Study was actioned to amplify the voices of adults who have had their names mispronounced and/or changed in their formative years. In this pursuit, it is critical to underscore that the principal researcher, Bonika, possesses her own lived experience with name mispronunciation and change:

> *My name is Bonika Sok, and there's a good chance you didn't say my name right. It's pronounced Bon-nik-ka Soak. At first it was a nuisance, but now my name has become an important part of my identity. For many students, there are fond memories associated with a substitute teacher because it meant watching movies all day. But for some of us, we actually dreaded seeing a new face at the front of the classroom because it meant, once again, our name was about to be butchered in front of the entire class. This was usually followed by an awkward public apology or hurtful joke. Every year in elementary school, my teachers would always make a big scene before even attempting to pronounce my name, often professing, "I'm sorry if I pronounce this wrong." I knew that it was my name that was going to be announced next. I can remember always agonizing over that first part of the day when attendance was taken. It always made me feel embarrassed, and over time, I began to feel ashamed of my name. There have been so many variations of my name, and growing up, other children would poke fun at it. I hated my name for a long time. I didn't like that it was different and hard to pronounce correctly. I thought my name was ugly, and I would even complain to my mom and ask her why she chose it. I also felt that it impeded my ability to fit in with the rest of my peers because I was the only one that had an uncommon name. My name felt like a barrier that prevented me from connecting with my peers. My name didn't feel like it fit in, and so I didn't feel like I fit in either. I never wanted to correct my teachers and draw attention to myself. I felt like I was being rude or disobedient because of the culture I grew up in. I decided to just let others say my name however they thought it was supposed to be pronounced to make it easier for them. I also changed my name to "Nika" to avoid embarrassing mispronunciations. But in doing so, I now realize that I was only inconveniencing myself because I was being called a name that wasn't my own.*

Literature Review

Assimilation

In response to pressures associated with assimilation, newcomer families are expected to consider negotiating their children's names when entering school, even if it sits in opposition to their belief system (Keller & Franzak, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2007). The driving forces behind this are often linguistic or phonetic challenges that typically arise when one's name is pronounced in post-immigration circumstances (Ainciburu & Buttazzi, 2019), a desire to assimilate with greater ease (Keller & Franzak, 2016), and avoidance of discrimination (Khosravi, 2012; Thompson, 2006). Marrun (2018) supposes that newcomers engage in this behaviour as a deliberate attempt to

remove the cultural and linguistic significance behind their name(s) and to fit the mouths of the country in which they settle. These naming practices, especially when the child possesses both birth and assimilated names, lead to the adoption of multiple identities. This phenomenon was evidenced in a study conducted by Kim and Lee (2011), where children possessed Korean, English, and biblical names that were used disparately to fit into home, school, and church contexts. For some children, this was so confusing that they forgot their Korean names and only responded to their English or biblical name. This compromised peer interactions, as children with Korean names were less likely to be called upon by their peers because their names were hard to pronounce or remember. This, according to Pennesi (2017), is reflective of othering and occurs when "students with names a teacher cannot pronounce properly … are called on less frequently in class, are ignored entirely, or are singled out because of their 'funny' or 'difficult' name" (p. 34). A compromised sense of belonging, as well as unfavourable self-esteem and academic outcomes (Ayón & Philbin, 2017), have been found to arise in these circumstances.

