EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN PRE-LICENSURE SCHOOLS OF NURSING: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to:

My mother Katie Keller Koplin BSN, RN

My paternal great-grandmother Alice Grador Adolphe

My paternal grandmother Emily M. Koplin

You are not forgotten, may you rest in peace.

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EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN PRE-LICENSURE SCHOOLS OF NURSING: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

Despite more than 40 years of research and governmental support, African Americans continue to be underrepresented in the nursing profession compared to the population it serves. Though some progress has been made over the past 20 years, the American Nurses Association (ANA), American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), National Black Nurses Association (NBNA) and Institute of Medicine (IOM) continue to identify increasing diversity as a disciplinary priority. Further understanding of the experiences of African American nursing students is needed to inform decisions about recruitment, retention and successful matriculation of these students. This qualitative descriptive study focused on understanding the experiences, and the meaning those experiences had, for African American students who attended predominately European American schools of nursing. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fourteen African American nurses who shared their experiences in pre-licensure nursing programs. Thematic analysis revealed two salient themes: "Standing out" and "It's not just about me." The findings from this study shed new light on this persistent issue and inform faculty members and nursing school administrators about the strategies and ways of framing the educational experience that may create environments that are welcoming to African American students to address the retention of African American students in pre-licensure nursing programs.

Pamela M. Ironside, PhD, RN, FAAN, ANEF, Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Despite 40 years of research and governmental support, the nursing profession continues to predominately attract young European American[1] females. As such, the ethnic and racial demographics in nursing are a poor representation of the population it serves (Childs, Jones, Nugent, & Cook, 2004). This is important because a diverse healthcare workforce can improve minority client access to care, quality of care, client involvement in care, and client implementation of the plan of care (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Sullivan, 2004) all of which contribute to diminished health disparities. In 2013, only 10% of students in US schools of nursing with baccalaureate (BSN) programs were African American[2] while 65.2% were European American (AACN, 2014). The consequences of this disproportion for future nurses preparing to work in the healthcare system are dire, since historically African Americans are more likely to be mistrustful of healthcare providers and are more likely to perceive discrimination in healthcare (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999). Further, a correlation between health disparities and the lack of diversity in the health professions has been established that supports this concern (J. Cohen, Gabriel, & Terrell, 2002). The Institute of Medicice (IOM) attributes health disparities to inadequate communication between client and provider (IOM, 2010). More African American Registered Nurses are needed to improve overall care for this population.

[1] The term European American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are from a variety of European descents.
[2] The term African American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are of African descent, the subject of this study.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) first addressed cultural diversity in nursing programs in 1986 (ANA, 1986). At that time, the Government also funded congressional and workforce grants in support of the ANA efforts toward diversity (Lowe & Archibald, 2009). Over the last 35 years, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has released several policy briefs, fact sheets and databases related to the diversity of students and faculty in universities and colleges of nursing (AACN, 2014). Additionally, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has released multiple reports documenting the need for diversity in the health professions (IOM, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2010). However, these numerous efforts have been insufficient (Lowe & Archibald, 2009). Predominately European American faculty members serve as gatekeepers for the profession which marginalizes minority viewpoints (Hassouneh, 2008). Recruiting and retaining minority students in nursing programs is essential for diversifying the nursing profession (IOM, 2010). Further understanding of the experiences of African American nursing students is needed to inform decisions about recruitment, retention and successful matriculation of these students and to create environments that welcome and support all students.

Background

African men and women have a lengthy and rich tradition of providing healthcare to those in need. Scholars have found evidence that 5,000 years ago, Egyptians and other Africans used a wide variety of animals, plants, and minerals to treat illnesses (Finch, 1983). Imhotep, born 2800 B.C., is the first known African physician (Kunjufu, 2006). While Hippocrates is widely viewed by European Americans as the

first physician, his medical and dietetic practices were acquired from Egyptian physicians through Pythagoras, a Greek scientist who studied in Egypt (Newsome, 1983).

Africans were brought to the US via the slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries and continued using traditional health practices on plantations (A. Davis, 1999). African nurse slaves passed along knowledge of healthcare through apprenticeship to other African slaves (A. Davis, 1999). African nurse slave midwives were particularly valuable as they earned additional income for the slave owner by assisting with the delivery of babies on other plantations who were without a nurse midwife (A. Davis, 1999). Following emancipation after the Civil War, many African Americans lacked employment and money to purchase health care services, so they continued to use African American nurses for traditional healthcare (A. Davis, 1999). These practices served a need, yet they also contributed to extensive health disparities between African Americans and European Americans (A. Davis, 1999) as western healthcare practiced advanced.

Formal nursing programs opened in the US in the late 1800s, and Mary Eliza Mahoney became the first African American Registered Nurse in 1879 (Richardson, 1981). However, admission quotas limited the enrollment of African Americans into nursing programs that were intended for European American women. African American schools of nursing opened at African American serving hospitals to meet the healthcare needs of the African American community (Carnegie, 1995) accounting for 80% of African American nurse graduates in the 1920s (Carnegie, 1995; Hine, 1982). In many states, there were no nursing schools that accepted African

American students (A. Davis, 1999). Opportunities for African Americans to become nurses were insufficient.

The National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) was formed in 1908 by three African American nurse leaders who felt the ANA was not meeting the needs of African American nurses (A. Davis, 1999). The goals of NACGN were to advance the standards and interests of trained nurses, break down discrimination in the nursing profession, develop leadership in the African American nursing community, and incorporate its goals into the ANA (Carnegie, 1995; Staupers, 1961). The NACGH was incorporated into the ANA in 1951 (Carnegie, 1995).

The ANA however, still did not offer leadership positions to African American nurses (Hine, 1989), and African American nurses had no leader, formal network, or communal voice (A. Davis, 1999). African American nurses sought other African American nurses with whom to share their discontent when the European American community denied their full participation in the ANA (A. Davis, 1999). Thus, the National Black Nurses' Association (NBNA) was formed in 1971 to improve healthcare for African American people and promote the professional development of African American nurses (Hine, 1989). African Americans have long sought inclusion and leadership in the nursing profession. The NBNA continues to emphasize diversity in nursing education through student memberships, scholarships, and leadership development (NBNA, 2016).

Forty years of nursing research have advanced the discipline's understanding about African American students in pre-licensure nursing programs. The first research done by nurses in the 1970s focused on recruiting and retaining African American

students in the profession (Claerbaut, 1978; Harvey, 1970; Miller, 1972; Scheinfeldt, 1967). There have been small, incremental increases in the number of minority students enrolled in BSN programs in the US. For example, in the 2012-2013 school year, 9.6% of BSN students were African American (AACN, 2013), up from 6% in 1992 (NLN, 2016). However, these enrollments are still insufficient to fill the gap of 500,000 m nurses needed for the profession to mirror the racial and ethnic demographics of the US population (AACN, 2014; Lowe & Archibald, 2009). In addition, students from minority groups experience higher attrition rates compared to European American students (Benn & Pacquiao, 2010; Gardner, 2005b; Jeffreys, 2007; Symes, Tart, Travis, & Toombs, 2002). Despite continued effort, increasing diversity in nursing has been slow and remains a priority for the nursing profession.

Problem Statement

Increasing the diversity of the nursing workforce has been a long-standing challenge for the discipline. Current nursing education practices are grounded in a European American perspective. African Americans have a unique cultural identity that is partially defined by slavery, persecution, oppression, and inequity. Initially, diversity was an important matter to the profession in relation to social inequity, however diversity is now understood to positively influence the level of care provided for a diverse population through improved communication and access to health care services. While researchers have recognized that understanding students' experiences is important to inform recruitment and retention efforts, prior research has been limited because it focused either on specific, isolated aspects of the experience, or on students' perspectives of the experience while they are in the

midst of it (thereby failing to capture the experience as a whole). Missing from the literature is research that investigates how African American students understand their experiences in schools of nursing once they have successfully completed the program and become Registered Nurses.

Study Purposes

The purposes of this study were to describe the experiences, and the meaning those experiences had, for African American students who attended predominately European American schools of nursing. The findings of this study will inform teachers, administrators, and others engaged in disciplinary efforts to more fully understand the complexities of African American student experiences. This is essential to facilitate communication across ethnic cultures, address diversity issues in nursing education and practice and contribute to disciplinary efforts to create learning environments in which African American students can thrive. Using qualitative descriptive methods and interviews of African American nurses who have recently graduated from pre-licensure nursing programs, the researcher provides rich descriptions of participant's experiences, and explores the meaning of these experiences, to shed light on this pressing issue in the nursing profession. The methodology will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Study Significance

This study was important because the discipline of nursing continues to be challenged to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce. Studies of African American students' experiences are important because it is in nursing school that students

acquire the profession's values and norms (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010; du Toit, 1995). Yet, investigating students' experiences in ways that are focused on students at a particular point in the program, or on a particular aspect of the program misses the ways African American nurses understand the nursing school experience as a whole. This study did not focus on a predetermined aspect of the nursing school experience, but allowed study participants to share the experiences in a way they wished.

Health Disparity

Increasing the diversity in the nursing workforce has been a goal of the discipline for more than 40 years because it is widely believed that a more diverse workforce improves communication with all clients (IOM, 2010) but particularly with racial and ethnic minorities (IOM, 2003, 2004). A racially and ethnically diverse workforce also improves client outcomes through greater access to healthcare for minority populations (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004), improved cultural sensitivity in the workforce, and improved policy to address social issues related to access to care (Anderson et al., 2003; J. Cohen et al., 2002; LaVeist, Nickerson, & Bowie, 2000). In particular, workforce racial diversity reduces client mistrust, discrimination, and negative experiences that in turn improves early access to care (Anderson et al., 2003; J. Cohen et al., 2002; LaVeist et al., 2000). Communication between nurses and patients are influenced by ambient biases that are deeply rooted though often unconscious in European American dominated professions such as nursing (Hall & Fields, 2013).

Nurses are uniquely positioned to address health disparities by addressing subtle racism during individual health care encounters (Hall & Fields, 2012). Diverse health care workers serve as cultural brokers; people who understand both the biomedical

model of treatment and the client's background (Shaw-Taylor & Benesch, 1998). Further, minority healthcare providers may be more willing to serve in currently underserved communities (Keith, Bell, Swanson, & Williams, 1985; Moceri, 2008; Petersdorf, Turner, Nickens, & Ready, 1990), though this has not yet been demonstrated for nursing (J. Phillips & Malone, 2014). National efforts to address health disparities by increasing the diversity of the workforce relies on health profession schools increasing the recruitment and retention of students who successfully complete the program and licensure requirements.

Recruitment and Retention

African Americans make up about 10% of the student population in US pre-licensure nursing programs (AACN, 2014), while at the same time, African Americans represented 15% of high school graduates and students attending colleges and universities (Department of Education, 2014). Thus, although African American high school graduates are increasingly attending postsecondary colleges and universities, they are not necessarily choosing a nursing major. Further, the African American enrollment in baccalaureate nursing programs has declined recently, from 11% in 2009 to 10% in 2014 (AACN, 2014). Recruiting African American nursing students is a persistent challenge.

African American nursing students also experience higher attrition rates compared to students of other cultural backgrounds (Benn & Pacquiao, 2010; Gardner, 2005b; Jeffreys, 2007; Symes et al., 2002). Many programs that intend to retain minority and disadvantaged students use cultural groups for academic and personal mentoring

(Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006; Bagnardi & Perkel, 2005; Carthon, Nguyen, Park, & Guevara, 2014; Melillo, Dowling, Abdallah, Findeisen, & Knight, 2013; Zuzelo, 2005). However these programs may be less effective for African American students compared to other cultural students for unknown reasons (Carthon et al., 2014). The ongoing dominant influence of European Americans in nursing limits the influence of minority groups reflected in curricula and student assessments (Allen, 2005). Despite research, financial resources, and a variety of initiatives, nursing continues to struggle with recruiting and retaining African American nursing students, which is critical to increasing the diversity of the profession.

Conclusion to Study Significance

This research was important work because the experiences of African American nursing students, and the meaning of their experiences learning nursing, were not yet well understood. Despite decades of support and funding aimed at increasing disciplinary diversity, the current rates of recruitment and retention of African American nursing students are inadequate to achieve a nursing workforce representative of the population being served. Qualitative descriptive methods, with their attention to explicating participants' understanding of their experiences, were particularly advantageous for describing the meaning that nursing school experiences had for newly graduated African American nurses. The report of this study informs the profession of these experiences as it develops recruitment and retention strategies for African American nurses and creates environments that are supportive of African American students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. For the purpose of this study, they are defined as follows.

African American

African American refers to people born in the US who are of black African descent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2015).

Culture

Culture refers to the patterns of human behavior particular to a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. These behaviors include thoughts, communication patterns, practices, beliefs, values, customs, and rituals (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004).

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to people with an affiliation with a particular group who share historical origins, language, and customs (O. Davis, Nakayama, & Martin, 2000; Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2015).

European American

European American refers to people born in the US who are of white European descent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2015).

Minority People

Minority people are groups of people who are different in race or ethnicity than the larger group (European American) in the U. S. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2015).

Nursing student

Nursing students are individuals who are enrolled in a pre-licensure nursing program.

Race

Race is a social and political construct which categorizes people based on physical appearance, especially skin tone (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Historically, this term has biological origins, which have been found to have significant physiologic variability (O. Davis et al., 2000). Therefore, ethnicity encompasses what was previously termed race (O. Davis et al., 2000).

Underrepresented Minorities

Underrepresented minorities are the racial and ethnic groups who are and have been underrepresented in higher education relative to their share of the population (D. Smith, 2009).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do recent graduates describe their experiences of being African American students in predominately European American, pre-licensure schools of nursing?
2. What meaning did those experiences have for recent African American pre-licensure graduates?

Summary

Chapter one described the research problem, background and significance regarding African American nursing student experiences. Chapter two will present a literature review and provide context for the educational challenges faced by African

American nursing students. Chapter three will describe the research methodology used to answer the research question. Chapter four will present the study results. Chapter five will discuss implications for the profession.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides the rationale for conducting research that described the experiences of African American[3] pre-licensure nursing students when attending predominately European American[4] schools of nursing. The researcher used qualitative descriptive methods to illuminate the complexity of African American students' experiences in schools of nursing and the meanings those experiences had for those graduate nurses in order to inform initiatives aimed at increasing diversity in nursing. Through interviews and qualitative analysis of interview data with recently graduated African American nurses, the researcher provided rich descriptions of participants' experiences and shed new light on a persistent challenge for the nursing profession.

Chapter Two includes five sections. The first section describes major historical events and policy initiatives that have affected the educational experiences of African Americans in the US. The second section describes on-going racial disparities in education as they affect college access and readiness. These two sections provide a contextual understanding of the challenges faced by African American nursing students today. The third section describes the experiences of African American college students in general, particularly the unique challenges they face. The fourth section describes the experiences and challenges of African American nursing students specifically. The final section summarizes gaps in the literature leading to the study aims.

[3] The term African American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are of African descent, the subject of this study.
[4] The term European American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict American who are from a variety of European descents.

Historical Influences on the Educational Experiences of African Americans

A number of major historical events and national policy initiatives in the US have influenced the educational experiences of African Americans. These include the Supreme Court case *Brown vs the Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act, national policy on affirmative action, desegregation, and the No Child Left Behind Act.

Brown vs Board of Education

For the 245 years that slavery existed in the United States, beginning with early colonization of the Americas in the 1620s, Africans were denied formal education (Lewis & Manno, 2011). Following the Civil War in 1865, African slaves were emancipated and states were required to either accept African American students into European American schools or to provide separate and equally funded schools (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). Many states, especially in the South, chose to provide separate schools (Lewis & Manno, 2011; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). In 1954, the Supreme Court heard the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, a consolidated case of five African American children who had been denied admission at European American schools (Nichols, 2005; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) provided legal representation for the children (Nichols, 2005; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). The Supreme Court ruled that separate schools were unequal since African American students and teachers did not have access to the same resources as their European American counterparts (S. Smith, Nsiah-Kumi, Jones, & Pamies, 2009; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). This ruling subsequently laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights Act and affirmative action policy (S. Smith et al., 2009; Willie-LeBreton, 2011).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination of the basis of race, gender, color, religion, or national origin (Pratkanis, Turner, & Malos, 2002). Although intended to protect all minorities, the Civil Rights Act primarily focused on African Americans because they were the largest minority group in the US at the time (D. Smith, 2009). As a result of the Civil Rights Act, colleges re-evaluated hiring practices, curriculum content, student admissions, and increased financial aid for African American students (D. Smith, 2009).

Affirmative Action. Affirmative action is the active effort to improve the educational opportunities for minority groups (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2015). When first mandated by President Johnson in 1965, the intent was to compensate minorities for past inequities in education and employment (Pratkanis et al., 2002). Affirmative action was a strategy intended to offset the negative effects of previous discrimination, first applying to employment, and subsequently applied to education (Helms, Anderson, & Theis, 1998; S. Smith et al., 2009). The Department of Education required affirmative action policies for all colleges and universities that received federal funds and that had previously discriminated against minorities – this included nearly every college and university in the US (Helms et al., 1998; Anderson, & Theis, 1998). The Office of Civil Rights was created to enforce affirmative action and most of the impact was in the areas of admissions policies, financial aid, and employment of faculty (Helms et al., 1998).

Colleges used quotas to diversify their student bodies and faculties (Stulberg & Chen, 2011). Racial diversity was embraced as a marker of successful

affirmative action, especially by elite colleges (Helms et al., 1998; Stulberg & Chen, 2011). Affirmative action policies were largely responsible for the increased rates of African American graduates from predominately European American US Colleges and Universities. In 1960, 5.4% of college graduates were African American, and in 1990, 15.4% of college graduates were African American (Teitelbaum, 2011).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded prior to 1964 for the purpose of providing higher education for African American students before the civil war (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). These colleges and universities historically educated large numbers of African American leaders (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). Currently HBCUs enroll 12% of African American college students and provide 30% of the baccalaureate degrees awarded to African American students (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). HBCUs are more successful at graduating African American students than those colleges and universities that enroll predominately European American students.

Legal restrictions and opposition to affirmative action have since reshaped race-based admission policies (Stevens & Roksa, 2011). For example, in the case of *Regents of the University of California v Bakke* in 1978, the Supreme Court supported affirmative action by a narrow margin on the grounds that racial diversity provided educational benefit to all students. This ruling deviated from the original intent of affirmative action which was correcting harm from past discrimination (Chang & Ledesma, 2011; Stevens & Roksa, 2011). Subsequently, admission race quotas were prohibited, prompting colleges to use other criteria to encourage diversity on their campuses (S. Smith et al., 2009; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). The *Bakke* decision resulted in funding cuts, an anti-affirmative action tone, and decreased access to higher

education for African Americans which prompted a significant influx of African American students attending HBCUs (Willie-LeBreton, 2011).

