

COMMENTARY

Names and Naming of an African American Author: Implications for Race, Power, and Privilege

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What does it mean for a White man to misspell the name of an African American woman author and to then choose to use her work as the subject of an article for publication? In his article published in 2012 in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* titled, “Rethinking Tavistock: Enactment, the Analytic Third, and the Implications for Group Relations” (Rizzolo, 2012), Rizzolo wrote:

The loss of mutual recognition frequently gives way to enactments in which those involved engage unconsciously in attempts to negate one another as independent subjects. . . . The doer turns the other into an object in his psychic reality, while negating him as a subject in the world outside of his omnipotent control. (p. 354)

The author, Rizzolo (2012) a White male, makes use of my work, citing long quotes, to help him make a point for his publication on intersubjectivity (McRae, 2004). He misspells my last name, *McRae*, as *McCrae*, which was clearly printed on the first page under the title. Ironically, he enacted the very point of his paper, his theoretical insights notwithstanding. He was the “doer” and I was “done to,” an object, negated outside of his world of omnipotent control. My work entitled “Class, race, and gender: Person-in-role implications in taking up the directorship” was used as a case illustration by Rizzolo (2012). The chapter is a discussion of a vulnerable experience of a Black woman, me, from a sharecropper family, who had recently lost her oldest brother, a barber, taking up a role of authority as director of a group relations conference for the first time. The focus of the work in the chapter was on my role in relationship with the staff of consultants that I had hired to work with me.

Rizzolo’s (2012) authorship engages him in a racial enactment (Leary, 2000), where a White man uses the work of a Black woman, without really recognizing or seeing her. There is a history of distrust, and disrespect in the histories of our respective social identities and roles. Historically, the process of names and naming of Black Americans by White Americans is locked in a power dynamic of domination and oppression. Naming can be seen as an act of violence or psychological warfare in the black psyche (Zulu, 2017). In the academic world, the misspelling of my name made it

impossible for my work to be recognized, a citation search would not find me, a blocking of scholarly privilege. I learned of the citation from a colleague recently, in 2019, who had read my chapter. Rizzolo (2012) took ownership of my work, shutting me out of his world of “omnipotent control.” In terms of intersubjectivity, there was no mutuality, no connection with the subject, just objectification.

In terms of role, Rizzolo (2012), as author, has the power to critique how a Black woman took up a leadership role, as director of a group relations conference. He does not disclose what role(s) he might have held in a group relations conference, member or staff. In fact, he does not disclose whether he had actually participated in a group relations conference. The roles differ in that members come to learn about authority and leadership, while staff is there to provide opportunities for learning. These roles are circumscribed by the task of learning. Might the role that Dr. Rizzolo (2012) took up in a group relations conference have contributed to his analysis of the model and his use of my work for his case illustration? As author, he is situated in a role of power more closely related to his social identity in a sociopolitical context.

My writing of the chapter was a way of learning from vulnerability, acknowledging the impact of my social class and race on the person-in-role of director; an exposure of experience rarely shared by those in roles of authority. The director of the conference creates the theme and design of the conference and hires a staff to work to this task. The staff begins their work before the conference opens, giving them time to form as a group and to determine various roles to work to the theme and task. The staff engages in processing their own behaviors and feelings, which is what is addressed in my paper. The Tavistock model of group relations is designed to explore both conscious and unconscious feelings related to authority and leadership. My work over a period of 20 plus years involves adding a multicultural lens, exploring the impact of the social identity of those taking up various roles of authority. At the time of Rizzolo’s publication I had directed a series of group relations conferences at New York University titled, *Working with Differences*. The series have been noted as an innovative application of a multicultural lens to the model. The group relations conference is designed to create a safe enough space to experience and study both hostile and friendly emotions. Given the feelings of competition, desire for connection, jealousy and envy that often surface toward the conference director, and among or between members and staff, it is a fertile opportunity to study intersubjec-

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tivity, subjugation, and objectification. It would have been helpful if Rizzolo (2012) had explored his own actions in relation to these terms.

How might my race, gender, and social class background have contributed to Rizzolo's (2012) evaluation of my experience? As a Black woman, it feels like a familiar experience of being used or not recognized by a white colleague. My work served a purpose for him to get published, to demonstrate his understanding of complex psychoanalytic concepts and his skills of critique and interpretation. According to Rizzolo's (2012) analysis in the case illustration, my experience was transformative, there was an enactment and an analytic third. While I found his assessment encouraging, it was inaccessible to me until 7 years after he had written the article. Were it not for my colleague, perhaps I would never have known that he used my chapter as a case illustration. As someone who has published over a long career as a professor of applied psychology,

I am also curious about how a journal of such high standing became complicit in this enactment.

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