Racial microaggressions

Targeted acts of cruelty, called racial microaggressions, are often intentional or unintentional verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities that convey harsh and demeaning messages often related to gender, ability, sexuality, race, and religion (Corkett et al., 2021). Pernicious to this is that the subtleness of these acts, which are sometimes occurring outside of the consciousness of the victims and the perpetrators, are often downplayed (Cho et al., 2018) or excused with the rationale that the victims are hypersensitive and/or the perpetrators are simply rude (Corkett et al., 2021). Kohli and Solórzano (2012) argue that having one's name mispronounced or changed is a covert form of racial microaggression that promotes racial and cultural inferiority and unfavourably informs a child's self-perception, worldviews, and sense of belonging in a new society. To investigate this, these researchers explored racial microaggressions and internalized racial microaggressions pertaining to the names of students of colour in K–12 schools. The participants reflected on either their middle or high school experiences, all indicating that they have been subjected to both forms of racial microaggressions in their schools as a direct response to their names. The findings revealed that these students experienced feelings of invisibility, fear, humiliation, shame, and embarrassment. In conjunction with this is Pennesi's (2017) research, which ascertains that children are likely to resent the person(s) who named them at birth, most often their parents. Along the same lines, Ayón and Philbin (2017) analyzed parent responses to their Latino children's experiences of institutional and interpersonal discrimination and microaggressions associated with ethnicity, appearance, and name(s). The parents reported that their children are subject to frequent discriminatory comments from peers and adults from inside and outside of their school community due to their name(s), which caused emotional distress, social exclusion, and internalized oppression. This is unsettling in that "negative self-image or stereotype, an alternation of the self-image and a lack of identification may result, producing demotivation and personal dissatisfaction" (Ainciburu & Buttazzi, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, some scholars have found that collective acts of racism, including racial microaggressions, can precipitate trauma-related stress symptoms and disorders (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Comas-Díaz, 2016; Nadal et al., 2019), hence heightening the need for attention in this domain of teacher practice.

Teacher influence

Teachers are in a novel position in that they influence the perceptions and developing identity of children by showing either respect or disrespect for their names. Given this, it is disconcerting that

they are sometimes agents of insensitive naming practices such as mispronunciation and/or renaming (Gunn et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2015). Lack of sensitivity also occurs when teachers refrain from calling on students with names that are not of European origin due to fear of mispronunciation, which leads to students feeling insignificant, shamed, and detached from the educational learning environment (Harris, 2017; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Marrun, 2018). It is vital to note that teachers do not engage in these behaviours with the intent to harm but rather with the notion that their avoidance of articulating names will minimize exclusion (Gunn et al., 2013).

Tualaulelei (2020) underscores that teachers should be mindful of how naming informs inclusivity in classrooms so that they can play a role in interrupting the portrayal of teachers "as culturally negligent and conformist to dominant values and practices with naming and naming practices" (p. 5). This negligence, although plausibly unintentional, disproportionally impacts children who are newcomers and already feel that their culture or ethnicity is devalued in educational settings (Tualaulelei, 2020). It similarly minimizes the connection children have with their language and culture, therefore invalidating their school experiences (Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Given that a student's name is typically the first piece of information a teacher gains about a child, it is critical that responses to names are well thought out, as they may either bolster identity or incite embarrassment. This critical reflection is essential so that insensitive naming practices, which marginalize and deepen power structures associated with non-white inferiority in communities and schools, can be destabilized and thought anew (Marrun, 2018). As such, to invite teachers into critical reflection about naming practices, most notably in the Canadian context, an Ontario study was conducted.

Methodology

This research garnered the perspectives of individuals who have had their name mispronounced or changed as a child (ages 0–12) in their early education experiences. A qualitative intrinsic case study was used, as this methodology sets the stage for researchers to investigate a real-life case within its context (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Furthermore, this methodology places the case itself at the fore (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995), is of authentic interest to the researchers (Crowe et al., 2011), and is rich in detailed case description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study is considered an intrinsic case, as the case itself is an unusual incident (Ridder, 2017) in that this phenomenon disproportionally impacts students of colour (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Given that a social constructivist philosophical paradigm pairs well with an intrinsic case study methodology, as it is rooted in the belief that knowledge and reality are individually or socially constructed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), the researchers adopted this posture. This philosophical paradigm assumes that there is no single reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), which is reflected in the researchers' ideology that participants were likely to reveal diversified realities associated with having their names mispronounced, altered, or avoided. Moreover, a social constructivist paradigm is typically rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which advises that culture and interpersonal contexts are primed for human cognitive development, whereby "social and cultural engagement is mediated by culturally constructed tools such as language, materials, signs, and symbols that create uniquely human forms of higher-level thinking" (Wang et al., 2011, p. 298). Vygotskian theory declares that knowledge is constructed as people engage relationally in the context of their heritage (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2014; Verenikina, 2010), which is highly consequential for the cultural nature of this study.