The *Bakke* decision characterized diversity less as racial equality and more as diversity in general including factors such as gender, geographic location, and disability (Antonio & Gonzalez Clark, 2011; Helms et al., 1998). For example, in 1996 the University of California (UC) stopped considering ethnicity, race, or gender for the admission of students (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). Ten years after this decision, the rate of African American admissions in the freshman class had decreased from 7.1% to 4% at the UC Berkeley campus and from 5.1% to 2% at the UC Los Angeles campus (Willie-LeBreton, 2011). By 2008, African Americans accounted for only 3.4% of the freshman class of UC Berkeley (Teitelbaum, 2011). Similarly, after the University of Texas law school repealed affirmative action, the number of African American freshman students decreased by 34% (Teitelbaum, 2011).

In the 2003 case of *Grutter v Bollinger,* the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action policies but ruled that race could only be considered along with other factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), gender, geographic location, and disability (Chang & Ledesma, 2011; S. Smith et al., 2009). This decision facilitated reverse discrimination complaints (Flores & Oseguera, 2013; Willie-LeBreton, 2011). Many colleges discontinued diversity objectives in order to avoid legal penalties, and five states passed referenda reversing affirmative action (Epperson, 2011).

Some states found alternative ways to support minority student enrollment in higher education. In Texas, for example, admission is guaranteed to any state university for students who graduate in the top 10% of their high school class (Epperson, 2011).

This guarantee avoids the three most common admission criteria that disadvantage minority students: entrance exams, grade point average (GPA), and Advanced Placement (AP) classes taken (D. Smith, 2009). African American students from poor high schools have limited access to AP courses. This disparity not only disadvantages their academic preparation but lowers their GPA because AP classes are usually graded on a 5.0 scale compared to 4.0 scale for traditional courses (D. Smith, 2009). Therefore, the Texas Top 10 percent plan facilitates college attendance for students who attend schools without the benefit of AP classes. Likewise, Florida guarantees admission for the top 20% of high school graduates to one of its eleven public universities and provides additional need-based financial aid (S. Smith et al., 2009).

The gains in minority admissions from each of these percent plans were limited and less effective than traditional affirmative action, suggesting that access alone will not solve the problem of educational inequity for African American students in higher education (Epperson, 2011; Flores & Oseguera, 2013; D. Smith, 2009). In 2001, for example, fewer than half of qualified African American students in Florida were enrolled at a state university (S. Smith et al., 2009). Even though these percent plans are not as effective as affirmative action plans, they do improve college opportunity for African American students who predominately attend substandard and racially segregated public K-12 schools.

Desegregation and Public Schools

Desegregation, the process of integrating kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) public schools, was mandated first by the Supreme Court in 1954 and later by an executive order in 1965 to provide equal education for all children in the US

(Frey & Wilson, 2009; Hunter, 2009). To diversify their schools, some school districts changed the geographic boundaries of schools (Hunter, 2009) and others used mandatory bus transportation of African American students into predominantly European American neighborhoods (Frey & Wilson, 2009). During the time of desegregation, many African American teachers and principals lost their jobs as African American schools closed (Bell, 2004), depriving African American students of African American mentors, role models, and advocates (G. Cohen & Steele, 2002), and lowering the SES of a large number of educators in the African American community (Bell, 2004). However, desegregation had no impact on the predominately European American faculty members or on the curricula used in schools resulting in the acculturation of African American students rather than integrating the European and African American cultures to create equal opportunity (Feagin & McNair Barnett, 2004).

Since the 1960s, K-12 schools in the US have steadily become more economically and racially segregated (Epperson, 2011), partially because desegregation was not entirely successful (D. Smith, 2009). In some cities, neighborhoods were very racially segregated making redistricting and busing unmanageable (Epperson, 2011; Hunter, 2009). State governments provided less money per student to schools that taught lower income students (Hunter, 2009). Over time, the Supreme Court placed restrictions on desegregation (Hunter, 2009). Together, these dynamics contributed to the ongoing segregation of schools (Epperson, 2011) with a growing number of African American students attending schools that had a high minority population (Rothstein, 2013). In 1989, 34% of African American students attended schools with at least a 90% minority student body, whereas in 2007, 39% of African American students attended schools with

at least a 90% minority student body (Orfield, 2012). The achievement gap between European American and African American students worsens when African American students attend largely minority schools (Card & Rothstein, 2007) which is understandable in the US where majority minority schools receive less funding than majority European American schools (Feagin & McNair Barnett, 2004).

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was a federal mandate designed to improve the academic performance of elementary and secondary students, to ensure that no student was trapped in a failing school and to decrease the education gap between European American and underrepresented minority children (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Hanushek, 2009; Harrison-Jones, 2007; Rowley & Wright, 2011). NCLB required states to make annual progress toward student proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science and to track the progress of each racial, ethnic, and SES student group (Harrison-Jones, 2007). Schools were rewarded or sanctioned based on progress toward the state mandated targets for each student group, measured by standardized testing of all students (Hanushek, 2009; Harrison-Jones, 2007). In schools that served primarily poor students, tutoring and extra services were provided when a student group failed to meet its annual goal (Harrison-Jones, 2007). If schools failed to meet the goal for two consecutive years, parents could choose a different school for their children and the state was required to intervene to improve school performance (Harrison-Jones, 2007).

NCLB encouraged school systems to increase the quality of teachers for low-income and minority students, track the progress of students by race and SES, and in some states boosted quality teaching/learning materials and quality of education

(Darling-Hammond, 2011). There have been many controversial aspects of NCLB including insufficient funding, inadequate definitions of proficiency, poor oversight, excessive cost, and lack of scientific evidence on which to base standards (Harrison-Jones, 2007).

In an analysis of NCLB, Darling-Hammond (2011) reported the effects of the program, many of which were unintended. For instance, a lack of adequate funding coupled with annual testing made NCLB very expensive for some school systems. This resulted in the use of less expensive and lower quality tests that were not reliable indicators of student progress. This is especially significant to African American students who largely attend schools with low SES. In the US, poorer schools receive less money per student than schools with students in higher SES. For some schools, test preparation has replaced a focus on higher-order thinking skills. In some cases, the test score targets are unrealistically high for diverse schools. Schools with the greatest diversity, often the ones with a high percentage of African American students, have been most often labeled as failing. These schools may have as many as 30 different targets to meet each year, and schools are labeled as failing if they miss one. Once schools are labeled as failing, they have difficulty recruiting quality teachers, further perpetuating the cycle of poor performance for the neediest students. Schools may receive more rewards and fewer sanctions when high-risk students transfer or drop out, and this creates less incentive for schools to support improvement in high-risk students.

Research data measuring the success of NCLB is mixed (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Hanushek, 2009; Rowley & Wright, 2011). When assessments and teaching/learning materials were well constructed, education improved

(Darling-Hammond, 2011). In 2005 and 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress data indicated improvement in reading and math for African American students along with a narrowed gap between European American and African American students (Hanushek, 2009; Harrison-Jones, 2007). Because these trends are about the same as the years preceding NCLB (Harrison-Jones, 2007; Koretz, 2009), it is unclear what improvements can be attributed to NCLB (Koretz, 2009). Though the gap between European American and African American students is closing, it is still substantial with most African American students scoring at the target but not above it (Harrison-Jones, 2007; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Also, the most improvement is reported from states with the lowest standards, which biases the overall findings related to NCLB outcomes (Harrison-Jones, 2007).

NCLB was unable to address many other factors, such as large class size, teacher ineffectiveness, poor living conditions, lack of parent involvement, and cultural differences that also contribute to lack of educational success for some African American and European American students (Hanushek, 2009; Rowley & Wright, 2011). In the US, schools are run mostly by local governments with little federal authority, allowing for racial discrimination that NCLB cannot correct (Rowley & Wright, 2011). Some scholars have argued that African American students are still being left behind despite the intention of NCLB to make public education equal to all students (Lee, 2012; Orfield, 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2011).

Educational Disparities in the US

Educational disparities are embedded in systemic racism which reflects the long-term domination of African Americans and denies African Americans the opportunity

and privileges available to European Americans (Feagin & McNair Barnett, 2004). Disparity research inherently compares African American students with European American students even though the social and economic experiences of the two groups vary greatly due to systemic racism (Ford & Helms, 2012). For instance, disparities are measured through standardized tests which are written and controlled by European Americans and are known to unfairly bias African American students (Ford & Helms, 2012). Further, stereotype threat negatively impacts test performance for African American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Thus, despite national initiatives, African American students in the kindergarten to twelfth grade (K-12) continue to experience a number of differences in their education compared to European American students that influence their college choices and their success to graduation (Lewis & Manno, 2011; M. Phillips, 2011). On average, African American students have lower grades and test scores than European American students for admission to college (M. Phillips, 2011). However, African American students who do have sufficient grades and test scores are more likely to apply to and enroll in college than European American students with equally sufficient grades and test scores (M. Phillips, 2011).

African American students consistently score significantly lower in academic performance when compared to European American children (NCES, 2010; 2013). African American preschool students, for example, perform more poorly than European American preschool students in reading, vocabulary, mathematics, and color recognition (NCES, 2010). Some experts attribute these differences to disparities in SES, although studies have shown that only 17% of the difference in scores between European

American and African American students can be attributed to SES (Magnuson & Duncan, 2006). Opposing explanations such as the effects of longstanding oppression experienced by African Americans in the US are not presented in the literature.

Low achieving African American students in lower grades rarely catch up to their European American peers in later school years (M. Phillips, 2011). For example, students whose standardized test scores measure in the bottom 25% of all kindergarten students have only a 16% chance of scoring in the top 50% of students when they reach eighth grade (M. Phillips, 2011). In addition, students whose test scores are in the top 90% for all African American students would have test scores in the top 60% if they were compared to European American students (M. Phillips, 2011). African American students scored an average of 23 points lower on a standardized science exam than European American students in eighth grade (NCES, 2013), 31% lower on a standardized math exam, and 24% lower on a standardized reading exam (M. Phillips, 2011).

Early childhood education programs such as Head Start were developed in part to address these disparities. Evidence regarding the outcomes of these programs, including positive effects on high school graduation and college enrollment, has been mixed (Deming, 2009; Flores & Oseguera, 2013). Although Garces, Thomas and Currie (2002) found that Head Start was more effective for European American students than African American students, they also found that African American males who participated in Head Start as preschoolers had higher high school graduation rates than those who did not. In another study, participation in Head Start improved high school graduation and college enrollment for African American students (Ludwig & Miller, 2007). Deming

(2009) found evidence of the long-term benefits of Head Start by comparing children who participated in Head Start with their siblings who did not. In this study, the standardized test scores of African American students who attended Head Start continued to improve to age 11, and their life skills continued to improve to age 14 (Deming, 2009).

Students who successfully complete an algebra course have higher SAT scores and are more likely to enroll in college (Adelman, 1999). When Algebra is placed in the eighth grade, it creates opportunity for African American students to take higher-level math courses in high school, leading to better college readiness (Speilhagen, 2006). These positive effects occur regardless of their performance in seventh grade math classes (Speilhagen, 2006; Stein, Kaufman, Sherman, & Hillen, 2011).

Lee (2012) used academic behaviors and standardized test scores during elementary and middle school to predict college trajectory for various groups of students. European American students are often on a trajectory for completing a four-year college degree, while African American elementary students are often on a trajectory for completing a two-year degree. When measured after middle school, most African American students are on a trajectory to only begin, but not complete, a two-year degree program.

The choice of courses in high school impacts college readiness and success. Rigorous courses result in higher SAT/ACT test scores and a greater chance of completing high school and enrolling in college, especially for students attending disadvantaged schools (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012). Advanced placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes offer the most rigor (Flores & Oseguera, 2013). In 2010, only one-third of the public schools in the US offered AP or IB courses

(Flores & Oseguera, 2013). Adding just one AP or IB class can improve high school grades and rates of high school graduation, especially for poor students (Long et al., 2012). However, schools with poorer students where the majority of African American students attend, have fewer AP or IB courses (Iatarola, Conger, & Long, 2011).

Tracking, the system of grouping students by ability, is particularly detrimental to African American students' educational opportunities and achievement (D. Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). The initial tracks that students are assigned to in elementary and middle school, often determine the future courses they take and ultimately determine readiness for college (Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997). African American students are often unfairly placed on tracks below their measured abilities (Michelson, 2002) and are more likely to be in the lower track for reading and math, which limits their preparation for college (Hallinan, 1994; Oakes et al., 1997). Homogenous groups based on ability may be beneficial for high achieving students, but they are not beneficial for low-income and underrepresented minority students (Hallinan, 1994; Oakes et al., 1997). Tracking systematically harms the African American student.

High school graduates who have college-educated parents are more likely to apply and attend college than are high school graduates with less educated parents (M. Phillips, 2011). Twenty three percent of African American mothers and 27% of African American fathers have at least a bachelor's degree compared to 41% and 42% of European American mothers and fathers respectively (Child Trends Data Bank, 2014). The current college acceptance and attendance trends favor European American students who are more likely to have a college educated parent compared to African American

students. This disparity continues to influence higher education opportunities for the next generation of African American students.

Conclusion

The performance disparity for African American students is significant and is resistant to remediation at later stages of education. The structure of K-12 education inhibits the performance of African American students while supporting the performance of European American students. Affirmative action was initiated in order to correct systemic and generational inequalities in education. The initiative was only partially effective. Initial gains have given way to ongoing inequalities in access to higher education for African American students. The current sociopolitical environment is unfavorable toward policy to adequately support African American students. Awareness of the educational disparities and historical sociopolitical influences on education are an important context in order to understand their effect on the experiences of current African American college and nursing students.

The Experiences of African American College Students

Studies about the experiences of African American students in higher education are summarized here because this information provides the context for understanding the experiences of African American nursing students more specifically. First, African American students' college enrollment, progression, and completion rates are discussed. Then, research related to African American students' experiences in college are presented. Lastly, factors that influence African American college students' success are discussed.

Enrollment, Progression, and Completion

The rate of African American student enrollment in public colleges and universities has improved significantly over the past 10 years and now reflects the US population demographics (Department of Education, 2014; Engle, Yeado, Brusi, & Cruz, 2012). In 2013, 14.7% of the US population identified as African American, and 14% of college enrollments identified as African American (Department of Education, 2014). African American students now enroll in college at the same rates that they graduate from high school. For example, in 2011, African Americans represented 15.4% of high school graduates and 15% of college enrollments (Department of Education, 2012, 2014). Yet, African American college students graduate from college at a lower rate than European American college students (Nguyen, Ward Bibo, & Engle, 2012). In 2013, the African American enrollment rate in US colleges was 14%, but only 10.8% of postsecondary degrees were awarded to African Americans (Department of Education, 2014). The gap between African American and European American graduation rates is 22.5% (Department of Education, 2014). The proportion of African American students graduating from high school equals the enrollment of African American students enrolling in college. However, African Americans graduate from college at a disproportionately lower percentage. Increased enrollment of African American college students therefore has not resolved racial disparities in higher education.

Student Experiences

The education research literature reporting investigations of African American students in higher education is pertinent as background for the current study. A literature

review of the past 15 years revealed three common, prevalent themes: (a) isolation and alienation, (b) stigma, discrimination and racism, and (c) factors related to academic success.

Isolation and alienation. Many African American students feel isolated when attending predominantly European American college campuses (M. Davis et al., 2004; Flowers, 2004; Harrist & Bradley, 2002). African American college students are highly visible - sometimes being the only African American in their classes - yet often feel ignored and out of place (M. Davis et al., 2004). African American students in physical science, technology, engineering, and mathematic (STEM) programs feel especially isolated (Borum & Walker, 2012). For some African American college students, being different means being viewed as inferior (M. Davis et al., 2004). During an interview, one student described this as being a "fly in the buttermilk," meaning being highly visible yet feeling unwelcome (M. Davis et al., 2004, p. 434).

One study reported that some people in the US still do not believe African Americans belong in college, especially in STEM majors (Charleston, Adserias, Lang, & Jackson, 2014). African American college students therefore often feel like they have to prove their intelligence (Borum & Walker, 2012; M. Davis et al., 2004). African American college women in one study showed that those in STEM fields feel particularly isolated and marginalized by some peers and faculty members (Charleston et al., 2014). These findings are to be expected given that race is socially constructed (McGee, Alvarez & Milnar IV, 2016) in the US culture, where the image of the African race as inferior to

the European American race is systemic and comprehensive (Mutegi, 2013). Race and racism shape the educational experiences for all African American students (Mutegi, 2013).

African American college students frequently describe feeling socially isolated (M. Davis et al., 2004). They report that European American students often talk in groups by themselves and do not include African American students in the conversations (Charleston et al., 2014; M. Davis et al., 2004). African American college students therefore, are left to initiate interactions with European American students (M. Davis et al., 2004). Collaborative group projects are particularly challenging because African American college students perceive that some other students may not want to work with them (Charleston et al., 2014). Interviews with African American students in one study revealed that students sometimes feel at odds even with other African American students who they perceive to be not ambitious or who disrupt the learning environment (M. Davis et al., 2004). Isolation, therefore, is common for African American students and negatively influences academic achievement (G. Cohen & Steele, 2002; Harrist & Bradley, 2002).

Although research shows that African American students in predominantly European American colleges feel isolated and alienated, a more in-depth understanding of these experiences is needed to address the problem. For example, the studies by Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) and M. Davis et al. (2004) reveal that African American college students feel isolated and alienated. However, these studies do not provide robust descriptions of how European Americans faculty members and classmates estrange African American students. African American college students described needing to

initiate interactions with European American students (M. Davis et al., 2004), but the researcher did not reveal why it is that European American classmates do not initiate interactions with African Americans. There is no substantive research about the impact of the European American dominated learning community on the African American student, or that does not (implicitly or explicitly) place the burden for change on the African American student.

Stigma, discrimination and racism. African American college students frequently experience discrimination and racism (Chao, Mallinckrodt, & Wei, 2012; M. Davis et al., 2004; Flowers, 2004; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Feeling sterotyped or stigmatized by European American faculty members and classmates creates distrust in African American students that in turn hinders motivation and academic achievement (G. Cohen & Steele, 2002). In one study, African American college students reported feeling singled out due to their race and revealed that faculty members seemed surprised to see them in classes (Borum & Walker, 2012). In another study, African American students described seeing racist graffiti on bathroom walls and carved into desks, and were exposed to the use of nooses in student artwork (M. Davis et al., 2004). In the same study, students reported that European American students blamed African Americans for their (African American) own academic problems since they (African Americans) were disruptive in K-12 classrooms (M. Davis et al., 2004).

