A Description of the Experiences of African-American Students in Pre-Licensure School of Nursing

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Research Questions

• How do recent graduates describe their experiences of being African American students in predominately European American, pre-licensure schools of nursing?

• What meaning did those experiences have for recent African American pre-licensure students?
Methods

- Qualitative Description
- 1:1 phone interviews
- 14 Participants (IL, IN, MI, OH, NY, TX)
- Cohorts 1%-18% African American
- Recent African American graduates reflecting on nursing school experiences
- Thematic analysis
- Constant comparison
- Member check
Standing Out
Standing Out

Anita: “I guess I should say I expected more people to look like me. I expected it to be different because of the area that the school was in. When you’re surrounded and it’s only 10 out of 65, it does seem like an army.”

Winter: “I did feel like the token black girl a little bit at this predominately white school that I was attending.”
Standing Out

Turner: “I am from an inner city with a high population of African Americans. When you live in that situation, you don’t necessarily always realize that you're a minority. I went into the honors program...and I lived in the honors dorms. I feel like I was even more of minority in that scenario because I think in the whole dorm system there were maybe three of us that were African American students. Definitely I went from being surrounded by African Americans to having, you know, less than a handful.”
Being Watched

Anita: “It’s the first day, and they have icebreaker games. They say, ‘tell us about yourself.’ When you begin to tell your story, you are basically defying the odds. Because of your situation, you probably shouldn’t be here, but since you're here, let’s see how long you last. You basically prove them wrong.”

Carol: “You’re going to be the only minority in class. There is going to be a lot of topics that are going to be discussed and people are going to make their comments about it because of what they may have heard, or may have seen on TV and you’re going to feel a need to chime in because they’ve got it all wrong. A lot of times, you’re actually being a spokesperson for a race. Very rarely do I walk in with my white friends and they are feeling the need to explain and justify their background and who it is that they are.”
Perceptions by Others

Violet: “People perceive you as maybe someone who might get pregnant early on, not complete a degree, not obtain higher education, someone who is lazy or I guess were from the ghetto, like loud.”
Laying Low

Vivian: “I don't think every school is the same though but if you're talking about my school that I went to, I would tell her that she needs to be low key. Don't be the life of the party so to say. Don't try to insert yourself because I personally think that would make her a target. Just stay low key, do the work like you're supposed to do, if you have questions go ahead and ask but don't be offended if little things, the type of stories that I told you, come up.”

Vanessa: “I learned at that point that sometimes it’s not to your benefit to speak up. Sometimes just be quiet.”
Belonging

Vanessa: “I have made it my business to outshine everybody, not just a couple of people, everybody. Every other student, every other student because I need for people to know that I am worth it and that I belong here. I belong where I am. I worked hard for my position, for my education and I belong her. I deserve a seat at the table not because I’m black but because I know what the hell I’m talking about.”

Violet: “I had to make my mark in the program, a positive mark. I was a student leader for a couple of organizations in our program, but just really being involved I guess and not wanting to appear like I was trying to be an outsider.”

Winter: “I was the president of the student association. I volunteered every chance I could, Habitat for Humanity, anything extra-curricular I was all over it.”
Significance

- Findings confirm what is known about Stereotype threat (Steele, 2010)
  - Threats due to stereotypes within society, not just individuals
  - “In the air” “Ghost”
  - Not racist behaviors
  - Create anxiety in certain situations
  - Diminishes a person’s performance
    - Regardless of their ability, skill and preparation
Implications: Minimizing stereotype threat

• How is our nursing history told?
• How is nursing presented?
  – Music, pictures on walls, manikins, case studies
• Build trust with and between students
  – Out of classroom contact
• Teach and lead from a growth mindset \(^{(Dweck, 2010)}\)
  – Work harder to get as much as white people \((Al, Anita, Carol, Marie, MyaMarie, Vanessa, Violet, Winter)\)
  – While recognizing that there is a limit
    • No one can change societal stereotypes
• Give thoughtful attention to ethnic students
Success is Not Just About Me

Those who came before...
And those who will follow
Give meaning to nursing school
Success is About Family

Violet: I have a younger sister, younger brother who look up to me and for me to not make it I feel like I’m failing them.

Bella: “I needed to be that one to set that example, and to show people that it doesn’t matter if your family or your friends haven’t succeeded. That you can. It doesn’t matter. You can still succeed no matter what.”
Support

Turner: “I do have an older half-sister who actually was probably critical to my support system. She did go to college and did have those experiences. She has always been a motivator in my life as well. Sometimes we need someone to say, ‘Okay, you got it out. You can do it. Its only one class, its just one test.’”

Vanessa: “She took me under her wing and she taught me. It was so necessary for me to see that coming form a black woman. I identified with her. She understands my plight. She came from the projects too....It normalized things for me. I’m like, okay, she went through this too. Its not just me that’s struggling with this or that. I can’t repay her for sharing her life with me.”
Malia: “That was the Black Students Nurses Association...we had instructors that were a part of it...they would offer to mentor students...Just having somebody to talk to that’s older, that’s been through it and knows a lot of things about being a nurse and being involved in nursing when you're out in the real world, that was helpful.”

• Mya Marie: “When I first got there, they matched you with a mentor the week before classes started. She actually introduced me to some of older students that were African American. They all gave me their information. Then I signed up for the program to mentor another student. I just continued what was done for me.”
Helping Other African Americans

Vanessa: “There are certain populations that need a little bit more help than others based on *historical factors*. We know what some of those factors are. I am *determined* and I’m in a *position* to help those people whom I know some of the struggles that they go through because I have experienced them myself. I do not apologize for focusing on the population that I focus on. Yes, it is *African Americans* and they do need *extra help*.”
Significance

- Findings extend what is known about family and community influences
Implications: Families and Community

• Involve families
• Involve communities
  – Local churches
  – Area African American professionals
  – Be an ally for a campus ethnic group
  – Service learning with African American communities
• Lead the difficult discussions about race