Sampling, participants, and recruitment

Participants were selected based on purposeful and criterion sampling, which involved identifying and selecting individuals who specifically relate to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015), which allowed them to provide in-depth information (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Palinkas et al., 2015). A small sample size of three participants was intentionally chosen to allow for an extensive case-oriented analysis. All three participants belonged to an ethnic or visible minority group and possessed the capacity to reflect on their Canadian elementary school experiences. The researchers secured a gatekeeper for participant recruitment, as this tactic is recommended to maintain objectively within research (McAreavey & Das, 2013), support actioning of ethical protocols and recruitment, and improve the quality of the data collected (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016).

In reflection that qualitative methodology invites the researcher(s) to immerse themselves in the research and live within the data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), it was advantageous that the PI, Bonika, has childhood experiences with name mispronunciation and change, as exhibited in the opening vignette. Since "participants give a great deal when they choose to participate in qualitative research projects, often revealing intimate details and experiences of their lives" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 233), it was of benefit that Bonika could relate to the participants' stories. It was also fortuitous that three individuals, who engaged with a name mispronunciation and change blog that the principal investigator (PI) developed in 2020, expressed interest in vocalizing their childhood experiences with having their names mispronounced and/or modified.

Table 1: Participant demographic information.

Participants	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Spoken Language (In addition to English)	Place of Birth	Resident Status
Alwine	28	Male	Asian	Cambodian	Canada	Canadian Citizen
Rana	28	Female	Middle Eastern	Arabic	Canada	Canadian Citizen
Abhay	29	Male	Indian	English only	India	Canadian Citizen

Data collection method and analysis strategies

Data collection transpired through virtual interviews using Zoom, as it enabled audio and video recordings, allowed the interviewers to be in control of the meeting, and later enabled accessibility to the recorded interviews (Lobe et al., 2020). Three semi-structured interview transcripts were used as the data source. A one-on-one dialogue interview is most fitting when recalling personal stories (Alshenqeeti, 2014) and was therefore the chosen method. Participants were encouraged to respond freely during the 60–90-minute interviews. The interview guide incorporated seven open-ended questions that were structured to ensure that they were sensitive, accessible, and conversational in tone (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Examples of questions include "Did you correct your teacher/classmates who mispronounced your name? If so, what happened

when you did this? If not, why?" and "Do you believe this experience had an impact on your ability to fit in with your peers in the classroom? If yes, how?"

The interviews were recorded, and the PI took hand-written notes in the unlikely event that technology errors occurred. The recordings were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word for data analysis. The transcripts served as the researcher's main source of data to make sense of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). A coding framework was utilized to allow the researchers to closely examine the transcribed texts, which were organized into themes (Bolderston, 2012). In vivo coding, which "is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants" (Manning, 2017, p. 1), was applied. This was a crucial analysis schema for this study, as it highlighted and honoured the participant's voices while adding depth to the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of their authentic experiences (Manning, 2017). As a measure of quality, this study subscribed to verisimilitude to determine the truth and believability of the findings, which remained open to individual interpretations, lived experiences, and personal stories (Loh, 2013).

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by an Ontario post-secondary research ethics board (REB). Written consent was obtained from all three participants through a letter of informed consent. As ethical considerations are especially pertinent when research involves participants from vulnerable groups (Arifin, 2018), ethical considerations remained at the forefront for all junctures of the research. Accordingly, researcher reflexivity, which is often employed in anti-racist research as it elevates sensitivity and creates a space for the researcher to "separate oneself from the field of study and to gain the distance that allows for a fresh examination" (MacNaughton et al., 2010, p. 162), was core to the posture of the researchers of this study. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were assured; however, given that this study was intended to draw attention to name change and mispronunciation, participants were asked whether they wanted to have their first name identified in the research manuscript. All three participants were made explicitly aware of the potential for identification should their first name be utilized, since verbatim quotes from the transcripts were intended to be used. In the letter of informed consent, each participant consented to using their first name. Written consent to use middle and/or nicknames was also secured post-interview. Keen attention was paid to potential disadvantageous outcomes that may have arisen from probing participants' historical experiences with having their names mispronounced or modified as interview questions were designed. As a preventative measure, the researchers shared a list of community resources with all participants at the onset of the interview that could be utilized should they feel psychologically provoked by the questions. The co-investigator is a Certified Trauma Integration Clinician and was available to provide community referrals in the unlikely event that participants required support. This did not prove to be the case in this study.