Evidence regarding the academic consequences of discrimination and racism has been mixed (Whaley & Noel, 2012). One study found racism to be either extremely distressing or moderately distressing to 26% of African American collee students (Chao et al., 2012). Researchers have found that experiences of discrimination have a negative

influence on intellectual curiosity, beliefs and attitudes about learning, persistence, and academic performance (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). Other researchers have found that African American college students who experience discrimination have higher levels of anxiety, depression, uncertainty about the future, and stress requiring counseling services (Chao et al., 2012). These negative effects, however, can be mitigated when African American students feel a sense of belonging and have positive race-related experiences on campus (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Ouetrzak, 2002). In addition, some African American students feel challenged to overcome the stereotype rather than threatened when they experience discrimination (Levin, Van Laar, & Foote, 2006). This is particularly true when experiences with discrimination are mitigated by African American friendships (Levin et al., 2006; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001). Some African American students report that their experience of discrimination actually motivates them to work harder to achieve at least as well as European American students (Levin et al., 2006).

As with research on African American experiences of isolation and alienation, research substantiates that discrimination and racism are common experiences among African American college students. The studies do not, however, describe the relationships among discrimination, emotional responses to these experiences, and the meaning of these experiences for students. Though Chao et al. (2012), for example, found that depression, anxiety, uncertainty, and stress are higher when African American students are distressed about racism, the authors did not describe if or how these experiences affected their college life. Absent from the literature are descriptions of the

social, cultural and historical structures that maintain systemically inferior educational experiences for African Americans in predominately European American colleges and universities and the examinations of the influence of such behaviors by European American faculty members and classmates of African American students.

Factors Related to Success of African American College Students

Researchers have identified many factors that influence the success of African American college students. These factors include academic and institutional support, African American students' relationships with faculty, family, and peers, and the students' personal characteristics.

Academic and institutional supports. Institutional initiatives including orientation programs, academic counseling and support, and faculty involvement, influence African American student achievement (Borum & Walker, 2012; Engle et al., 2012; Flowers, 2004). Programs about time management and study skills, for example, have been shown to be helpful for new African American college students (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004), and classes that promote group work, collaboration and study groups have been shown to increase African American student success (Borum & Walker, 2012).

Remediation programs have been used to compensate for the disparities African American students experienced in K-12 education (R. Davis & Palmer, 2010). African American college students are twice as likely as European American students to use remediation programs to gain access to, and succeed in, college (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). The effectiveness of remediation programs, however, is not clear (R. Davis & Palmer, 2010). While remediation programs increase the likelihood of

African American student success in college, research shows that students who require two or more remediation courses are the least likely to succeed in college (R. Davis & Palmer, 2010).

Affirmative action initiatives influence the experiences of African American students on college campuses. African American students who attend colleges with affirmative action admission policies report experiencing more diversity and less isolation than do African American students who attend colleges that do not use race-based admissions (Kidder, 2012; Orfield, 2012). While affirmative action policies have been previously thought to stigmatize the African American students on campus and make the environment less comfortable (Attewell et al., 2006), some experts argue that African American students can more easily form supportive subgroups on campuses with large populations of African American students and, therefore, feel less marginalized (Baber, 2012).

Some colleges and universities have been particularly successful with improving African American college student success. Engle et al. (2012) described a variety of strategies from a national initiative that have successfully improved the graduation rates for groups of students who experience achievement gaps including African American students. The 22 public college and university systems participating in the *Access to Success Initiative* (A2S) have pledged to halve the gaps in college completion between underrepresented minorities students and European American students by 2015 (Engle et al., 2012) but these data have not yet been made public. The preliminary data from 2012 indicate that the four-year institutions in the program have improved success rates for all groups of students, though gaps still remain between underrepresented

minorities students and European American students (Engle et al., 2012). For example, Rutgers University-Newark initiated a commitment to improve graduation rates for all students with a specific focus on nontraditional students including African Americans. They successfully improved the graduation rate for African American students from 38% in 2002 to 69% in 2011, more than double the increase for European American students in the same time period, essentially negating a graduation gap for African American students (Navarro, 2014). Strategies used by Rutgers includes aggressive advising, academic workshops, early registration for the following semester, revised writing and math curricula, and summer bridge programs (Navarro, 2014).

Other successful schools in the A2S initiative used strategies identified by Kuh in 2008 as high impact for student retention in higher education (Engle et al., 2012). Kuh (2008) described the teaching and learning practices that have evidence of improving student retention and college completion from a study of hundreds of colleges and universities. For incoming students, high impact practices include first-year seminars and learning communities (Kuh, 2008). For instance, one school was able to increase their graduation rate from 25% to 50% using a cohort-based curriculum during the first year of college to create a first-year seminar and learning community (Engle et al., 2012). This first-year curriculum had limited course options, small class sizes, and dedicated faculty members working across disciplines to develop critical thinking skills and writing fluency (Engle et al., 2012). Georgia State University used learning communities and hybrid courses that blend lecture with staffed group computer lab time to triple the number of students returning for their sophomore year and improving graduation rates from 41% to 47% (Yeado, Haycock, Johnstone, & Chaplot, 2014). Similarly, the

University of Alabama used blended learning in a computer lab to allow for immediate instructor attention as soon as the student needed help rather than having to wait several days for faculty office hours (Yeado et al., 2014). Several years after the course redesign, African American students are passing at the same rate as European American students, and the pass rate overall has improved from about 60% to over 80% (Yeado et al., 2014).

Specialized classroom assignments also can help to mitigate the negative consequences of isolation. For example, Walton and Cohen (2011) used an essay and speech project for new African American college students to promote a sense of belonging. The students read essays written by previous first-year students who described their struggles to belong and the strategies they used to become more confident. The new students then wrote similar essays and speeches to be used for incoming students. Grade point averages (GPAs) for the African American students who completed the assignment improved compared to the GPAs of African American students who did not complete the assignment, and the GPAs of the participating African American students continued to rise over the next 3 years. Over three years in college, the GPA gap between European American and African American students decreased by 79%.

Research shows that remediation, affirmative action policies, freshman transition programs, student cohorts, academic assistance, and enhanced advising have successfully improved the academic success of African American college students. However, these studies lack comparisons among institutions, making it difficult to analyze the precise elements that contribute to student success. For example, Engle et al. (2012) describe many successful programs that use various combinations of academic support, but they

do not compare the various elements to identify best practices. In addition, Engle et al. (2012) do not describe programs sustained over time. Researchers have not yet described the role of campus assessment to identify what programs are needed, when they are needed, and the campus environment required to support academic support programs (Tinto, 2012). Lotkowski, Robbins and Noeth (2004), Engle et al. (2012), and Flowers (2004) describe programs for beginning college students, but they do not describe ongoing academic support beyond the first year of college. Much of the research evidence is based on a single institution, program or class and the practices vary even within single categories of high-impact practices making it difficult to generalize findings about specific components (Brownell & Swaner, 2009). In addition, the studies lack comparison groups and longitudinal data, and many studies do not analyze data for specific student groups (Brownell & Swaner, 2009) such as African American students.

Influence of faculty members. Faculty members can be a strong influence on the experiences of African American college students. In one study, faculty members were found to have a greater influence on African American and Hispanic student success than peers, especially when the faculty members were the same race (Baker, 2013). Classroom performance improves for African American students when they are able to discuss academics and other subjects with faculty members outside of the classroom (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012). Positive interactions among faculty members and students are related to higher self-concept in African American students, which in turn is associated with higher GPAs (Cokley, 2000; DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). African American student interactions with faculty members also increase the depth and breadth of student learning and student degree completion (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). More

interactions with faculty are associated with better academic achievement for African American college students (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012) as the interactions improve cognitive and affective learning (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Some colleges and universities have improved African American student success when they hire more African American faculty and staff and when faculty members and staff receive diversity training (Flowers, 2004). African American women college students have higher grades when taking classes with professors who are of the same race than from professors who were a different race (Baker, 2013).

Faculty members are instrumental in creating an inclusive environment to prevent the marginalization of African American students in classrooms and other learning environments (Charleston et al., 2014). Faculty members who exhibit caring, respect, and active listening, and who engender trust and build and create a respectful classroom environment, are viewed by underrepresented minority students as most effective (Case, 2013). For example, African American students report that effective faculty members invite underrepresented minorities students to participate in class discussions without putting students on the spot and use an inclusive approach that invites all perspectives (Case, 2013).

Faculty members can also have a negative influence on African American college students. African American college students are more likely to perform poorly and are less likely to believe that education will pay off for them in the future when they experience prejudice and discrimination from their faculty members (Whaley & Noel, 2012). African American college students report that some faculty members make racially offensive statements in lecture, give unjustifiably lower grades to

African American college students, and use grades to retaliate against students who report faculty discrimination (M. Davis et al., 2004). Though such blatant discrimination is now uncommon, microaggression is common (Caplan & Ford, 2014). Microaggressions are subtle messages of bias and prejudice which makes it hard for the recipients of the messages to confront or challenge the threat incurred (Caplan & Ford, 2014). Examples of microaggression include eye rolling, jokes, or unfriendliness with a racial tone (Caplan & Ford, 2014). African American students describe how microaggressions negatively influence their experiences of college and how these experiences impact dropping classes, changing majors, or leaving the university (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

While research has shown that faculty members influence the experiences of African American college students through their interactions with students and the learning environment they create, more research is needed. Case (2013) described the attitudes and behaviors of effective teachers identified by underrepresented minorities students but did not describe how teachers create supportive learning environments, promote collaboration in mixed-race groups, and effectively manage racism in the classroom. Faculty members are instrumental in African American college student success (Baker, 2013; Charleston et al., 2014; Cokley, 2000), yet researchers have not described or documented the impact of faculty development programs to improve classroom experiences for African American students.

Peer support. Peer support, both formal and informal, contributes to resiliency, which is in turn associated with college persistence (Baber, 2012; Baker, 2013). African American college students report they appreciate the benefits of friendships with

European American classmates but also need African American friendships (M. Davis et al., 2004). Cultural support groups that promote in-group friendships serve as a buffer for students at predominantly European American institutions, resulting in a greater likelihood of persistence to graduation for the African American student (Baker, 2013; Levin et al., 2006; Whaley & Noel, 2012) but are hard to establish on campuses and in fields with few African American students (Charleston et al., 2014). Study groups with peers are particularly beneficial for African American women students (Baker, 2013).

Research findings indicate that belonging to a social group contributes to college success (Baber, 2012; Baker, 2013); however, a deeper understanding of the role of African American and European American friendships is needed to fully appreciate how friendships influence African American college student success. For example, M. Davis et al. (2004) reported that African American students need both African American and European American friendships, but they did not describe how African American and European American friendships differ and the unique role each plays in student success. Whaley and Noel (2012) described the importance of African American friendships but did not describe the role of European American friendships for African American college student success. Charleston (2014) revealed that some African American students do not have access to African American friendships but did not indicate if European American friendships can provide the needed peer support for African American student success. Researchers have not fully described how colleges can provide a campus climate that facilitates friendship-making for African American college students.

Family support. Families can be both a support for successful transition to college and a source of conflict as African American students discover new identities during the first year experience (Baber, 2012). Parental characteristics such as single motherhood, SES, education, and employment, have not been found to correlate with African American students' academic achievement (Whaley & Noel, 2012). However, parental messages such as how to cope with racism and engage in cross-racial relationships do correlate with African American college student success (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014). Parents promote academic success when they share African American cultural materials and discuss African American history with their children (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014). Parents' messages to their children about race may compensate for racial discrimination and subsequently improve academic outcomes (Neblett et al., 2006).

These findings highlight the importance of family influences for African American college student success; however, they do not provide enough information to guide colleges to maximize family support. For example, while Baber (2012) described the reactions of parents as their college children's ideologies and behaviors change during college, the author did not identify supportive parental behaviors. Furthermore, Blackmon and Thomas (2014) described how parents influence the career choice of their college children, but not how colleges can engage parents to best support their African American college student's career choice. Blackmon and Thomas (2014) and Neblett et al. (2006) have described that parents are highly influential in the formation of social cultural norms for their college children but did not describe how to transfer these values to academics.

Personal characteristics. A variety of personal characteristics have been shown to influence the success of African American college students. For instance, when African American students have a positive perception of the African American community, they are more successful in college (Whaley & Noel, 2012). Identification with African American culture is associated with high academic achievement, peer support, and college attendance (Whaley & Noel, 2012). One study found that African American college students who were able to adjust to the European American education culture tended to have higher GPAs than those who did not (P. Carter, 2006).

African American students who persist in college have a more positive attitude toward academics than all other groups including Asian American, Hispanic, and European American students (Lundy & Firebaugh, 2005). Early academic success raises the confidence of African American students and enables them to succeed more as their college program progresses (Charleston et al., 2014). For some African American students, early success in college changes their personal identities and social interactions, which then continues to develop throughout their programs (Charleston et al., 2014).

Similar to the research on family support, research demonstrates that identification with the African American community can help African American college students. The studies do not, however, describe how an African American college student negotiates a predominantly European American college environment. The relationships among biculturalism, assimilation, and student success are not described. Though P. Carter (2006) found that adjusting to the European American environment is important, the researcher did not describe the relationship between identification with the African American community and adjustment to a predominately European American

academic environment. Placing an emphasis on the personal characteristics of African American students diminishes the responsibility of colleges and universities to create a campus environment in which all students are welcome and can feel accepted.

Conclusion

African American students enroll in college at rates that reflect the demographic makeup of the US population but do not progress and graduate at the same rate as other racial and ethnic groups. Many African American students experience isolation and discrimination that has a negative impact on their academic success. Several elements of institutional support are known to improve African American student outcomes and African American student relationships with faculty members are particularly influential in African American college student success. Relationships with family members and peers also influence the experiences of African American students in college. Some personal characteristics of African American students that seem to mitigate the negative effects of earlier disparities have also been identified. Strategies for decreasing isolation and discrimination are not yet understood. Best practices for institutions and faculty to improve the environment in which African American college students learn are yet to be determined.

The Experiences of African American Pre-Licensure Nursing Students

Researchers have studied the experiences of African American nursing students for the past forty years contributing to a gradual increase in the diversity of the profession. However, more African American graduates are needed in order for the profession to reflect the racial demographics of the US (Lowe & Archibald, 2009).

Additional African American nursing graduates would improve access to and quality of care through better communication with African American clients (IOM, 2010).

Research about the experiences of African American pre-licensure nursing students in Schools of Nursing in the US is summarized here. First, the enrollment, progression, and completion rates of pre-licensure nursing students are discussed. Then, research related to their experiences in college is presented. Lastly, factors that influence their academic success are discussed.

Enrollment, progression, and completion

African Americans are underrepresented in the US nursing workforce (Carthon et al., 2014). In the 2010 US census, 12.4% of the population identified as African American (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011) yet other surveys have revealed that only 6.0% of RNs identify as African American (HHS, 2010; Budden, Zhong, Moulton, & Cimiotti, 2013). While efforts have been made to increase the recruitment of African American nursing students over the past twenty years, African Americans remain underrepresented in nursing programs. Whereas the number of African American students attending college has steadily risen since 1976, and 15% of all college students are now African American (Department of Education, 2012), this trend is not seen in nursing. In baccalaureate nursing (BSN) programs, the enrollment rates of African American nursing students decreased from 12.1% in 2006 to 9.6% in 2013 (AACN, 2013). Likewise, the National League for Nursing (NLN) reported that the enrollment of African Americans in associate degree and BSN programs declined from 14.5% in 2003

to 12.9% in 2012 (NLN, 2012). These declines are significant because the percentage of African American high school graduates was at an all-time high of 15.4% in 2012 (Department of Education, 2012).

While it is generally believed that attrition is a significant problem for African American nursing students, there are no national attrition data published by the AACN or the NLN documenting the problem. Several studies, however, report attrition data from selected nursing programs. For example, one study reported that persistence to graduation was 15% lower for minority students than European American nursing students (Symes et al., 2002). Other studies reported that persistence to graduation was 23-36% lower for African American nursing students than European American nursing students (Benn & Pacquiao, 2010; Jeffreys, 2007). The AACN reports that African Americans have a lower graduation rate than all other racial and ethnic minorities (AACN, 2013). Because of high rates of attrition, admitting more African American students into nursing programs will not resolve the disparate representation of African Americans in nursing.

National data are needed about the progression and graduation rates of African American nursing students. In addition, data about clinical progression needs to be reported separate from didactic progression in order to more fully understand the influences of the practice environment in addition to the academic environment for the experiences of African American nursing students.

Student Experiences

Isolation and alienation. Similar to their counterparts across college and university campuses, African American nursing students in predominately European

American schools of nursing often report that they feel alone and alienated from their peers (Buchanan, 1999; Coleman, 2008; Dapremont, 2014; France et al., 2004; Gipson-Jones, 2009; Kegans, 2009; Kosowski, Grams, Taylor, & Wilson, 2001; Love, 2010; Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Payton et al., 2013; Robinson, 2013; Stokes & Claytor, 1998; Wong, Seago, Keane, & Grumbach, 2008). Some feel isolated because they are the only African American person in the class or study group, and this makes them feel awkward, uncomfortable, or "othered" (Coleman, 2008; Kosowski et al., 2001; Payton et al., 2013). Others feel isolated because they are not invited to or made to feel welcome in study groups (Coleman, 2008; Dapremont, 2014; France et al., 2004; Kosowski et al., 2001). Some African American nursing students report, for example, that they may be included in study groups but European American nursing students fail to share the arrangements for the meetings (France et al., 2004). When left out of study groups, African American nursing students report experiencing stress that in turn they believe affects their grades (Payton et al., 2013). In addition, while study groups with peers can provide both academic and social support, African American nursing students are often less able to attend study groups than European American nursing students because the African American students have more competing family or work obligations (Dapremont, 2014). African American students believe that European American nursing students receive information about course content and exams from European American upperclassman, and this information is often not shared with African American nursing students (Dapremont, 2011; France et al., 2004). African American nursing students view their peers more negatively than do students of other races and ethnicities (Wong et al., 2008).

In addition to isolation, African American nursing students report experiences of alienation. For example, sometimes they are excluded from important conversations and left outside of cliques (Coleman, 2008; France et al., 2004; Kosowski et al., 2001; Payton et al., 2013). In one study, African American nursing students reported that they were particularly troubled by microaggressions, or overt gestures of disapproval from peers, including eye rolling and sighing (Robinson, 2013). Some African American nursing students, especially those who had experienced social exclusion in earlier school settings, more easily "move on" when they experience exclusion in nursing school, while others continue to feel hurt and isolated (Love, 2010).

Some African American nursing students resolve the loneliness that they experience by "sticking together" with other African American nursing students (Kosowski et al., 2001; Love, 2010). Others experience a tension between wanting to "hang out" with other African American nursing students and wanting to join the social groups of European American nursing students. Some African American nursing students report that they need to be careful not to offend European American classmates by seeking friendship too aggressively and not to offend African American classmates by moving outside the African American friendship group (Dapremont, 2011; Kosowski et al., 2001). Some African American nursing students perceive that fitting in comes with a cost, and they learn how to "act white" and "talk white," at school but "talk black" with African American friends and family (Love, 2010).

Nursing research supports the findings from education research that African American students in predominately European American colleges feel isolated and alienated. However, greater understanding is needed to address the problem. As with the

education research, the extent of isolation is not yet determined. For example, Coleman (2008), France et al. (2004), Kosowski et al. (2001), and Love (2010) did not denote the number or percentage of African American nursing students who had isolating and alienating experiences. In addition, while Coleman (2008), France et al. (2004), Love (2010), and Robinson (2013) found that isolation and alienation are commonly experienced, they did not explore the impact of the predominately European American learning environment on these experiences. Gaining access to study groups is particularly important to African American nursing students who are trying to be successful (Coleman, 2008; Dapremont, 2014; France et al., 2004; Kosowski et al., 2001; Payton et al., 2013); however, these authors do not describe strategies nursing faculty members can use to facilitate inclusion. While Love (2010) described students who were resilient to the experiences of isolation, more understanding of the experience of student resilience is needed.

Stigma, discrimination and racism. For African American nursing students, discrimination and racism contributes to isolation and a sense of alienation. Some African American students report experiencing discrimination from teachers, other students, nurses, nursing aides, and college administrators (Love, 2010). African American students from one study expressed the pain of racism on a written survey using capital letters, large print and exclamation points to describe their painful experiences (Mills-Wisneski, 2005). In another study, African American nursing students reported that some of their European American classmates believe that African Americans will become violent if confronted (Love, 2010). Some African Americans report that faculty members are less willing to help African American nursing students than European

American students and do not provide African Americans equal access to good clinical experiences (Love, 2010; Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Robinson, 2013). Because of perceived discrimination, African American nursing students report feeling judged, believe others see them as stupid, and feel like they are always "sitting on pins and needles" (Love, 2010, p. 346). In some cases, dealing with stereotyping and discrimination can cause them to work harder to prove themselves and disprove stereotypes about African Americans (France et al., 2004).

African American nursing students found experiences of discrimination and racism by faculty members especially difficult because faculty members had the power to pass or fail them (Love, 2010). Some African American nursing students perceive discrimination and racism to be due to of the lack of African American nursing faculty members (Mills-Wisneski, 2005) and believe that African American nursing faculty members are more approachable, better able to relate to them as minority students, more encouraging, more honest, and better able to serve as role models than European American faculty members (Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Payton et al., 2013).

Role stress and conflict occur when African American nursing students feel devalued by their peers, faculty members, and others (Robinson, 2013). Some experts have suggested that African American students may devalue their own skills and abilities as they internalize long-standing societal racial oppression (France et al., 2004; Love, 2010; Robinson, 2013). Robinson (2013) recommends that nursing program faculty members and administrators assess their organizational culture in regards to diversity, discrimination, and institutional racism. She also recommends that nurses identify their

own biases and identify oppressive behaviors in the nursing culture (Robinson, 2013). Several experts have called for more dialogue about race in nursing (Hassouneh, 2006; Robinson, 2013).

As with research about isolation and alienation, research supports that perceived discrimination and racism is a common experience (Love, 2010; Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Robinson, 2013); however, research does not indicate the incidence and prevalence of these experiences among African American nursing students. While Love (2010) and Mills-Wisneski (2005) described the emotional toll of discrimination on African American nursing students, these authors did not describe the meaning of discrimination on the overall nursing school experience. Love (2010) and Robinson (2013) briefly mention discrimination in the clinical setting, however these authors did not describe these experiences or the meaning of their experiences while students are learning to become nurses. Though racism in nursing has been occationally addressed in editorials (Allen, 2006; Cortis & Law, 2005; Hall & Fields, 2013; Hassouneh, 2008) there are no research studies addressing the influences of systemic discrimination and racism in predominately European American nursing education programs.

Factors Related to Success of African American Nursing Students

Academic and institutional supports. The literature reflects faculty members' efforts to devise programs to better support African American students. These programs focused on various aspects of African American students' experiences such as providing financial support (Loftus & Duty, 2010; Swinney & Dobal, 2008; Tabi, Thorton, Garno, & Rushing, 2013), tutoring (Brown & Marshall, 2008; Stokes & Claytor, 1998; Swinney & Dobal, 2008; Tabi et al., 2013), and mentoring (Brown & Marshall, 2008; Igbo,

Straker, Symes, Bernard, & Hughes, 2011; Payton et al., 2013; Tabi et al., 2013). Some nursing programs also provide gatherings for peer socialization (Igbo et al., 2011; Stokes & Claytor, 1998; Tabi et al., 2013). Elements of academic support can include extra instruction about study skills, writing, and critical thinking (Brown & Marshall, 2008; Igbo et al., 2011; Swinney & Dobal, 2008). One program provided an advisor dedicated to providing support for underrepresented minorities students (Swinney & Dobal, 2008).

While each of these initiatives is claimed to be successful for African American nursing students (Brown & Marshall, 2008; Igbo et al., 2011; Swinney & Dobal, 2008; Tabi et al., 2013), the studies lack comparisons among institutions and do not analyze the specific elements that contribute to student success. In addition, no researchers address academic success in clinical classes and how program or healthcare environments influence the experiences of African American nursing students.

Influence of faculty members. African American nursing students perceived faculty members to have much influence, both positive and negative, on the students' school experiences (Coleman, 2008; Kosowski et al., 2001). They report that positive faculty behaviors include being encouraging, nurturing, caring, supportive, and understanding (Coleman, 2008; Kosowski et al., 2001). In addition, positive faculty members reached out to students, provided advice, and offered clear feedback and explanations (Dapremont, 2011; Kosowski et al., 2001). African American nursing students report that negative faculty behaviors include being unsupportive, not recognizing or acknowledging African American nursing students, not encouraging African American students to do well, providing short answers to their questions, and

breaking confidences (Dapremont, 2011; Kosowski et al., 2001). Some African American nursing students comment that faculty expectations are unclear to them and, therefore, they have trouble meeting expectations (Payton et al., 2013).

Some African American nursing students prefer African American faculty members as role models and believe these faculty members are more approachable and understand what their student experience is (Coleman, 2008; Mills-Wisneski, 2005). European American faculty members are sometimes perceived as "high class," distant, uncaring, and unsupportive by some African American nursing students (Payton et al., 2013). Faculty members who worked their way through school and who struggled to succeed are preferred by some African American nursing students (Coleman, 2008; Payton et al., 2013). Further, African American nursing students may rely on friends, roommates, and family rather than faculty when struggling in their programs (Kirkland, 1998; Loftus & Duty, 2010).

As in the education research, nursing faculty are an important element for African American nursing student success. Coleman (2008), Dapremont (2011), and Kosowski et al. (2001) described some elements of helpful and ineffective faculty members, but the sample sizes for these studies were small, limiting generalizability. More research is needed for a deeper understanding of the helping and hindering behaviors of faculty members. In addition, no researchers have determined the effectiveness of faculty training to become more supportive of African American nursing students. The nursing research does not offer best practices for faculty to minimize discrimination and racism in the classroom and in the clinical setting.

Peer support. Peers provide especially important sources of social support for African American nursing students. Clinical experiences and group projects offer opportunities for making friendships (Dapremont, 2011). Peers can share common experiences, serve as trusted confidants, and help African American nursing students persevere when discouraged (Dapremont, 2011; Gipson-Jones, 2009; Kosowski et al., 2001). Peer support has been shown to have positive and long-lasting benefits for some African American nursing students (Coleman, 2008; Dapremont, 2011; Love, 2010). Planned gatherings of African American nursing students and interested faculty members can provide social and academic support (Stokes & Claytor, 1998) as the gatherings provide a venue in which African American nursing students can share feelings, exchange ideas, and learn about campus resources (Stokes & Claytor, 1998).

As with research about the influence of faculty, research suggests that peer support is an important component for African American nursing student success. While Stokes and Clayton (1998) found that planned gatherings facilitated peer relationships, the study is now dated, limited to one nursing program, and not sustained over time. Dapremont (2011) indicated that clinical groups and group projects can facilitate peer relationships but did not provide an in-depth description of how these learning environments can best promote peer relationships. In particular, research is lacking about how African American nursing students negotiate friendships with European American students while maintaining their African American identity and how European American students can seek and promote friendships with African American students.

Family support. Family members often offer support to African American nursing students. Older children and other family members can encourage African

American nursing students to stay focused on studying and maintain composure during academically stressful times (Dapremont, 2011; Gipson-Jones, 2009). African American nursing students, however, often experience conflicts between family and school responsibilities (Gipson-Jones, 2009). African American nursing students report spending more time providing family care than other races and ethnicities (Loftus & Duty, 2010) and therefore can experience tension between wanting to achieve academically and wanting to take care of their families (Gipson-Jones, 2009).

As with nursing faculty, family members can be a support or a hindrance to the success of African American nursing students (Dapremont, 2011; Gipson-Jones, 2009). However, these studies did not provide in-depth descriptions of the influences of family during nursing school or how family influences change as students progress towards graduation. There are no studies describing how families can best support African American nursing students, or how nursing programs can guide families to be supportive of their students' career choice and commitment to nursing education.

Personal characteristics. Personal characteristics of African American nursing students may be associated with success. Learned resourcefulness, for example, has been shown to be a means for adapting to the stresses of nursing school (Goff, 2011a). Learned resourcefulness is the ability to regulate emotions and cognition and may be acquired with life experiences (Goff, 2011a). In one study, African American nursing students had higher levels of learned resourcefulness than European Americans (Goff, 2011a). While more research is needed, learned resourcefulness may be one important difference between those persevering in nursing school and those not completing a program. The degree to which learned resourcefulness can be taught and the best

practices for supporting learned resourcefulness by nursing faculty members and program administrators have yet to be documented.

Perseverance is a personal characteristic associated with the success of African American nursing students (Love, 2010). Some African American nursing students report being determined to work harder when faced with obstacles, giving schoolwork their full effort, and choosing to be self-determined and resilient (Coleman, 2008; Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Robinson, 2013). Some students report that they learn to be stronger students through a disciplined daily routine, peer study groups, reading course material, and creating note cards (Dapremont, 2014). Murray (2015) reported that successful students were determined to work through difficulties, accept their hardship, and overcome stereotypes.

Researchers described that learned resourcefulness and perseverance are important personal characteristics for an African American student to succeed in a nursing program (Coleman, 2008; Goff, 2011b; Love, 2010; Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Robinson, 2013), however, these studies used small sample sizes and did not determine how these traits can best be cultivated and/or strengthened in African American nursing students. A more in-depth understanding of these characteristics may be important to determine how to foster these assets in African American students. However, students without resourcefulness and perseverance also need to be welcomed and supported to succeed in nursing programs. Describing the personal characteristics of African American students who succeed must not reduce the efforts of nursing programs to create an environment in which all students are welcome and can feel accepted.

Conclusion

African Americans experience lower rates of admission to, progression in, and graduation from pre-licensure nursing programs in the US than other racial and ethnic groups. Many report experiences of isolation, alienation, discrimination and racism in nursing school. Institutional support has been found to be helpful, but best practices to facilitate the success of African American nursing students have not been determined. The influence of, and best practices for creating, an open and welcoming educational environment have not yet been established. While family and friends of African American nursing students can provide support, family and social responsibilities can also impede success. Some personal characteristics of African American students may also influence their success in nursing programs but only a few such characteristics have been studied and identifying these characteristics must not be used to diminish the responsibilities of nursing programs to be welcoming and supportive of all students.

Gaps in the Literature

Research has established that African American college students have lower retention rates that European American students (Department of Education, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2012), tend to experience discrimination on college campuses (Chao et al., 2012; M. Davis et al., 2004; Flowers, 2004; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013), and that early academic success is critical to African American college student persistence in college (Charleston et al., 2014; Lundy & Firebaugh, 2005). Yet these studies do not describe the experiences identified by students as important or significant as they completed college, nor do they describe the meaning of the experiences for the students.

Racial affiliation alters the experiences of African American nursing students (Coleman, 2008; France et al., 2004; Gipson-Jones, 2009; Love, 2010) and influences relationships with faculty members, peers, hospital staff, and family (Coleman, 2008; France et al., 2004; Gipson-Jones, 2009; Kosowski et al., 2001; Love, 2010; Payton et al., 2013), but these studies do not describe these experiences in detail. Academic stress is considerable for many African American nursing students (Coleman, 2008; Kirkland, 1998; Kosowski et al., 2001), and a common response is that students "work harder" (France et al., 2004; Love, 2010) rather than ask for help (Kirkland, 1998). There are no studies of African American nursing students' experiences from a retrospective viewpoint (after completing the program) without a predetermined focus on a particular facet of their experience; therefore, it is not yet know how African American nurses understand nursing school as a whole through the experiences most meaningful to them when they were students.

Summary

In this chapter, four areas of literature review were examined: the historical influences of the educational experiences of African Americans, on-going educational disparities in the US, the experiences of African American student experiences in higher education, and the experiences of pre-licensure African American nursing students. While national policy initiatives have attempted to reduce the educational disparities experienced by African American students, African American students in higher education continue to experience a number of academic and social challenges that result

in lower progression and completion rates than European Americans. The challenges evident in African American pre-licensure nursing students mirror the challenges of African American college students in general.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The present study used qualitative descriptive methodology to generate understanding of the experiences of African American[5] nursing students in pre-licensure nursing programs. Despite some progress over the past 20 years, African Americans continue to be underrepresented in the nursing profession compared to the population it serves (Carthon et al., 2014). Greater diversity in the healthcare workforce indirectly improves health outcomes through culturally sensitive care (Anderson et al., 2003; J. Cohen et al., 2002; Sullivan, 2004). African American students experience higher attrition compared to European American[6] students (Benn & Pacquiao, 2010; Gardner, 2005b; Jeffreys, 2007; Symes et al., 2002). The experiences of African American nursing students in pre-licensure nursing programs in the US will be described through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with nurses who recently graduated from a pre-licensure nursing program in order to understand their experience of being a nursing student.

Chapter three is organized into three sections. The first section describes the qualitative descriptive research design. The second section details the methods for the study. The third section describes the strategies to be used for protecting research participants.

[5] The term African American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are of African descent, the subject of this study.
[6] The term European American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict American who are from a variety of European descents.

Qualitative Descriptive Design

A qualitative descriptive research method uses general qualitative practices to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon in order to understand how people interpret, construct, and make meaning from their experiences (Kahlke, 2014; Merriam, 2009). These practices are especially useful to answer information gathering questions in the context of a group (Bailey, 2013) by understanding individuals' interpretations of experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). Historically, qualitative descriptive practices date back to a sociologist, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld who in 1925 used social psychology for market research in order to describe how women decided where to buy their clothes (Bailey, 2013). He, along with another sociologist Robert Merton, assembled the combination of practices now known as qualitative descriptive research (Bailey, 2013). Researchers who use one or more techniques associated with grounded theory, phenomenology, or ethnography without a full execution of the methodology are using qualitative descriptive methods (Sandelowski, 2000).

Qualitative descriptive methods use subjective reports of experiences from study participants through the use of broad, semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Sandelowski, 2000). Similar to phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory, qualitative descriptive practices depend on the perception of the researcher (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005). However, while other qualitative methods use a specific process based on particular theoretical underpinnings with which to interpret data, qualitative descriptive methods use broader theoretical interpretation in order to

understand a phenomenon in the everyday language of the participant (Maxwell, 1992; Neergaard, Olesen, Anderson, & Sondergaard, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000; Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005).

Qualitative descriptive methods are rooted in naturalistic inquiry and constructivism. When using naturalistic inquiry, the researcher commits to studying the phenomenon as close to its natural state as possible (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivist researchers believe that individuals construct reality as they interact with their environment and that people come to know and understand the world through life experiences and by reflecting on life experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Therefore, the intent of qualitative descriptive research is to understand the meaning of a particular experience for the research participants (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative descriptive research is useful for researchers who want to know who was involved in the phenomenon of interest, what happened, and where the phenomena took place (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Qualitative descriptive researchers do not seek to create theory, add further philosophical perspectives, or immerse themselves into a culture (Merriam, 2009) but rather describe a phenomenon through the viewpoint of those who have experienced it first-hand (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative descriptive methods use inductive processes which may (or may not) produce hypotheses or categories for future theory-building that have not been previously discussed in the literature (Merriam, 2009; Neergaard et al., 2009).

Qualitative descriptive researchers immerse themselves in a phenomenon through those who have experienced it first-hand to gain understanding of how people

understand and make meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Data are collected and analyzed simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). The interview guide is semi-structured while also flexible to adapt as themes emerge during simultaneous data analysis (Nergaard et al., 2009). The result is an account of the participants' experiences that provides an inside view of how the participants experienced a phenomenon (Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski, 2000; Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005).

Qualitative descriptive methods have been previously used in nursing to understand how African American students balance work, family, and school (Gipson-Jones, 2009) and to identify the strategies used by African American nursing students to successfully complete their nursing education (Dapremont, 2011, 2014). Other qualitative methods have also been used to describe African American student experiences. For example, Kosowski et al. (2001) examined students' experiences of a "care group" component of their curriculum, Coleman (2008) studied the effect of race on the experience of nursing school for African American associate degree students, and Love (2010) studied socialization among African American nursing students in predominately European American schools of nursing.

This study differs from previous studies because it did not focus on a predetermined aspect or characteristic of the nursing school experience but allowed participants to share their experiences in the way they wished. Further, the researcher queried participants for the meaning of the experiences they shared to mitigate any preconceived notions of the research team as to the meaning of the experiences. This present study also differed from previous studies because it elicited stories from African

American students retrospectively, though still near enough to the events of nursing school so as to be vivid and clear in the minds of the participants. Retrospective stories represent an understanding of events that cannot be explained while still experiencing them (Sandelowski, 1991). A retrospective approach permitted the study participants to reflect, interpret, and understand the total nursing school experience in light of becoming a nurse.