Findings

In the interviews, Abhay (Ab-buy), Alwine (Al-win), and Rana (Ran-na) reflected on their early experiences with having their names mispronounced or altered, recalling personal stories that shaped them during their formative years and whose effects have persisted into their current daily lives. Narratives from all three of their stories were organized into five overarching themes: **Theme 1**: *Mispronounced or Changed Name*, **Theme 2**: *Correcting Others*, **Theme 3***: Different with Multiple and Contextualized Identities,* **Theme 4**: *Adverse Effects*, and **Theme 5**: *Messages to*

Teachers. As previously mentioned, the participants indicated in their letters of informed consent prior to data collection that they wanted their names to be used in dissemination. Hence, the names Abhay, Alwine, and Rana are the real names of the study participants.

1. Mispronounced or changed name

Akin to the perspective presented in Bonika's opening vignette, the participants expressed that they dreaded the taking of attendance because they anticipated their names being mispronounced. Participants expressed that this was especially embarrassing for them because other students in the class would typically laugh when this happened. Alwine shared a vivid memory of his name being changed by his kindergarten teacher on his first day of school, which was a deeply painful experience that left him avoidant of his middle name. Prior to beginning school, his family used the cultural nickname "Vinson" at home, and therefore he did not initially respond to his teacher when he was called by his legal name "Alwine." He responded to the teacher by saying *"Oh no… that's not me. And she's like… my teacher was like, 'Oh no, that's you, raise your hand.' I'm like, no… my name is Vinson, and she's like, 'No, your name is Alwine.'"* He recounted expressing his confusion to the teacher and how he was forced to accept the name change as his new reality. Later, in Grade 3, his teacher's first attempt at pronouncing his middle name "Meinyun" during attendance reinforced how his names were not typical in the Canadian context. He explained how his middle name became a laughing matter for the class:

> He [his teacher] said um "Maine" … "Meiniang" "Menu" [pronouncing in different ways] and then he decided to say like Asian… like other Asian words afterwards and or he thought they were Asian words… so he was like making fun of it. And then… he's like, "How do you say it?" … like people were laughing and meanwhile I'm like dreading this.

This exemplifies that Alwine's teacher may not have understood that he further marginalized him as he mimicked other Asian words that sounded comparable to his middle name. What was plausibly meant to be innocuous nonetheless invited Alwine's peers to laugh at and mock his name. He explained that "*up to this day I don't talk about my middle name so much, because… 'cause of that experience*." Furthermore, he expressed that when his teacher mispronounced his name, it led him to disregard *"so many things growing up because you made me feel like my name didn't matter, so I didn't matter as a person.*"

2. Correcting others

When the participants were asked whether they corrected teachers or classmates who mispronounced their names, they explained that they stopped doing so early in their educational experiences, and when they stopped correcting others, they also stopped caring about how their name was pronounced. For Alwine, this occurred near the end of elementary school. He explained that he had one teacher whom he corrected multiple times who persisted in saying his name incorrectly as if it was a game or joke. It was after this that he "*just stopped caring [about] what people called me. I stopped correcting people."* He divulged that he later learned to accept his mispronounced name because he believed nothing was going to change. He felt that his name no longer held meaning and was *"just a name.*" Similarly, Rana felt disheartened that her teachers, who frequently mispronounced her name, "*didn't put any effort into trying to correct themselves*."