Study Methods

This qualitative descriptive study provides the discipline with a deeper understanding of African American nurses' experiences in nursing schools. The goal of the researcher was to gain insight into how the study participants experienced nursing school and to describe participants' experiences by creating a detailed description of the experiences. The present study used qualitative descriptive study methods to answer the following research questions:

1. How do recent graduates describe their experiences of being African American students in predominately European American, pre-licensure schools of nursing?
2. What meaning did those experiences have for recent African American pre-licensure graduates?

The purposes of this study were to describe the experiences, and the meaning those experiences had, for African American students who attended predominately European American schools of nursing. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly helpful to inform culturally sensitive interventions and policy (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005). Therefore, the findings of this study will inform teachers, administrators, and others

engaged in disciplinary efforts to more fully understand the complexities of African American student experiences in order to address diversity issues in nursing.

The specific aims of this study were to:

1. Shed new light on the experiences of African American nursing students in predominately European American schools of nursing.
2. Explore the understanding and significance of nursing school experiences for African American students.

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited from a population of African American nurses in the US using purposeful sampling. The purpose of qualitative descriptive methods is to examine phenomena through those with the most information about the phenomenon of interest; therefore, participant selection must be purposeful (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000).

Participants were recruited by the research team using study invitations (Appendix A) distributed through professional contacts known to the research team to potential participants. The recruitment notices included a brief description of the study, a statement indicating the participants would be paid a $20.00 Amazon gift card in appreciation for the interview, and a URL link to access the study information sheet (SIS) (Appendix B). After reading the SIS, a quick response (QR) code on the SIS linked participants to a confidential electronic survey. The survey had questions to select participants who met the inclusion criteria, and provided a pseudonym name and an email address to schedule the interview time. The recruitment notice indicated that the

researcher sought African American nurses who had graduated from a predominately European American pre-licensure program in the last ten years.

Snowball sampling extended the participant pool beyond those known to the research team or their colleagues. Following each interview, the participant was asked if he/she knew of someone who might be interested in participating in the study. The researcher requested that the participant share the study URL link with that person.

Selection criteria for this study consisted of participants who were:

1. Current RNs who self-identify as African American.
2. Graduates from a pre-licensure program within the past ten years.
3. Graduates from a predominately European American school of nursing.
4. Born in the US and a current resident of the US.
5. English speaking.

Participants were included in the study until data were saturated and the participants provided enough data to answer the research questions. A total of 14 participants were recruited and interviewed for this study.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews for this study began with a few predetermined questions as outlined below. However, the largest portion of the interview was used to explore topics that participants' shared during the course of the interview (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions were open-ended to encourage participants to freely describe their experiences. The interviews were also guided by themes emerging from the data according to thematic analysis principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sample questions included:

1. What was it like to be a nursing student?
2. If you were talking to a new African American student about to begin in the program from which you graduated, what would you tell them about your experiences?
3. What else is important for me to know about your nursing school experiences?
4. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that I should have?

Interviews began with "What was it like to be a nursing student?" This question was intended to open the interview broadly to allow participants to focus the interview about the experiences important to them rather than matters that were important to the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Throughout the interview, the researcher encouraged participants to describe experiences in as much detail as possible and used probing questions to help the participant clarify or extend the account being shared (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For instance, participants were asked, "then what happened," "could you say more about that," or "can you give me an example of…" Follow up questions were sometimes used to clarify ideas and explore ideas that were surfacing among interviews with other participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example, "other nurses have talked about needing to have 'time away' while in school. Did you have the sense of needing 'time away'? Can you tell me how you were able to have 'time away?'"

Data were collected from the participants by phone interviews at a time convenient to both participant and researcher. The interviews lasted 30 to 70 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed into electronic Word documents by a professional

transcriptionist provided through Recordiapro. The transcriptionist removed identifying information and replaced it with a generic de-identified tag or descriptor.

The researcher checked the transcription for accuracy. The recordings will be deleted after dissemination of the study findings. The printed transcriptions and interview notes are kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked office. Electronic records were kept on a password-protected computer. The researcher was the only interviewer for this study.

Data Analysis

Researchers using qualitative descriptive research designs commonly use thematic analysis to analyze the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) and was used for this study. While flexibility regarding data analysis is an important feature of qualitative research, there also needs to be consistency and coherence to maintain research quality (Hsieh & Sahnnon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis provides a detailed, qualitative account of data to articulate, refine, or extend the reader's understanding of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than counting specific elements, common threads of words or phrases were detected through the researcher's analysis of the set of interviews. As recommended by Ayres (2007), the researcher used an iterative process of reading and coding the data. The data were analyzed in two ways: individually within individual interviews and among all the interviews to identify salient themes within and across texts.

Braun and Clark (2006) and Miles and Huberman (1994) guided data analysis. Following the transcription of each interview, the researcher immersed herself in the data with repeated and active reading of the data to search for overall meanings.

The researcher then marked or coded words and phrases that captured salient ideas from the data to keep track of the understanding gained from the data. Coding provided a means for the researcher to link connected parts of an interview within the interview and among other interviews to observe for patterns among the codes (Ayres, 2007). The researcher coded data following transcription after each interview. Coding continued while data were collected to help the researcher recognize when no new information was being provided, data redundancy was achieved, and the participants provided enough data to answer the research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher sorted the data to identify similar phrases and ideas that could represent themes. Paradigm cases were identified with the assistance of the research team to further assist with identifying themes. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), inconsistencies within and across data were noted. Together, these analysis steps resulted in grouping of similar patterns of data into potential themes and notations of inconsistent cases.

As Braun and Clark (2006) and Miles and Hubermann (1994) recommended, verbatim participant stories were then selected from the data that best represented each theme to determine if each theme had enough interview data to support it. The themes were described in writing to define and distinguish it from other themes. Themes without coherence, distinction, or enough data to support were eliminated. The theme definitions and descriptions were shared with the research team to check for accurate interpretation of the data. Changes were made per their recommendations. Subthemes were identified and defined. Participant quotes were selected that supported the subthemes.

Quality Criteria

Quality criteria for qualitative research are described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Schwartz-Shea (2014) among others. Quality criteria in qualitative research has been the subject of much debate (Hope & Waterman, 2003; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). The purpose of quality criteria is to ensure that the research is worthy of the reader's trust (Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Ultimately, quality is determined by the reader of the study (Rolfe, 2006). However, there are strategies researchers employ to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher for this study used rich description, reflexivity, audit and transparency, inconsistent case analysis, and peer review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwartz-Shea, 2014) to confirm that the data collection and analysis were credible and dependable.

As recommended by Schwartz-Shea (2014), the research report provided rich descriptions of the experiences of African American nursing students to capture the meaning of their experiences with enough passages from the interview data to support the descriptions. The reader therefore will be able to hear the stories of the participants and judge the rigor of the descriptions provided by the researcher.

The researcher recorded thoughts, questions, and self-reflections during the research process in a journal. Regular journaling, as recommended by Schwartz-Shea (2014), helped the researcher become more aware of her role in the research process. In addition, an audit trail of analytic decisions and the development of themes were made in the research journal to provide transparency for the process of data analysis.

Per Lincoln and Guba (1994), Patton (2002), and Schwartz-Shea (2014), describing discrepant cases were noted and described to ensure that the researcher did not just look for predetermined evidence (Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Noting discrepant cases prevented the researcher from quickly determining themes and ignoring evidence to the contrary. In addition, discrepant data helped define, broaden and revise descriptions of themes. Noting discrepant cases is particularly important when the researcher is likely to discover new cultural understandings (Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Peer review was achieved through the research team who checked theme definitions and descriptions for accurate reflection of the data.

Participant Protection

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before proceeding with this study from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Since there was minimal risk to the participants, the study was deemed exempt. Participation in the study was voluntary. The participants read a study information sheet (SIS) (Appendix B) which was approved by IRB and used as the solicitation to participate in the study. The participants indicated that they had read the SIS by selecting the link to choose to proceed with an interview through the electronic screening system. Participants chose a pseudonym which was used for all communications with the researcher and throughout the interview. All personal identifiers, including participants' city and school names, were removed by the transcriptionist and replaced with a generic descriptor.

Summary

This study provides a different research approach for describing the experiences of African American nursing students. The researcher used qualitative descriptive design

to interview newly graduated African American nurse in order to determine the nursing school experiences important to them, understand their nursing student experiences, and describe the meaning of these experiences.

Chapter three explained qualitative descriptive methodology that was used to answer the research question. The research purpose, question, and aims were presented as well as the study methods. Strategies for data collection and analysis were presented with procedures to protect the participants. The results of data analysis will be presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purposes of this study were to describe the experiences, and the meaning those experiences had, for African American[7] students who attended predominately European American[8] schools of nursing. This intention was achieved using qualitative descriptive methodology and individual phone interviews with recent RN graduates. This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis for the stated research purposes.

Fourteen participants were interviewed for this study; all of them were African American Registered Nurses who attended predominately European American pre-licensure nursing programs. The percentage of African American students in the nursing programs participants attended ranged from 1% to 18%. These participants came from six different states in the US including three regions: the east, mid-west, and south-central. Ten of the participants were from Baccalaureate pre-licensure programs, three from Associate Degree programs, and one from a Diploma program. Eleven of the fourteen participants graduated within the last six years (since 2009); three graduated seven to ten years ago (between 2005 and 2008).

Semi-structured interviews were used for this study. The interview questions were open-ended to encourage participants to freely describe their experiences. Interviews began with "What was it like to be a nursing student?" The interviewer encouraged participants to describe experiences in as much detail as possible and used

[7] The term African American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are of African descent, the subject of this study.
[8] The term European American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are from a variety of European descents.

probing questions to help the participant clarify or extend the account being shared. Participants were also asked what advice they would give to a new African American nursing student about their experiences, what else was important for the interviewer to know, and if there was anything that the interviewer should have asked but did not. The themes are presented here supported with excerpts from the participants' interviews. Participants chose their own pseudonym when they signed up for the study and the excerpts used throughout this chapter are identified using those pseudonyms.

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in two salient themes: "standing out" and "success is not just about me." Standing out describes how the participants felt obvious in a class of predominately European American students. The theme of standing out has four subthemes: being watched, being ignored, laying low, and being noticed. Participants described experiences in which they felt that others were watching their every move, and carefully examining everything they did and said. This scrutiny contributed to participants feeling obvious in the class and "marked" as different than others. Yet, some participants also described experiences in which being different than others led to their being ignored. For these participants, standing out did not lead to a heightened level of scrutiny but to having what they said and did overlooked, not taken seriously, or ignored by others. Although being watched and being ignored appear dichotomous, participants in this study frequently described both as ways in which European American faculty and students challenged participants' abilities, contributions, and potential for success. In other words, for participants being watched and being ignored communicated how others believed they didn't "belong" in the school.

The subthemes of laying low and being noticed were described by participants as strategies they used to survive the challenges of nursing school and successfully complete their program. When participants were asked what advice they would give to a new African American nursing student, some told of the importance of "laying low." Laying low was described as blending in, avoiding anything that would draw attention to oneself, and focusing solely on being successful. Some participants, however, sought out opportunities to "be noticed" for their achievement by "outshining" other students to demonstrate how they deserved their place and "belonged" in the nursing program. As with being watched and being ignored, the subthemes laying low and being noticed appear to be dichotomous strategies for success participants used. Importantly, the subthemes laying low and being noticed highlight participants' agency and resilience and how participants (all who had successfully completed their nursing programs) responded to experiences of standing out. In other words, participants had a finely honed sense of when and how to respond to standing out which contributed to their success and the advice they would pass on to others.

The theme "success is not just about me" described how participants strove to be successful in nursing school for themselves and their families, how they were supported by their family and the broader African American community to succeed, and how they believed, in turn, their families and the larger African American community also benefitted from participants' success.

Theme: Standing Out

Participants in this study described how, as an African American student, they stood out in a class of predominately European American students. Participants

described how they believed that classmates, faculty members, and administrators were aware of their presence whether or not the African American student did something to draw attention to themselves. For some participants standing out was uncomfortable, as Erica explained,

> It's just different when you're the only one [African American student] in the class. If there were one or two of them [African American students] I probably would have felt a little more comfortable. By being the only one out of 50, I was a little uneasy.

Another participant, Al, described how comments about her speech and hair made her stand out among her peers,

> I felt like such the oddball. I would talk and people would say, 'What are you saying? I don't even understand what you're saying. Are you talking English or what?' I mean I think that I speak very clearly and very good… [And] my instructors would say to me, you can't wear your hair like that. I mean I don't know what you want me to do, like it's pulled back in a ponytail. I can't help it if it's curly and kinky, but I mean it's brushed clean. It's not all these different colors and it's pulled back in a ponytail.

Al describes standing out from other students--feeling like an "oddball" because others (European American faculty and students) could not understand her speaking and disapproved of her appearance. Although Al notes that she speaks "very clearly" and that her hair is "brushed clean" and "pulled back in a ponytail" (a common requirement in nursing programs), she is challenged and ridiculed by others (e.g., "are you talking English or what?"). Al implies that standing out is specifically related to being African American when she notes that her hair isn't [dyed] "all these different colors" but, rather, are characteristics she can do nothing about.

While participants often described standing out for differences related to race and racially linked characteristics (e.g., "curly and kinky" hair), differences *among* African

American students were often overlooked. In other words, participants stood out for being African American, not as individuals who happened to be African American. Turner shared:

> It was quite interesting to me because we [two African American students] were in a class I think of probably over thirty students and the entire time we were in the program the majority of our class they would mix our names up. Yeah. It's funny because to this day some of them, I'll see them because I'm still in the area where I went to undergraduate in, and I'll see them and I'll say, "Hey!" And they'll call me her name. Yeah. I always think it's just hilarious because two African American females. We both have dark hair and you know similar tones or complexions. How many Caucasian females were in the class that had similar hair and similar complexions? It's always amazing to me when people don't take the time to, it seems like, actually look at you. Because I don't think it would be okay if I called every Caucasian blonde girl I met the same name. That wouldn't be okay. Like, "Oh, you look just like" if I'm just looking at her and saying, "Oh you're blonde and you have a fair complexion." We definitely have similarities in our height and our, like I said, we both have dark hair. Other than that, we don't look alike at all. It's kind of a joke that we have amongst ourselves even to this day that we can pass for each other if we wanted to.

Turner, who is one of only two African American students in her nursing program, describes how her classmates throughout the program (and to the current day) confuse her with the one other African American student. She stands out among European American students as an undifferentiated African American student. She notes how "amazed" she is that "people [European American students and faculty] don't take the time to…actually look at you," noting that while she and they other African American student have similar hair color and skin tones, they "don't look alike at all."

Stories of standing out were common in participants' accounts of their experiences in schools predominantly attended by European American students. Participants described how standing out occurred because of their race and racially-linked characteristics. Each of the participants attended a predominantly European American

school of nursing where they were the only one, or one of a few African American students, making it impossible for them to *not* stand out as different. Participants were very aware of how they stood out among their classmates, which frequently led to their sense of being watched by others.

Subtheme: Being Watched

For some study participants, standing out from other students was experienced as being watched. For instance, Al described being "monitored" by faculty members who watched "every little thing that I say, every little thing that I do." Carol similarly shared how being watched by faculty members made her vulnerable to criticism. When asked what advice she would give to a new African American student entering a predominantly European American program, Carol shared, "You're going to feel, at times, because you are the only minority, that everyone is looking at you." She shared how she could feel the attention when she walked into a room, "It was pretty much you walk in and you feel the energy shift in the room. There are people that are looking at you."

For some participants, being watched meant being "targeted" or "marked." Because participants' skin color made them stand out from the European American students (the majority) it was easy for them to be "spotted" and watched. Being highly visible among European American students made participants "easy to pick out" and thus easy to watch, leading Anita to contend "you cannot have a bad day." Anita further explained:

> I would tell you for sure that, because you are the African American student, regardless of how well you do, or how poorly you do, regardless of that, everybody knows your name, every dean, every professor. They know who you are. They know us [African American students], because it's not that many of us. And it's easy to spot. An African American person in the colored scrubs for the school. You're easy to pick out. So,

> regardless of how you may feel, or if you want to give up the stake [change it], you almost can't because everybody knows who you are. You cannot have a bad day. You almost literally have to work twice as hard just to be considered, "You can do this." Because they're spotting you out, and it's already maybe unintended or intended, it's already a mark on you because there's not many of us.

Malia also described the sense of being watched: "Any situations where I'm put on the spot in front of a small group of people, it makes me nervous, so I felt like in the small group clinical setting, whenever we would do a skills check-off, I guess I felt like everybody was watching me." Importantly, for participants, the sense of being watched related to how others saw their capability and potential. They felt they were being monitored or scrutinized which made them "nervous" and fostered "literally…work[ing] twice as hard" to be seen as capable.

Stories of standing out were pervasive in the data. While many participants described experiences of being watched, for others standing out led to being ignored. Clearly being ignored appears to be the opposite of being watched, yet for participants in this study it often occurred together with being watched. That is, participants described being watched because of how they stood out from other students as different, but this difference led others to overlook or discount them and their contributions to classes and the learning environment.

Subtheme: Being Ignored

Participants described many experiences in which, although they stood out as different from the majority of their classmates, they experienced being ignored or invisible while other students were given attention. Importantly, participants described being ignored *because* they stood out as different from the majority. That is, because others readily identified participants as different, their greetings, contributions, and

capabilities were often overlooked. For example, Carol described a European American classmate with whom she shared several classes who never returned a greeting in the hallway, “I've had enough interaction to know him and for him to know me. He’ll actually look [at me] and he won’t speak [to me].” Others described how their efforts to contribute to class discussions were ignored by faculty members and other students, until the same idea was contributed by a European American student. Vanessa shared,

> [In a class discussion] I will suggest, I will give an idea. Nobody listens to me when I say it but when a white male down the table says it, now everybody’s up saying how fabulous and cutting edge this idea is. I said that first, but nobody heard it when I said it.

Similarly, Violet described experiences of feeling ignored,

> When I asked [the instructor] my question I felt I didn’t get a very thorough answer. [The instructor] wasn’t necessarily really paying attention to what I had to say, but then I heard that when a couple other students who were white or Hispanic were asking the questions, then she really--It looked like she gave a careful attention to what they were saying.

Being ignored was not only an issue in interactions among teachers and students. Participants also described being ignored as a sense of distance from others stating, “It would be like, [other students would] sit farther away from you [than from each other]. Like if you’re talking, they’re not making eye contact.” Carol compared this experience to how children treat those who don’t belong, “It's like little kids. How little kids, there is the one outsider who is over there standing in the corner.”