In the interview, she made it clear that she would rather have her name said incorrectly than draw more unpleasant attention to herself. As she addressed this, she stated,

> *That's why I decided like what was the real point here of trying to correct this person after I've done it so many times. I'm just making [it] public…. I'm drawing attention to the fact that my name is… is being mispronounced so why don't I just pretend that that's my name.*

She likewise shared her struggles and the burden she carried when it came to correcting her teachers because of her cultural upbringing and her desire to fit in with her peers:

> *It's a little awkward to question your authority, but to indicate that they did something incorrectly…. It's still in my culture the same as yours it's a sign of disrespect and that's not something that you do, and it was very intimidating to try to correct the teachers because, again, like you're younger than them…. You shouldn't be saying these things, but then you're also in a weird spot where you're, where you're like OK, but my name is not being said correctly like that's not my name … but I feel that the fear of not being accepted by my students by the peers… and to feel more so normal outweighed the intimidation factor of having to actually speak, and those are both heavy items.*

Rana had to intentionally contemplate whether she should correct others. Ultimately, she decided not to because she prioritized fitting in with her peers and determined that it was more advantageous to conform to the authority of her teachers than correct others in order to be perceived as "*normal*" and gain the acceptance of her classmates.

3. Different with multiple and contextualized identities

All the participants conveyed that the mispronunciation of their names made it apparent to the class that they were "*different*." For example, Rana explained that being identified as different, on top of being a minority, meant she would be perceived as "*not normal*." Along similar lines, Abhay explained how he felt early on in his educational experience: "*I just knew that I was different, and people are going to regard me as different. No matter what. But I just wanted to control the narrative on why I was different.*" To control this narrative, he joined a variety of sports teams and took on leadership positions because this allowed him to be known for something other than being an outsider with a peculiar name. He rationalized this stating:

> *It was hard to pick on your captain or your leader or you just don't… that's just not what you do…. The leadership position is coveted or revered, and you don't make fun of your leader… even if they're, they've got a different name.*

This pursuit of an alternate image and name meant that Abhay could redress his social positioning and gain others' acceptance and respect. This could, in turn, shift attention away from his name.

Each of the participants explained that, as children, they had to balance multiple identities within their homes and schools, which caused turmoil. Alwine recounted how he "*pretty much had two identities.*" He postulated that having a nickname at home ("Vinson" or "Son" for short), which is common in Asian households, perplexed him throughout childhood because this cultural practice was not understood by his teachers and peers. He pointed out that this took a toll on him because he found that later in life he was "*constantly choosing and trying to figure out which one [name]*"

to use. Along the same lines, Rana stated that she felt she was "*stuck between two worlds*" growing up in a traditional Middle Eastern household. She detailed that "*how they [her family] perceived things was so different from the people in [her] classroom.*" She also pointed out that she struggled with "*not knowing or being able to be herself*" as she was so preoccupied trying to relate to others and be accepted by them that she was not able to celebrate her culture and name. Rana was fixated on acculturating, placing a higher value on meeting the expectations of others than on being true to her authentic identity and cultural name. Self-protection was interwoven with identity for Rana. She explained,

> *So you just kind of had to do it for your own safety…. It's better to not stick out. Just blend in…. You need to change your name so that they can not only be able to pronounce it correctly, but that you just fit in with them.*

The mispronunciation of Rana's name undermined her self-worth and identity, causing a disconnect between her home and school personas. This exemplifies how the need to alter one's name to "*fit in*" can endanger one's authentic identity.

4. Adverse effects. Long-lasting negative effects

All the participants revealed that their childhood school experiences with name alternation or pronunciation pervade their adult lives. Alwine explained that when he completes employment applications, he "*leave[s] out [his] middle name*" or "*contemplate[s] which name to use, or which would be easiest for others*" because of his distressing encounters in the third grade. He also stipulated that over time, the way in which people have responded to his corrections of their mispronunciations has prompted an attitude shift regarding his own name. As he put it,

> *It's like not even of an interest to them. So, since I see that I was not an interest to people, it's not an interest to me anymore because it doesn't fit in again or I'm just trying to not speak about it 'cause I don't want to go through what I went through already.*

This narrative conveys that Alwine avoids repeating his past experiences regarding his name because of the emotional trauma they carry. Rana has also experienced undesirable long-term consequences in that she feels "*phony*" when being referred to by a name that is divergent from her given name. Her less-than-optimal early experiences with her name have interfered with her sense of self and have interrupted her capacity to feel connection and belonging.