During each interview participants were asked for advice they would give to a new African American student entering a predominantly European American school of nursing. While acknowledging how African American students stand out in predominantly European American programs, participants’ advice to new African

American students commonly focused on "laying low" as a survival strategy when they experienced being watched and being ignored.

Subtheme: Laying Low

Participants in this study described the strategy of "laying low" as important advice to give to new African American nursing students. Laying low was described as keeping quiet, not drawing attention to yourself, not causing trouble, and "just doing my work." Some participants described laying low as "staying under the radar." Vivian described laying low as:

> Don't be the life of the party… Don't try to insert yourself [into conversations or other situations] because I personally think that would make [African American students] a target. Just stay low key, do the work like you're supposed to do.

Vivian highlights how laying low focuses on "doing the work" in order to be successful rather than drawing attention to oneself inside or outside the classroom. Laying low mitigates the risk of becoming a "target" for others. Marie shared advice that highlighted how "sometimes you really have to pick your battles as far as you don't want to cast yourself on the outside where people are out to get you." Similarly, Vanessa described purposely choosing to be quiet after one unpleasant interaction with a faculty member, "I learned at that point that sometimes it's not to your benefit to speak up. Sometimes just be quiet." For participants, laying low was a strategy to avoid the problems associated with standing out. Recognizing the risks of standing out (e.g., becoming a target, or creating situations in which others are "out to get you") participants used laying low as a survival strategy so they could focus on being successful in the program. They shared how they would advise new African American students to "pick their battles" and "sometimes just be quiet."

Subtheme: Being Noticed

While laying low was commonly shared by participants as a survival strategy they would pass on to new African American students to foster success, some participants also described focusing their efforts on being noticed for their academic ability and potential as a nurse. For instance, Anita described how she experienced being noticed (recognized) by a professor which she understood to mean that she "counted as a student."

> When I got to nursing school, and I sat in this classroom, and this classroom seats 30. I can actually see the professor and the board. I'm like, 'Oh goodness. They [the professors] know my name. They know my face. They know if I'm not there. I actually count as a student here. I have no choice but to show up.'

For Anita, being in a small group of nursing students meant the professor knew her name and her face and would notice if she wasn't in class. Being noticed gave Anita "no choice but to show up" and be successful in nursing school. Similarly, Turner also described how being noticed by a faculty member promoted her success:

> [The instructor] was the type of person that was very encouraging, and specifically spoke out to the African American students. Like, 'Hey, really good to see you guys here. Keep up the good work.' You know, 'Keep working hard. You can do it.'

Turner noted the importance of an instructor's encouragement directed to African American students in the class. This encouragement communicated both the recognition that the African American students were "working hard," and the confidence that they could be successful ("you can do it").

Vanessa, shared that when she was ignored by others, she worked harder to build relationships with students and faculty members in order to be noticed stating: "Unless [African American students] really go out of our way to try to make those connections,

nobody's going to come and offer that stuff to us. Nobody's going to just say 'hey, I want to help you.'"

Similarly, Mya Marie described going out of her way to become noticed by her clinical instructor who she believed wasn't helping her learn during clinical experiences. She recounted,

> One day I actually [said], 'You never go over anything with me.' I said, 'I watch you in the hallway for twenty, thirty, forty minutes showing [other] students how to look up labs, how to find, and look at images.' I said, 'You never do any of that with me. Is that not part of my clinical experience? Am I not going to receive that?' Then finally I think she was like, 'I guess she's right. I don't kinda do this with her.'

Mya Marie responds to a teacher by calling out the lack of attention she receives in clinical compared to other students in the group. She challenges the teacher by questioning "is this not part of my clinical experience?" and draws attention to how the teacher "never [goes] over anything" with her.

Other participants described being raised with the notion that African Americans have to work harder that European Americans in order to achieve the same level, so they expected to do extra work in order to be noticed. Al stated, "You can't just do what's expected. You have to be more innovative…You have to really excel just to get the same sort of 'good job' as somebody else who did much less." Violet similarly described, "It feels like you always have to stand out or maybe do a little extra work than other students" to be noticed. Embedded in participants' descriptions of being noticed was being recognized or acknowledged for being just as capable as other students. As mentioned previously, participants shared how being noticed as a capable student meant they "belonged" in the nursing program and had the potential to be successful nurses.

Some participants who worked "twice as hard as others" were pleased when classmates and faculty members noticed their achievement. For example, Vanessa stood out to one faculty member based on the quality of her written work and she was encouraged to speak up more in class.

> I respected that professor for telling me that because she took notice of me and she took notice of my work. She actually went out of her way to tell me, 'you know what, I want to hear from you. I want you to interact; I want you to be better than what you are.'

Similarly, Al described being included in a study group (comprised of European American classmates) when they recognized her high grades on the course exams.

> I would always do really, really well on the exams and the two girls that I began to work with ... they were technically viewed as the top of the class. Nobody really knew that I was getting better grades than they were on the test. We had gotten tests handed back to us one day and one of the girls happened to see my grade and that's how we started talking. She just asked if I was interested in studying with them and we just kind of became friends like that.

Participants described their determination to be noticed for their ability. Being noticed was a strategy they used to prove they "belong here" [in the school of nursing]. For instance, Vanessa described her internal drive and mindset to be successful in the program:

> I have made it my business to outshine everybody, not just a couple of people, [but] 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 here. I deserve a seat at the table not because I'm black but because I know what the hell I'm talking about.

Vanessa describes how she is driven to "outshine everybody" to how she is "worth it" and "belongs" in the school of nursing. Being noticed for her academic success means she "deserves a seat at the table." Importantly, Vanessa points out how she strives to

stand out, to be noticed, not because she is black, but because she knows "what the hell [she] is talking about."

Similarly, Winter seized the opportunity to stand out and be noticed as a capable students among her classmates when she was asked to give a speech to college benefactors:

> I was asked to do a speech, it's called 'Reflections' that they have every year. They spotlight a student that has won a scholarship and I tell my story in front of a bunch of donors, a bunch of people that donate money to the school. So that speech…when I told my story, I think that set the tone to the rest of the three semesters I had at nursing school. I gave that speech and everybody knew who I was.

For Winter, being selected to "do a speech" meant that "everybody knew who I was" and "set the tone" for the rest of her program. Winter's experience that was shared when she "told her story" positioned her as a capable and successful student in the school. Recognizing the importance of being noticed, Winter continued to stay in the spotlight through volunteer and extra-curricular activities, "I volunteered every chance I could, Habitat for Humanity, anything extra-curricular I was all over it. So I think that they saw that and they liked that."

Yet, Violet and Carol described the "double-edged sword" of wanting to be noticed for their abilities and not simply for standing out as an African American student. On one hand, Violet noted that at her school, "I never really saw African American nurses being asked to participate in promotional opportunities." On the other hand, she resisted standing out as simply a "token" African American:

> Sometimes I have to wonder if [my graduate school promotional opportunity] is a form of tokenism, like if I'm the token black student. I don't want to ever see special treatment for something just because I'm

> black. I want to receive the same treatment [as other students] but I want to be fair. It's like a double-edged sword.

Vanessa who sought to "outshine everybody" (above) and Carol similarly explained how they wanted to be noticed in school for something other than their color. Carol noted, "I'm just a person and I'm not dissociating myself of my color, but I'm not going to let you identify, or classify me by my color because that's something that I can't change."

For participants, being noticed for their academic ability and their contributions to class or other activities was important to their success and to show they belonged in the school. Yet the worry that this notice came because of "tokenism" was described as a "double-edged sword."

Theme Summary

The theme, "standing out" was apparent throughout the data. Standing out had four subthemes: being watched, being ignored, laying low, and being noticed. Participants described many experiences of standing out in their nursing programs among the European American students. At times they believed they were watched or that their actions were monitored by faculty members and classmates, while at other times they were ignored. Participants understood the sense of surveillance they experienced (whether that showed up as being watched, or being ignored, or both) to mean they didn't belong in the school of nursing and/or that they were not capable of the work required to be successful.

Participants had all successfully completed their pre-licensure nursing programs. When asked about advice they would give to new African American students, participants described laying low as a strategy to survive the problems of standing out and to be successful in the nursing program. Another strategy offered by participants was

striving to be noticed for their ability and potential as a nursing student. Participants described "working twice as hard" as their European American counterparts and working to "outshine everyone." Participants described the importance of having their work, potential, or contributions recognized by faculty and other students because this mean they belonged in the program, not because of their color but because of their ability. However, participants noted that standing out is a "double-edged sword." They sought fair treatment and wanted to stand out for their achievements and not simply for their skin color and they worked diligently to prove that "I deserve a seat at the table."

Theme: Success is Not Just About Me

Participants described how their success in nursing school was as much about their families and communities as about themselves as individuals. Participants viewed going to college in general, and nursing school in particular, as a privilege not to be taken lightly. The participants wanted to do their best, not just for themselves, but also on behalf of those in their family or community, some of whom never had the opportunity to attend college. In turn, the participants became an example to their family and community members of what African Americans can achieve. Participants described how in their success, they became a shoulder on which other African Americans could stand. In other words, their success contributed to the advancement of the African American community. Participants took care to work with fellow African American students, understanding that success for African American students in a predominantly European nursing school was a community effort. By working together, they believed they improved the likelihood of all the African American students succeeding.

Subtheme: Success is About Family

Participants in this study were often the first in their family to graduate from college and they spoke of how their family inspired them to succeed. Though they may have attended nursing school away from home, they shared how their families were on their minds as they persevered through the challenges of nursing school. For example, Violet noted, "I have a younger sister, younger brother who look up to me and for me to not make it [be successful in nursing school] I feel like I'm failing them." Participants described how their families, many of whom did not have the opportunity to attend college, shared in the participants' success and were the ultimate benefactors of their graduation and becoming a professional. Winter "wanted to be a success for my family and obviously for my son." Anita explained how successfully completing her nursing program was "not just for me. I'm literally taking this step for everybody who carries my last name. We're trying to catapult our families into something greater."

As participants shared their experiences in predominantly European American schools of nursing, they frequently described the responsibility to "succeed no matter what" and to "be an example" for their families and their communities. For Carol, "it didn't matter what it was I was being put through [in school], I had something that I needed to do [graduate]." Those who succeeded became professional role models for their families. Bella called it setting an example:

> My mom went to college, but she never finished. My dad didn't go. None of my uncles or aunts went. I felt like I needed to branch out, and 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.

Participants also told of the importance of having a college educated family member who could help with financial, health, and legal issues. Becoming a professional was about becoming an advocate for family. Vanessa explained:

> There's all kinds of responsibility that falls onto that person that sometimes outweigh their professional obligations…I have to care for my family. Not just one or two people, my family needs help. They need money, they don't know anything about the healthcare system. I've got to be on the phone talking to doctors at doctor's appointments. You're like the representative for the family because you have the most education. It's like if somebody goes to college, wow, that's a big damn deal. To whom much is given much is expected. Nursing school I guess from my experience, nursing school was so much more than nursing school. It wasn't the curriculum; it was way more than that.

Family was also often a source of support when school was challenging. They provided care packages, encouragement, confidence, and financial support. For example, Mya Marie, who graduated from a second degree nursing program shared, "[My family] would tell me, 'You been through this before in undergrad [first baccalaureate degree]. You know how this is, so just get done and get outta here. Let's just finish, just keep pushing and finish.'" Violet also noted how her family "had always had my back and they were going to stand up for me regardless." Family was especially important when participants did not make friends in the nursing program as Bella explained, "I had to count on my family to kind of motivate me." Family support helped participants' endure the challenges of the nursing program, such as those described earlier.

For participants who weren't the first in their family to go to college, nursing school was also about meeting the standards previously set by others from the family. One participant, Turner, had an older half-sister who was a college graduate. Turner described how her sister provided inspiration for her because she looked up to the half-sister and respected how she had succeeded in life. Turner stated: "She [my half-sister]

definitely has always held me to high standards and I feel like it made me hold myself to higher standards because of that and because of the fact that I looked up to her and what she had done with her career."

Participants frequently described how their families provided them with the determination to succeed and how participants took their place as a role model for other family members seriously. Further, participants described how not being successful would be "failing" their family. While participants gleaned support from family members as they navigated the rigors of the nursing program, they were clear that their success was for "everyone who carries my last name." Yet for some participants, family responsibilities also loomed large as they assisted family members to navigate the healthcare system, and to deal with other kinds of issues. Rather than describing this as a burden, however, participants' noted how their success came with the responsibility to give back to their family ("to whom much is given, much is expected"). Participants also described how this expectation to be successful (and much of the support for doing so) was not limited only to their families, but also included the broader African American community.

Subtheme: Success is About Community

For participants in this study, attending nursing school was an opportunity and a privilege that carried with it the responsibility to succeed on behalf of the African American community. Participants recognized that other African Americans had attempted to attend nursing school before them, but many were unsuccessful, "sure many of us [African Americans] have applied, but apparently we all didn't make it."

This knowledge weighed heavily on participants, which Carol described by stating, “It is your job to do your best because you were given this opportunity.”

Several study participants received support and encouragement from members of the African American community. For example, some participants specifically mentioned their “church families” as a source of support. Others described mentor relationships with professional African Americans outside a specific nursing course or outside the school of nursing who provided encouragement and guidance beyond what their families could provide. For instance, Malia found a faculty mentor through the campus Black Student Nurses Association who she was able to talk with about her nursing school experiences:

> One of our clinical instructors that was probably somebody that I wouldn’t have seen that much, but because she was involved with the [Black Student Nurses’ Association], I was able to talk to her about my experience and stuff like that. Just having somebody to talk to that’s older, that’s been through it and knows a lot things just about being a nurse and being involved in nursing when you’re out in the real world. That was helpful.

Other study participants found African American mentors outside of nursing who helped “guide” them, talked with them about “career aspirations” and life in a new place. Vanessa described her mentor:

> She’s older and she was also a professional woman, although she wasn’t a nurse, she was a professional. She shared with me a lot of her experiences being a professional black woman in a male-dominated profession. Although I’m not in a male-dominated profession, I’m in a white woman dominated profession, I’m still a minority just like she was. She really taught me how to be a professional woman.

Participants described how African American mentors were instrumental to them as they strove to complete their nursing program. For Vanessa, a mentor taught her “how to be a professional woman” while being a minority. Similarly, Turner, joined a campus

African American student women's group which she described stating, "That was helpful because that gave me a whole network. Even though not all of them were within nursing, it gave me a whole network of other African American women that I could talk to." Having a network of African American women (that wasn't available in the nursing school) gave Turner someone to "talk to" about her experiences and career trajectory.

Even within the school of nursing, participants described the importance and the influence of the African American community. Although few participants described having African American instructor, those who did strove to work even harder for these professors who had paved the way for them as nursing students. Further, participants believed that African American professors understood them and both the opportunities and challenges participants faced in nursing school. Violet explained:

> If I did come across … a mentor that was or a professor that was African American I did feel like I needed to make sure that I had stepped up my game because I did want to be seen as a professional nurse.

In addition, participants described how the African American community benefitted from their success, particularly when they dispelled widely held stereotypes. Several participants talked about seeking to disprove commonly held ideas about who and how they should be as African American students. For example, Winter described:

> What was important to me was succeeding, getting good grades, wanting to be accepted by my professors and my peers and just prove to them I'm not some girl that wants to collect welfare and wants the easy way out. Any stigma that they had about black people, I wanted to break that stigma now."

Other participants described wanting to discredit stereotypes about being "lazy," "loud," or being at risk to "not complete a degree." Anita commented, "I have to prove whatever [the] stereotype may be, I have to prove it wrong." Challenging widely held

stereotypes on behalf of the African American community further motivated these participants to be successful in the nursing program.

It is important to note that the importance and influence of the African American community was not limited to those experiences in which others supported the participants. Participants also described many experiences in which they provided support to and connected with other African American students so that *all* of them would succeed. Winter explained:

> I would look out for everybody, but I would make sure my girls [other African American students], like our sisters, were taken care of, were okay. If you need a ride, if you need help, if you're crying and you need somebody to talk to, call me.

Similarly, Anita compared her responsibility to other African American students to 'church moms' she grew up with who would call and ask her why she is not going to church:

> It reminds me of my church. We had those church moms who kind of call you why you're not coming to church every Sunday. In the same token, you just want to make sure that your friends are doing okay. You kind of just look out for each other and make sure that the other person has what they need and make sure that things are communicated to professors on why they may not be there. Yeah, you really don't want to see someone who you started with not end with you.

Both Winter and Anita highlight their commitment to the success of all the African American students in their cohorts, checking in with others frequently and being sure others "have what they need" so that none of them would be left behind. Anita further explained how nursing school included her fellow African American classmates:

> I didn't want that [failure] to be any of us. It was [my] goal to make it to the next step, constantly. It was just the determination that I wanted all of us [African American students] to be there in the end. We all had a determination, and I'll be like, "Okay, we have to make it. We want

> everybody to make it, but we [African American students] definitely do." We didn't want to be the ones that were first out.

Participants frequently described efforts to collectively work toward success, whether through the formation of study groups or through mentoring. Vivian, who was one of three African American students in her class, shared:

> Yeah we had study groups. It was a mixture of people. Like I said all the African American students, we were all in a group and then maybe a few non-African American students. I'd say I clicked with one African American student and she had 2 friends in the group so we'll all join together and become a study group. That's how my study group formed.

One participant who did not have peer relationships, now wishes that she did. Bella explained:

> During the times where I didn't feel so good about my choice to join the [nursing] program, and times where I was maybe discouraged and felt like quitting, I had to count on my family and friends outside of the program to kind of motivate me. Which worked, it was fine. But it may not have worked, because they didn't understand what I was going through necessarily. I think having the support of your peers around you, when things are difficult, or when you just aren't understanding whatever it is in nursing that you're being taught, or you're just struggling. Having your peers around you, who are going through the same exact thing, it could be great to keep you going.

Participants also described the importance of giving back to the African American community in terms of encouraging, supporting and mentoring other African Americans in nursing programs or who were considering nursing as a career. Turner shared,

> I actually got to mentor a couple of African American students that were in the classes behind me. That was really, to me it was really helpful and I hope it was helpful to them as well. I really tried to be encouraging to them and to let them know, "Hey, I've taken these classes. This prof [professor] is like this, and this one's like that. You really got to focus on this and that class." Just to give them tips that would be helpful to them and hopefully help them to succeed in the program.