Bullied

The participants also commonly experienced bullying as a result of their names. Rana pointed out that when her teachers mispronounced her name, it made her "*stand out from the rest of the students,*" which contributed to bullying from her classmates. Similarly, Abhay revealed that he was also "*picked on and bullied*" by other students because of his name. He ruminated about how his classmates knew their teasing provoked him, and that reaction in turn intensified the bullying. He often got in "*trouble*" and had a desk in the hallway that he was sent to when conflict arose with his classmates as he defended his name. He explained:

> *I guess, the violence or aggression was stemming from that… like, and really, I don't really have anything else to say, say back like what am I gonna say? How many ways can you say John or… Matthew or Mark you know, you can't, you can't say that back.*

Abhay resorted to using physical means to advocate for himself and safeguard his name, as he felt there was no other way. Ultimately, in order to avoid this kind of conflict, Abhay felt forced to modify his name and hence his identity.

Cultural implications

Participants recounted how having their name mispronounced or revised transformed their sense of self in connection to their culture. Using terms such as "*blame*," "*disconnected*," and "*distanced*," participants recalled how negative experiences with their names influenced their cultural selves. Alwine expressed that he felt embarrassed by his background and often questioned "*why did I have to be Asian?*" or "*why did my parents have to be Asian?*" and at times blamed his parents. He explained that "*when I think about my name, I was so mad at my parents…. Being Asian, I was mad at myself.*" Rana echoed this sentiment, explaining that she has no real connections with her culture and does not communicate or associate with her family's cultural community due to her distressing early experiences, which often involved her name. She did not want to identify as Middle Eastern, which led to a disconnect between her and her family and culture and interfered with her ability to celebrate and embrace that part of her identity. Her desire to draw attention away from her name was central in this concealment of her heritage. Similarly, Abhay said that he has always been acutely aware of his position as an outsider because of his name and background and revealed that he "*still distance[s] [him]self from it.*" He also feels "*adverse or hesitant*" when meeting others from his culture, which he believes stems from his childhood. Arguably, Abhay may have avoided associating with others from his culture because doing so would have made him more closely connected to others who also had names that were mispronounced by teachers and peers, thus further reducing his chances of being accepted during his formative schooling experiences.

Changed/altered name

All three participants confirmed that they altered or changed their names in their elementary school years with the common intention of making it easier for others to pronounce and therefore mitigating the potential for their names to become a laughing matter. Alwine explained that he ended up shortening his name: "*I would just say no, just call me 'Al' … because I've been through it so many times and 'Al' is shorter, and a lot of people pronounce it a lot easier.*" Rana revealed that she chose to change the spelling of her name twice, as she explained:

> *I then chose to change my name to Raina because that way I had control … of my name being pronounced the way I wanted it to be pronounced … and it all stems from like wanting to not identify to a part of it is… I don't want to identify as, because "Rana" sounds more foreign.*

In the interview, she shared that she adapted the spelling of her name to make it easier to pronounce and more "*Canadian sounding*." She elaborated, disclosing, "*You want to be Canadian and that's what it meant to be it. It was to change your name so that you could… be normal*." Similarly, Abhay started to go by his middle name, "James," because he figured it was a "*pretty normal*" name that was easier for others to pronounce. In his adult life, he continues to use "James," as it is simpler to use a "*Canadianized name,*" given that it mitigates the need to repeatedly explain how to pronounce his cultural birth name. Reflecting on his experiences meeting new people, he recalled that he

got a little bit, maybe kind of defensive about it, where it's like, why are we even wasting my time telling you this, this is my name, just like say it and forget about it, you can make up syllables and that's my name and I shouldn't have to say … internally, that's like what I'm going through in my head and yeah, like after that there's like no, this is, it's too much work, I'm just gonna go by James.

This exemplifies the distress associated with explaining one's name repeatedly, which in turn leads to defeat and conformity. It is crucial to note that participants made decisions regarding their names in both early and later life that were specifically intended to minimize ridicule and gain acceptance, as they felt they had limited agency. For example, Rana discerned, *"We just have to kind of accept it that, well, I mean we don't have a choice here, like we just have to do this to accommodate them because they can't say it right."*