Other participants described how their sense of responsibility for their communities led to efforts to use their nursing skills to help the African American community as nurses. Malia began working with African American communities while still in nursing school when her program permitted her to choose her clinical sites. She purposely chose clinical sites that were in predominately African American neighborhoods with high crime and teen pregnancy, sites that were not very popular with other students. Malia shared:

> I tended to pick sites where [there were] patient populations where I felt like I might be able to relate. For example, one of my clinical sites was at a clinic within a high school that was in a predominately African American neighborhood that was known for a lot of high crime and teen pregnancy, and things that I'd seen when I was in high school and when I was younger, the school was actually a predominately African-American high school, but I still felt like with some of the students, I could understand why they might have done certain things that they did.

Working in African American neighborhoods provided Malia with clinical experiences in settings where she "felt like she might relate" and where she could "understand" those for whom she would provide care during the experience. Similarly, Vanessa, continued on for a nursing doctoral degree in order to improve end of life care for African Americans. She explained,

> Although everybody needs help, I am determined and I'm in a position to help those people…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.

As participants described their experiences in predominantly European American nursing schools, participants often spoke of the importance of their own success along with the success of the wider African American community. Whether seeking support they needed for success, dispelling stereotypes, supporting other nursing students, or

seizing opportunities to give back to the African American community as a nurse, it was clear that participant' experiences were strongly intertwined with their families and community.

Theme Summary

For participants, success in nursing school was a goal and an obligation to their families and the larger African American community. Participants described how they both gave and received support from families and community, and the formative influence of their families and communities to their becoming nurses. Participants were inspired to be role models or examples of success for their families and communities and in turn, they described being advocates for their families and communities and dispelling stereotypes of African Americans. Participants described how support and mentoring need not come from only within the nursing program, and many benefited from establishing mentoring relationship or networks in across the university or outside academe. Within the nursing program, participants described their efforts to work together with other African American students to ensure the success of all and to give back to the community by choosing to learn or to practice in African American communities.

Summary

Two themes were described in this chapter from the interviews with recent African American nursing graduates who attended predominantly European American nursing programs. The first theme described the experiences of standing out. Study participants represented a minority in the school of nursing population (from 1% to 18% of matriculated students) and felt different and obvious in a group of predominately

European American classmates. Two subthemes further described the experiences of standing out for study participants: being watched and being ignored. The subthemes describe two dichotomous sides of standing out. Participants described how, by standing out among their classmates, they experienced a heightened sense of surveillance or that their every move was watched by others. Standing out was also described by participants as being ignored or that their contributions and potential were overlooked by faculty and another students. The subthemes being watched and being ignored were understood by participants as indications that others believed they did not belong in the nursing program.

Two additional subthemes of standing out, laying low and being noticed, were frequently described by participants when asked for advice they would pass on to future African American students to help them be successful. For participants, laying low meant not drawing any attention to oneself inside or outside the school while being noticed meant working twice as hard as others, striving to outshine other students, and seizing opportunities to demonstrate one's abilities. Participants described ways in which laying low and being noticed kept them focused on their work, challenged existing stereotypes, and demonstrated they belonged in the school of nursing. In addition, participants described the double-edged sword they encountered in schools of nursing where they encountered challenges in their efforts to stand out for their achievement rather than as only an African American student.

The second theme described how participants' success in nursing school was about more than themselves; it was also about family and community. Whether or not participants were the first generation in their families to attend college, participants told

of how their families inspired, motivated, and supported them as students. Participants strove to be role models for other family members as they also strove to live up to the example set by those who came before. Participants' accounts frequently revealed how their success in nursing school was for their families in addition to themselves. In other words, families were also the benefactors of student success.

In addition to participants' success being about families, it was also about the broader African American community which participants described as supporting, sharing, and benefiting from the success of these African American nurses. Whether across campus, outside the campus, or at church, participants described the importance of mentors and networks of professional African Americans who understood the challenges participants faced. In turn, participants also strove to extend help and support to other African American students in their program and those who would follow. Participants frequently shared strategies by which they helped other African American students to foster the success of all. But in a broader sense, participants similarly told of focusing their clinical learning on African American communities, particularly those facing significant challenges. For some, this focus on the community followed them into higher nursing degree programs where they sought to further hone their abilities to use their success to improve the lives of the African American community.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The nursing profession has attempted to become a more diversified workforce over the last forty years. A diverse workforce is needed to serve the needs of an increasingly diverse client population (IOM, 2004, 2004, 2010). Greater racial diversity in the healthcare professions improves communication with clients, access to healthcare for minority populations, and client outcomes (IOM, 2003, 2004, 2010; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Further, healthcare workforce diversity improves client trust, reduces discrimination, and promotes more positive experiences (Anderson et al., 2003; J. Cohen et al., 2002; LaVeist et al., 2000). Therefore, health professions like nursing are dependent on the schools to increase recruitment and retention of minority students to increase workforce diversity.

African Americans[9] are underrepresented in the US nursing workforce (Carthon et al., 2014). In the 2010 census, 12.4% of the US population identified as African American (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011) while only 6% of registered nurses identify as African American (HHS, 2010; Budden et al., 2013). Although there have been incremental increases in the number of African American students enrolled in pre-licensure programs over the last decade, the number remains disproportionate when compared to the racial demographics of the US population (Lowe & Archibald, 2009). African Americans comprise about 10% of the student population in US baccalaureate nursing programs (AACN, 2014) while African Americans comprise about 15% of

[9] The term African American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are of African descent, the subject of this study.

college students in general (Department of Education, 2012) and about 14% of high school graduates (Department of Education, 2014). African American high school graduates are increasingly attending postsecondary college and universities, but largely in fields other than nursing. In fact, enrollment of African American students in nursing has recently declined slightly (AACN, 2013; NLN, 2012). In addition, African Americans are less likely to successfully graduate from nursing programs than students from all other racial and ethnic groups (AACN, 2013).

Previous researchers have reported that many African American nursing students experience isolation, alienation, and perceived discrimination while in nursing school (Dapremont, 2014; Kegans, 2009; Payton et al., 2013; Robinson, 2013). Institutional support has been helpful for student success (Igbo, et al., 2011; Loftus & Duty, 2010; Tabi et al., 2013) though best practices have not been determined. According to the literature, family, friends, and faculty members can contribute to or detract from student success (Dapremont, 2011; Payton et al., 2013). However, no previous studies were reported with participants providing a retrospective view of their experiences (i.e. after they had become nurses) to capture how African American nurses understood nursing school and the meaning these experiences had for them.

The purposes of this study were to describe the experiences, and the meaning of those experiences had, for African American students who attended predominately European American[10] schools of nursing. Qualitative descriptive methods were used to analyze interviews of African American nurses who recently graduated from

[10] The term European American is used throughout this document to most accurately depict Americans who are from a variety of European descents.

predominately European American pre-licensure nursing programs. Fourteen recent graduates from six US states were interviewed. The specific aims of the study were to:

1. Shed new light on the experiences of African American nursing students in predominately European American schools of nursing.
2. Explore the understanding and significance of nursing school experiences for African American students.

Chapter four reported the analysis of interview data – a qualitative description of the experiences shared by participants. Chapter five contains a summary of the study, discussion of findings, implications for nursing education, limitations, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

Summary of the Study

The participants in this study were recruited from a population of African American nurses in the US using purposeful sampling. Snowball sampling extended the participant pool beyond those known to the research team or their colleagues. Following each interview, the participant was asked if he/she knew of someone who might be interested in participating in the study. The researcher requested that the participant share the study URL link with that person.

Participants were included in the study until data were saturated and the participants provided enough data to answer the research questions. A total of 14 participants were recruited and interviewed for this study. Data were collected from the participants by phone interviews at a time convenient to both participant and researcher. The semi-structured interviews lasted 30 to 70 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed into electronic Word documents by a professional transcriptionist. Using

thematic analysis, two salient themes emerged from the analysis of the fourteen interviews and are reported here: standing out and success is not just about me.

Discussion of Findings

Improving the diversity of the nursing profession has been a priority of the discipline of nursing for forty years. For example, Bessent and Fleming (2003) created an evidence based model for improving leadership skills in minority nurses. Some schools of nursing have improved the recruitment and success of African American students through mentoring, academic and social support, and communication skill instruction (Igbo et al., 2011; Swinney & Dobal, 2008, Tabi et al., 2013). Yet, African American students are still underrepresented students in schools of nursing and are less likely to successfully graduate compared to other races and ethnicities (AACN, 2013, 2014; NLN, 2012). Further understanding of the experiences of African American nursing students is important to enhance the efforts of faculty members and nursing program administrators to retain admitted African American students and to support their successful completion of the nursing program.

The stories shared in this study support previous research findings about how African American students experience standing out and not fitting into predominately European American nursing programs. Study participant stories also extend current knowledge, suggesting that the experiences of African American nursing students are complex and at times may appear dichotomous. Participants in this study shared experiences in which, because they stood out in a predominantly European American program, they sensed they were being watched and yet their comments and ideas were often ignored. Findings of this study also suggest that for participants (African American

nurses), being successful in a nursing program was not only an individual accomplishment. Rather, success was a reflection of and contribution to participants' families and communities, and in turn the influences of family and community on student success were great.

Standing Out

The theme standing out describes how participants felt conspicuous in their nursing program as a result of being African American. This theme suggests that when students are the only one, or one of a few, African American students in a nursing program, they stood out among their peers and felt that they were more obvious to others. Participants' experiences of standing out led them to sense their every word and action was being watched. Being watched refers specifically to unwanted attention, which participants understood as others expecting them to make a mistake or as an indication that others believed they didn't belong in the program. These findings are similar to those reported in a previous study of African American nursing students (Love, 2010) who commented that attending a predominately European American program was like "sitting on pins and needles (p. 346)." This is important for nursing program faculty members and administrators to understand because other researchers have reported that students who feel like they belong, or fit in, to the academic environment do better academically (Baber, 2012; Baker, 2013). Therefore, when African American students feel uncomfortable because they are different it can affect their grades and overall academic success. In addition to recruiting more African American students into nursing programs, faculty members and administrators need to evaluate their programs' cultural climate and readiness to welcome diversity (Terhune, 2006).

This study also furthered disciplinary understanding of the experience of standing out to include being ignored or *not* noticed. While at first glance it appears that being ignored is the opposite of being watched, in a class where the European American students are receiving attention, in fact, African American students can feel obvious and different when they are ignored or their contributions are not recognized or acknowledged. Both being watched and being ignored as African American students set them apart, made them feel less important or even targeted and not a part of the group. Researchers have previously reported that African American nursing students felt "otherness" (Coleman, 2008, p. 10) and less important than European American students (Payton et al., 2013). However, in this study participants' experiences of standing out were influenced by both acts of omission (being ignored) as well as acts of commission (being watched).

Participants also described experiences that reinforced their sense of standing out such as a class colleague refusing to return a greeting, "eye rolling", "sighing", and "dirty looks." Similar findings were reported by Robinson (2013) who reported how African American students experienced microaggressions such as eye rolling and sighing when contributing to class discussions. Microaggressions are brief verbal and behavioral indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to a racial group (Sue et al., 2007). Often the transgressors are unaware of the insult, however recipients are very aware of them and pervasive microaggressions have been shown to cause cumulative detrimental consequences (Sue, 2010). In this study, other forms of microaggressions were also apparent including not receiving a thorough answer to a question from a faculty member, having one's ideas ignored, and seeing other students sit

further away from African American students than other students in the class, which one participant likened to "standing in the corner" as a child. Understanding microaggressions, recognizing their presence, and intervening when they occur and/or mitigating them are important for nursing administrators, faculty and students. It is not enough to avoid racist practices as an individual, nursing faculty members need to take an overt stance against microaggressions and racial oppression overall with an understanding that incidents of covert and overt racism profoundly influences the experiences of African American students (Cortis & Law, 2005).

Laying low was a strategy participants described as important for future African American students to understand to be successful in a predominately European American nursing programs. Laying low meant that participants would sometimes just "be quiet", hang back from the conversation, or "stay under the radar." Prior researchers have not described the strategy participants in this study described as laying low. While laying low did not help participants feel like they belonged in the nursing program, it was a strategy they employed to feel less like the target of attention and therefore less vulnerable to criticism. In addition, laying low was a strategy for helping students focus on their work, which they believed also their fostered success. Understanding laying low as a survival strategy that participants used to be successful is important because it can easily be misunderstood by faculty who may interpret it as a lack of preparation for or engagement in class. Similarly, laying low may have inadvertent negative effects. For instance, laying low could keep students from speaking up in class, asking questions, seeking help with a problem, or pursuing connections or friendships with other students, and participating in study groups. But rather than mitigate students' abilities to "lay low"

(e.g., calling on students in class), recognizing laying low as a strategy used by African American students to avoid being a target of unwanted attention provides faculty with the opportunity to explore with African American students the reasons that laying low is needed. In other words, openly discussing laying low in the context of a particular course may help faculty better learn a) how to create learning environments in which African American students feel that they belong and that their contributions are valued and respected and b) to recognize the behaviors that make African American students feel targeted.

Being noticed was a strategy used by participants in response to standing out as an African American student in a predominately European American nursing program. Study participants sought to be noticed for their achievement, skill, work ethic, and extra-curricular interests. There is a difference between standing out merely due to their race and standing out because of their achievement. This is an important distinction for faculty members who interact with African American students because it highlights the importance of giving due attention to individual accomplishments rather than as a token gesture or on the basis of group characteristics.

It is common for African Americans to believe they need to work harder than European Americans for the same achievement and this belief was evident in the comments of study participants. However, study participants also described wanting to "outshine" other students and be noticed for their achievements. Seeking to be noticed through grades and extra-curricular activities has not been previously reported in the nursing literature. The importance of the subtheme being noticed is for faculty and administrators to understand how students experience the challenge of "having to work

twice as hard to be thought half as good." Again, this finding points to the importance of faculty and administrators recognizing African American students' achievements, both academic and extra-curricular, as an important component of supporting African American student success.

The theme "standing out" is supported in previous education and nursing literature (Gardner, 2005a; 2005b; Love, 2010, Paterson, Osborne & Gregory, 2004). Across this theme and subthemes, the importance of environments that are fair, safe and respectful resounded. In some cases, communication can clarify expectations between faculty and students to avoid misunderstandings and to call-out microaggressions and other discriminatory practices. Faculty should carefully design assigned group work to assure the contributions of all group participants are valued, and even required. Nursing faculty members also need to become self-reflective about their communication and practices to uncover insidious forms of discrimination so they can better create environments in which all students belong (Terhune, 2006). Faculty members' efforts to dismantle systemic European American hierarchy in their courses and school may benefit from focused efforts to identify discriminatory behaviors. For example, peer review can be one mechanism for faculty members to gain insight into practices such as not answering African American students' questions fully, or not giving equal feedback or guidance to African American students.

Success is Not Just About Me

The second theme reported in this study was "It's not just about me." The meaning of this theme highlights the influence of other people on participants' nursing school experiences. Participants shared that their success in nursing school was both an

acknowledgment of those African Americans who preceded them (whether successful or not) and as an example to those following. This is noteworthy because these influences were mostly outside the nursing program and university and rather in the community from which they came.

Participants told of being an example to younger siblings, children and others in order to "catapult our families into something greater." Success in nursing school was described by one participant as success "for everyone who carries my last name." In fact, when they became college educated graduates, participants readily acknowledged that they became role models for others. Study participants felt a responsibility to their families to be successful and believed their success was also a success for their family. These findings build on previous literature about African American students. Jeynes (2010) reported that parental expectations and support were powerful predictors of African American student success at the K-12 level. Similarly, Blackmon and Thomas (2014) and Neblett et al. (2006) described that parents were highly influential in the formation of social cultural norms for their African American college children which contributed to student success. African American parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education at home rather than participating in school events, and therefore the efforts often go unnoticed by European American educators and researchers (Auerbach, 2007). However, previous researchers have not described how families inspire, encourage, motivate, or support African American students toward academic success. Understanding the practical ways African American families can best support and encourage African American students is important for advisors who assist students learn how best to ask for and use their support systems including families.

Participants also described how the African American community further contributed to student success. Some participants wanted to help the community through nursing and others wanted to succeed on behalf of those African Americans who were not accepted into college or nursing school. Thus, participants' felt some responsibility to be successful on behalf of the African American community. When queried participants specified this responsibility served as a motivator, not a burden. They understood that nursing school was a privilege and an opportunity to move themselves and the community forward. These findings are new in the nursing literature.

For some participants in this study, being successful in nursing school was also about meeting the standards set by others in the community. When the participants knew other African Americans who had previously been successful either as college students or as nursing students, they in turn wanted to succeed because "I looked up to her" and they respected what others had done with their careers and as professionals. A few participants were taught by African American nursing professors which led them to strive to do their best in the course – to give their best effort in an effort to not let that professor down. Prior African American professionals paved the way for current students and set the bar for academic achievement. This finding is consistent with a study by Baker (2013) who found that African American women college students had higher grades when taking classes with professors who were of the same race than from professors who were a different race. Other researchers have reported that African American students would like more African American nursing faculty members (Mills-Wisneski, 2005; Payton et al., 2013). However, for many African American nursing students this is not an option. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2014) has acknowledged a

continued lack of full time nursing faculty members from minority backgrounds. The finding from this study adds to our understanding of the importance of African American nursing faculty members as role models and mentors for African American students.

Many participants also described a communal aspect to their nursing school experiences when they had other African American students in their class who provided further support and encouragement. Participants described how they both relied on and looked after the other African American students in the program to make sure they all would succeed. They also studied together, sometimes in mixed-race groups, working collectively toward the success of all the African American students. While previous researchers have reported African American nursing students forming friendship groups among themselves (Kosowski et al., 2001; Love, 2010), a communal commitment to the success of all African American students has not been previously reported. Findings from this study add to disciplinary knowledge about the importance of African American students working collaboratively as they progress through the nursing program. This finding helps nursing faculty members and administrators understand the importance of identifying ways to keep African American students together when making group assignments and creating other course activities. This may be even more important when there is a very low percentage of students who are African American.

Participants also relied on other students at higher program levels and others from the African American community outside of the nursing program. African American professionals were formal and informal mentors to participants, guiding their success in the nursing program and into their careers. African American groups on campus, at churches and at social events were further resources used by participants. Importantly

community mentors provided more than support and guidance through the program. They also assisted participants with problem solving academic and social problems during participants' time in school. Several participants described how they have maintained contact with their mentors after graduation. Drawing on mentors from outside the program has not been previously discussed in the nursing literature. Understanding the value that these participants attributed to these mentoring relationships offers new opportunities to facilitate mentor relationships and networks for students. This understanding can also guide faculty's curricular discussions, specifically related to how nursing curricula are often structured in a way that limits the ability for students to be involved in activities on the wider campus due to discipline specific courses and clinical experiences. In some programs, these experiences are geographically distant from the university campus, necessitating even greater efforts to leverage possible mentors for African American students from the broader community.