5. Messages to teachers

At the end of each interview, participants were asked, "Is there anything else that you want others to know about how your name being mispronounced/changed impacted you?" Overwhelmingly, the participants believed that all teachers should be explicitly aware of their role(s) in naming practices, as well as the plethora of unfavourable repercussions of mispronunciation, name change, and name avoidance. Alwine stressed the importance of teachers asking students what name(s) they would like to be called. He also suggested that it is critical for teachers to check in with parents regarding the pronunciation of their child(ren)'s names prior to each school year to "*eliminate people [from] mispronouncing names.*" Alwine highlighted the responsibility that teachers have to intervene when students ridicule a child's name, claiming that if a teacher had done this for him, "*it would have been a different turn of events.*" Rana added that teachers need to be more keenly aware of correlations between one's identity and their name(s). What's more, she suggested, it is paramount that teachers understand what "*minorities go through*" regarding their name(s). She proposed that the following is critical to teachers' practices:

We have to be proactive and understand so that we can prevent children from growing up and having these like identity crisis… basically like these… these struggles, right? Because these struggles can kind of delay your development too as a person.

In asserting this, she overtly articulated that her childhood educational experience could have been more affirming had her teachers known about naming practices and their significance for the developing child. She expressed the hope that her story will prompt teachers to make this topic an intentional focus in their practices.

Discussion

The primary quest of this study was to unearth experiences associated with having one's name mispronounced and/or changed in early school encounters. Although the three participants recruited for this study have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, distinct commonalities emerged in the data regarding their lived experiences. The findings, for the most part, synchronize with the literature that was reviewed to underpin this study. Elemental to this is participants' accounts that bespeak the nuances between name mispronunciation and change and microaggressions, which Kohli and Solórzano (2012) hypothesize evoke racial and cultural

inferiority. Correspondingly, the participants all expressed that they struggled to balance the multiple identities they developed in various settings based on their name(s). This resulted in tensions regarding their self-identities, as they were overwhelmed with the adjustments required to assume the identity that fit each context. This aligns with Kim and Lee's (2011) study, in which they find that "different names to address a single child in different contexts can critically influence his or her developing sense of who he or she is" (p. 213). In this case, the participants' capacities to be their authentic selves were compromised because their desire to be accepted by their peers took precedence over precise name pronunciation and preservation.

Data also points to the potential presence of developmental trauma, which typically results from early adverse experiences and continues to have a negative effect in later life (Cook et al., 2009; Kimron et al., 2019). Abhay, Alwine, and Rana attested to how their past experiences with name mispronunciation and change adversely pervade their current adult lives, thus providing insight into the longitudinal implications of this phenomenon. The continuing repercussions experienced by each participant demonstrate that the mistreatment of names is not a simple and harmless act but rather a contributor to long-term disadvantageous outcomes. The findings show that those who enter school with a non-Canadianized name are "*treated differently*" by both teachers and peers. This different treatment includes ridicule and bullying because of one's name(s), which participants conjecture led them to distance themselves from their ethnic communities of origin. These effects directly align with Peterson et al.'s (2015) argument that "names can be a source of cultural conflict and a watershed for issues of identity and belonging within the school setting" (p. 39). This is most dangerous "when the victims start to believe the[se] message[s] and begin to doubt their place or cultural worth" (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012, p. 449), which appears to apply to the participants of this study. This is not always the case, however, as research has shown that name-related microaggressions can rejuvenate cultural and familial ties and foster reclamation of one's identity (Player, 2021). Similarly, some scholars have claimed that newcomers who defend their name(s) action their voice regarding racism, discrimination, and marginalization as they shape an identity for themselves that is respectful and inclusive of rights (Pennesi, 2016). Although incongruous with the findings of this study, this contrasting viewpoint requires consideration.

A limitation worth recognizing is the small sample size, which could raise concerns about the validity of the findings or limit the capacity for generalization (Vasileiou et al., 2018). However, the researchers intentionally chose a modest sample size to support an in-depth, case-oriented analysis that explored a specific phenomenon of interest. Another limitation is that the interviews were conducted virtually as opposed to in person due to COVID-19 restrictions. Although this may have hindered the participants' abilities to develop trust with the interviewer (Lobe et al., 2020), having similar lived experiences and former blog collaboration with the PI plausibly minimized potential issues.

Teacher Practice and Research Implications

In view that teacher pre-service education is responsible for instilling cultural responsivity in the next generation of teachers (Chiu et al., 2017; Skepple, 2015), the findings of this study are well positioned to provide a catalyst for deconstructing and reconceptualizing the importance of name mispronunciation and change in teacher preparatory programs. It is urgent to move beyond merely drawing attention to what the literature suggests about working with diverse student populations in order to support the next generation of teachers in developing deeper meanings of difference, diversity, and social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In this exists a space for teachers to invite

"students to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have direct impact on their lives and community" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 78), which could include naming practices. In a similar fashion, it may prove fruitful for practicing teachers to examine this topic in professional learning experiences. By virtue that sound pedagogical teacher practice involves fostering a sense of belonging (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Puroila et al., 2021), strengthening cultural competence (Parker, 2010; Sleeter, 2011), preventing bullying (Murphy et al., 2018; Yoon et al., 2016), and nurturing identity formation (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008; Raburu, 2015), this research is pertinent to all who work with young children. In order to disrupt dominant discourses that silence name mispronunciation and change and generate more responsive naming practices, this movement must be championed by those who play a significant role in nurturing and guiding children, expressly teachers. The participants' messages to teachers, which embody tangible pedagogical strategies for the classroom, require deep and thoughtful consideration by those who work in educational settings. Arguably, the findings of this study can be transferred to educators who work with students of varying ages, most notably higher education professors given the burgeoning numbers of international students in Canada (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

Bearing in mind that the participants did not recall experiences with name mispronunciation and/or change prior to kindergarten, it may be efficacious to adapt inclusion criteria in future research that is specific to the recollection of experiences prior to school entry. It is reasonable to conclude that gathering data from those who possess memories prior to formal school entry may allow for shifts in pedagogical practice in the formative years (e.g., childcare), which may interrupt the potential for adverse naming experiences to be stored in the brain and body as trauma. Earlier intervention may likewise better prepare children to advocate for themselves when their name(s) are mispronounced or adapted by teachers and/or peers. Subsequent research could also probe connections between name mispronunciation and change *and* identity formation, cultural identity, and trauma-informed care and practice. Garnering the voices of adults from cultures not procured in this sample could also be instrumental in bringing attention to this field of study. Although the social constructivist philosophical paradigm proved to be suitable for this study, a critical theory paradigm could be adopted in subsequent research as it exposes "the oppressive structures that subjugate people and create inequality" (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 57).

Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to offer insight into the repercussions of having one's name(s) mispronounced or changed in early schooling experiences. A qualitative intrinsic case study was actioned to realize the stories of three adults who reside in Ontario, Canada. Persuasive evidence outlining harmful long-term consequences emphasize the urgency to deconstruct and transform teacher pedagogical practice relating to this domain of study. These findings point to a need for further examination to elaborate upon the voices of those who have had their name(s) mispronounced, modified, and/or avoided. Movements in the education sector that endeavour to foster inclusion, diversity, and cultural sensitivity should attend to the weighty role that teachers can play in destabilizing current naming practices that perpetuate microaggressions. Burgeoning immigration rates in Canada (Edmonston, 2016) and across the globe (Trost et al., 2018) signify that those who teach are likely to have the privilege of engaging with an "Abhay," "Alwine," "Rana," or "Bonika." In this, they are implored to preserve and accurately pronounce names and

hence cultivate favourable enduring effects for children and the cultural contexts that shape their unique identities.

Acknowledgments

Author Bios

Bonika Sok is a graduate of the Honours Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership (ECL) program at Fanshawe College. In 2020, she completed an internship with Strive where she developed a blog post called "*What's in a Name*?" This expressed her story of having her name mispronounced and changed in her formative years, which led to others in the community sharing similar experiences. The blog engagement prompted Bonika to focus on this topic for her ECL capstone research. Bonika is currently completing a master's degree in counselling psychology.

Tina Bonnett is a faculty member of the ECL degree program at Fanshawe College. She supervised Bonika's study and co-authored the research manuscript. Her doctoral work examined the relatedness of relational leadership and infant care, and her master's degree focused on infant/caregiver dyadic attachment relationships in linkage to primary care. Tina is also a Certified Trauma Integration Clinician.

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