While the participants sought success for themselves and their families, their sense of community also led them to address the negative stereotypes they encountered about the African American community. For example, participants described how nursing school gave them the chance to discredit stereotypic beliefs about the (limited) academic abilities of African Americans. This finding is consistent with the literature which suggests that outperforming others is a common strategy employed by African American college students for disproving negative racial stereotypes and avoiding the threat of being stereotyped (Massey & Owens, 2013). Yet, the literature suggests that disproving stereotypes can also add overwhelming pressure and negatively impact the emotional health of some African American college students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007;

Shaves & Moore, 2014). Faculty members and advisors who interact with students throughout the nursing program are well positioned to assess the impact of disproving stereotypes and counsel students to examine issues of when and how to address stereotypes and how to use these efforts as healthy motivation for academic success. Importantly, the burden for addressing stereotypes cannot be the responsibility of minority students alone. Faculty members and administrators can create a more just environment in the school while limiting the burden on individual students. Engaging with the broader community of African American professionals may also support African American students' efforts to resist stereotypes and the accompanying historical oppression (Allen, 2006).

The theme it's not just about me and the subthemes it's about family and it's about community also highlight how participants strove to succeed as a representative of their family and the African American community. This finding is consistent with the literature which shows that African American college students perceived their individual achievements reflected back on the African American community (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), and that the African American community was source of encouragement and motivation for student success (France, Fields, & Garth, 2004). This is significant for faculty members and advisors in order to be aware of and to support students' efforts to draw on the support and encouragement of families and communities. Importantly, participants described how families and communities provided students with role models, and in turn, participants became role models for others in their families and communities. Participants described a communal aspect to learning for African American students beyond the friendships previously described in the nursing literature as well as the

responsibility to use their nursing skills to address the healthcare needs of their communities. Further exploring ways faculty can facilitate the communal connections among African American students and between students and the larger community is important for faculty to learn when and how to leverage these in the service of student success and the disciplinary goal to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce.

Implications for Nursing Education

These findings are important because only 6% of registered nurses in the US are African American, enrollment of African American nursing students has recently declined, and African American students are less likely to persist to graduation compared to students of other ethnicities (AACN, 2013; AACN, 2014; Budden et al., 2013). Further understanding of the experiences of African American nursing students is needed to shed new light on this persistent issue in nursing so that faculty members and program administrators can develop new strategies for recruiting and retaining African American nursing students and create fair and respectful learning environments.

Faculty members who teach African American students need to negotiate between watching students to assure safety while understanding cultural variations in perceptions of behaviors. Speaking frankly with African American students about what to expect during nursing school may clarify the purpose of watching their performance. However, nursing faculty members and program administrators need to examine their current practices to assure all students are treated fairly and respectfully. Implicit biases are unintentional and unconscious, thus requiring intentionality in order to for them to be illuminated (Boscardin, 2015). As previously mentioned, peer review may be one strategy faculty members can employ to examine if their current practice advantages

some students over others (such as providing more complete answers and/or feedback to some students) or tolerates microaggressions or other forms of oppression during classroom or clinical experiences. In addition, having difficult discussions about race in nursing education and practice is important for both students and faculty in schools of nursing. Experts in race-relations, anti-racist pedagogy, communication and/or conflict management may be useful to assure such discussions are productive, thoughtful, and sensitive to different perspectives. Faculty development programs and faculty learning groups may also be helpful for faculty members seeking to engage students in discussions about race in nursing education and practice and to devise strategies for calling out and mitigating microaggressions and other discriminatory practices.

Families are clearly important to many successful students. Exploring ways that nursing faculty members and programs can most effectively involve this support system in African American students' education and coach students on how to effectively use this support is important. For instance, coaching can assist students to learn how to better ask for help when needed, and equally important how to say no to requests that exceed their time and ability. Students and families can share effective strategies for navigating the challenges of attending college and for celebrating collective successes.

The participants in this study frequently shared accounts of how African American students helped each other be successful in nursing programs. This finding draws attention to the need for nursing programs to continue to recruit a critical mass of African American students to decrease these students' experiences of standing out and to provide a cohort of students with whom African American students can connect. Mentoring programs such as the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nursing

Associations (NCEMNA), the ANA Minority Fellowship Program, and the Leadership Enhancement and Development Project have successfully promoted ethnic diversity in nursing (Bessent & Fleming 2003; Minority Fellowship Program, 2010; NCEMNA, 2012).

Nursing program faculty members and administrators can use creative solutions to connect African American students with community support and mentoring. Suggestions from study participants include African American student groups on campus, campus student mentoring programs, and professional mentors in the local business or professional community. African American professionals from the surrounding community can meet with students to interact socially, provide advice and encouragement, and celebrate their success as they proceed through the program. Campus African American groups can organize culturally relevant service activities with African American students such as voter registration drives, community clean up initiatives, and service learning opportunities to incorporate community into student experiences. The goal of these efforts is to build a learning community that fosters caring and success for African American students. Although European American faculty members can be effectively engaged with African American students and groups, having African American mentors is important for students who stand out as different in a program.

Nursing faculty members and administrators need to evaluate their programs for a European American context and consider altering practices and policies to provide a multicultural context using feedback from African American students to identify opportunities for creating multicultural practices. Nursing education programs need to move toward a holistic model of including African American students. Further, cultural

sponsors could be made available for African American students who are experiencing difficulties. Such sponsors, available through the school or university, can help struggling students negotiate the academic system and advocate on their behalf when matters of cultural differences arise. Nursing curricula could include coursework about minority ethnic cultures, historic European American dominance, and anti-racist efforts as a requirement for all students.

This current study showed that involvement with extra-curricular activities provided a way for African American students to be noticed for positive achievement and involvement outside of class. Service learning (particularly in African American communities), student organizations, and volunteer opportunities can promote a sense of community for African American students and may promote a sense of belonging in the nursing program. Further, faculty can explore ways in which African American students can raise other students' and the community's understanding of race-linked diseases and disparities, effective ways to communicate with patients from different cultures, and the ways nurses can provide and promote culturally sensitive care.

Limitations

First and foremost, a limitation of this study is that the researcher is a European American woman investigating the experiences of African American nurses. While two members of the researcher's dissertation committee were African Americans, it is possible that the stories and the implied meaning of the experiences participants shared were missed because of the racial/cultural difference between researcher and participants. In addition, it is possible that the questions the researcher asked during the interviews

missed salient points of the experience being shared by the experiences or opportunities for probing were inadvertently overlooked.

Recruitment through a convenience sample is a limitation because the sample may not reflect the same characteristics of the overall population of African American students or nurses. Consistent with qualitative approaches to inquiry, the researcher makes no claims to represent all African American nursing students and/or all schools of nursing. For example, no African American men volunteered to participate and no participants from Historically Black Colleges and Universities volunteered or were specifically recruited. The study is further limited by demographics that were not queried but may have influenced the participants' experiences. Another limitation of this study is that while the researcher noted the similar experiences of these African American participants, the researcher may not have uncovered the diverse needs within this group of participants, unless expressly shared during the interview. The findings are also limited because the participants were interviewed only once and therefore the researcher was unable to ask for clarification or follow up during data analysis. Also, the perspective of the nursing faculty members for these participants was not pursued. Lastly, this study was limited to the experiences of those students who successfully completed nursing school. Accounts from students who were not successful in nursing education programs could shed more light on the experiences of African American students.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study described the experiences of African American nursing students who successfully completed nursing school in predominately European American programs.

Further research is needed to learn about the experiences of students who did not persist to graduation. Such research would advance disciplinary knowledge about experiences that may have contributed to students leaving nursing school and the strategies that can be employed to mitigate non-persistence. Importantly, empirical studies investigating the specific characteristics and experiences that contribute to the persistence of African American students are needed.

This study also introduced the concept of laying low by African American nursing students as a survival strategy to foster success. However, further investigation is needed to explicate if, when and how laying low is an effective strategy for African American students, the implications for different faculty responses, and implications for learning. The double- edged sword of wanting to be noticed for individual accomplishments but not noticed for race identification warrants further study to determine the best practices for recognizing African American nursing students. Further research is needed to examine faculty practices and illuminate areas of implicit bias. For instance, when students report the need to lay low, it would be helpful to know teaching practices that contributing to the need to lay low. Examining the extent of implicit bias with nursing program assessment would help document the extent of implicit bias in particular nursing programs and track trends of progress (or lack thereof) in addressing issues of microaggressions and other oppressive practices.

Future research is needed to describe the experiences of nursing faculty members and the learning outcomes achieved when teaching African American students, to identify best practices for engaging African American students, how these practices can best be learned and implemented, and the learning outcomes that result from these

practices. Further research is also need to identify specific ways faculty can create for fair and respectful learning environments for African American students and ways to develop the communication skills to have difficult discussions about race in nursing programs.

Participants described the importance of the African American community during their nursing school experiences, yet there are no studies that describe students who choose to serve the African American community during or after graduation. Further it is not known if, and the extent to which graduating more African American nurses will increase culturally appropriate care in health systems or the care available in underserved African American communities. Last, additional research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of strategies that draw on the wider African American community into supporting African American students during their nursing school experiences.

Conclusions

A racially diverse workforce is needed to serve the needs of an increasingly racially diverse client population. The nursing profession is dependent on nursing pre-licensure programs to recruit, retain, and graduate African American students to improve workforce diversity. There are currently too few African American students graduating from pre-licensure programs for the profession to accurately reflect the racial demographics of the US population.

This study used qualitative descriptive methods with phone interviews to shed new light on the experiences of African American nursing students. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in two salient themes: standing out and success is not just about me. Standing out describes how participants felt like they stood out among their peers and were obvious in the class of European American students. Participants

shared that standing out included experiences of being watched and being ignored. Participants used laying low and being noticed as strategies to deal with standing out. In addition, participants shared that nursing school success was not just about them. Family and community were critical elements for their success as inspiration, motivation, support, and encouragement, and were benefactors when participants successfully graduated. Participants were also vested in the success of other African American students and some were committed to using their nursing skills to improve the health of their community.

Despite years of attention and progress, the nursing profession still needs to attract and retain a more diverse workforce, and a diverse nursing workforce begins in schools of nursing. This study explored the experiences the African American nursing students. The themes of being noticed and success is not just about me offer new knowledge and promise for schools, faculty, administrators and students to design and implement new interventions to improve the culture of schools of nursing and the success of more African American students. Findings also suggest that improving the retention and success of more African American students in predominantly European American nursing programs, and thus the diversity of the nursing workforce, belies a simple solution or single change in pedagogy. Creating dialogue among teachers and students in nursing programs, the wider university community and stakeholders in the surrounding community where issues and assumptions about race and the experiences of African American students and the patients they serve can be explored is an important first step.

Appendix A

Electronic Recruitment Script

Have you ever wanted to share your nursing experiences with someone? Want to give a "heads up" to future students? Tell them what it was really like? This is your opportunity! A PhD nursing student is looking for recently graduated nurses to talk about their experiences. If you want to know more, click on the link below to take you to study information and directions. If you choose to participate, and you qualify, you will receive a $20.00 Amazon appreciation gift card.
https://iu.box.com/s/kws3uguq12tupyepwa8rz6g2xidda4v8

Appendix B

Study Information Sheet

IRB STUDY #1506878676

INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

The Experiences of African American Nursing Students: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of being an African American nursing student recently. You were invited and selected for this study because you identify yourself as African American and graduated from a predominately White, pre-licensure program in the last ten years**.** We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Barbara White, MSN, RN (co-investigator), a doctoral student Indiana University School of Nursing, under the supervisor of Pamela Ironside, PhD, RN, FAAN, ANEF (Principle Investigator), a Professor at Indiana University School of Nursing.

If you agree to study participation, then please follow this link https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NCH55FQ or this QR code to complete the screening questions and provide an email contact to schedule an interview.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purposes of this study are to describe nurses' experiences of being African American students in European American (White) programs and the meaning those experiences had for them.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be interviewed over the phone by the co-investigator about your experiences while in nursing school. The interview will last about 1 hour and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you.

You will give yourself a pseudonym (fictitious) name in order to keep your true identity confidential. The only identifying information that will be requested by the co-investigator and interviewer will be an email address that can by used to contact you to set up the interview date and time. The interview will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the research team. The focus of the interview will be your experiences of nursing school, and the meaning of those experiences, as an African American nursing student who attended a predominately White school of nursing.

The recordings will be transcribed by a transcription service. Personal demographic information that could identify you will be removed from the transcript and not used in analysis or dissemination. Transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinets.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. Research records may be disclosed if required by law. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) who may need to access your medical and/or research records.

RISKS

Participants may feel discomfort with the recall of difficult moments experienced in nursing school. To minimize this, the researcher will give participants permission to end the interview, or pause it at any time as the participant wishes. In addition, interviews can become emotionally exhausting for participants so the interviews will be limited to one hour.

BENEFITS

Participants may benefit from the opportunity to share their experiences with an attentive listener. In addition, participants may benefit from contributing to improving the experiences of future African American nursing students.

PAYMENT

You will receive at $20.00 Amazon gift card for taking part in this study. The gift card will be emailed to an email address provided by you following the interview.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For questions about the study, contact the investigator Pamela Ironside, PhD, RN, FAAN, ANEF at pamirons@iu.edu or (XXX) XXX-XXXX or the co-investigator Barbara White, MSN, RN at whitebj@iusb.edu or (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (317) 278-3458 or (800) 696-2949.

If you agree to study participation, then please follow this link https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NCH55FQ or this QR code to complete the screening questions and provide an email contact to schedule an interview.

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Zuzelo, P. (2005). Affirming the disadvantaged student. *Nurse Educator*, *30*(1), 27-31.

Curriculum Vitae

Barbara Jean White

Education

Indiana University Ph.D. in Nursing Indianapolis, IN	2013-2016
Loyola University Chicago Ph.D. Coursework Chicago, IL	2009-2012
Bethel College Master of Science in Nursing Mishawaka, IN	2004-2008
Marquette University Bachelor of Science in Nursing Milwaukee, WI	1977-1981

Awards

NRC of North Central Indiana $1,500.00 Research Grant	2015
NLN Jonas $6000.00 Scholarship	2014
Spotlight on Nursing $5000.00 Scholarship	2014
Indiana League for Nursing $1000.00 Scholarship	2014
Alpha Sigma Nu Jesuit Honor Society Induction	2011
Sigma Theta Tau Nursing Honor Society Induction	2007
Nursing 2000 North Central Scholarship	2005
American Association of Critical Care Nurses Scholarship	2005

Professional Academic Experience

Clinical Lecturer Indiana University South Bend South Bend, IN	2009-Present
Visiting Assistant Professor Saint Mary's College Notre Dame, IN	2008-2009
Nursing Instructor Southwestern Michigan College Dowagiac, MI	2007-2008

Professional Academic Experience (Continued)

Adjunct Clinical Faculty 2004-2007
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN

Professional Clinical Nursing Experience

Staff Nurse 2011-2013
A Rosie Place Respite Hospital
South Bend, IN

Pediatric Transport Coordinator 1990-2007
Memorial Hospital of South Bend
South Bend, IN

Pediatric Critical Care Staff Nurse 1985-1990
St. Joseph Medical Center
South Bend, IN

Pediatric Staff Nurse 1984-1985
St. Joseph Community Hospital
Mishawaka, IN

Pediatric Staff Nurse 1981-1984
Milwaukee Children's Hospital
Milwaukee, WI

Courses Taught

Indiana University South Bend 2009-2015
Nursing Care of Children and Their Families Didactic
Nursing Care of Children and Their Families Clinical
Nursing Capstone Clinical
Nursing Management Practicum
Dynamics of Family Health

Saint Mary's College 2008-2009
Child Health Nursing Didactic
Child Health Nursing Clinical

Southwestern Michigan College 2007-2008
Nursing Care of Children Didactic
Nursing Care of Children Clinical
Pediatric Nursing for the LPN Didactic
Pediatric Nursing for the LPN Clinical

Publications

White, B.J. & Fulton, J.S. (2015) Common Experiences of African American Nursing Students: An Integrative Review. *Nursing Education Perspectives*: 36, 3, 167-175.

Kouba, J., Velsor-Friedrich, B., Militello, L., Harrison, P., Becklenberg, A., White, B., Surya, S, and Ahmed, A. (2012). Efficacy of the I Can Control Asthma and Nutrition Now (ICAN) Pilot Program on Health Outcome in High School Students With Asthma. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 1-13. doi 10.1177/1059840512466110.

Presentations

Diabetic Ketoacidosis in Children 2014 Pinwheel Symposium Memorial Children's Hospital	2014
The Experiences of African American Nursing Students Nursing Research Consortium North Central Indiana South Bend, IN	2014
Pediatric Diabetes, *Caring for our Sweet Kids* Memorial Hospital South Bend, IN	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013

Guest Lectures

Pediatric Nursing Review, IUSB 8th Semester Students	2011, 2012, 2014, 2015

Professional Development for Teaching

UCET: Introduction to Canvas	2014
UCET: Canvas for Nursing	2014
IUSB: Assessment Study Hall	2014
UCET: Beyond the Basics of Canvas	2014
IUSB: Assessment Workshop Barbara Walvoord	2014
National League for Nursing Academic Leadership Excellence: Creating Inclusive Environments	2014
National League for Nursing and Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Education Research Conference	2014
Nurse Tim, Inc.: Blueprinting and Test Item Writing	2014
National League for Nursing Education Summit	2014
SoTL: High Impact Practices	2014
UCET: Beyond the Basics of PowerPoint	2013
UCET: Weave Online Training	2012
IUSB: Assessment Bootcamp	2012
Incorporation of Genetic/Genomic Content into MSN Curriculum	2012

Professional Development for Teaching (Continued)

IN State Board of Nursing Professional Licensure and Disciplinary Issues	2012
National League for Nursing and Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Education Research Conference	2012
American Association of Colleges of Nursing Integrating Evidence-Based Practice in Your Curriculum	2011
American Association of Colleges of Nursing Interpreting Test and Item Analysis Data	2011
American Association of Colleges of Nursing Transforming Teaching to Transform Nursing Education	2011
IUSB: Assessing Your Assessment Pan and Interpreting Assessment Data	2011
UCET: Using Turnitin to Promote Academic Integrity	2011
American Association of Colleges of Nursing Teaching Students How to Teach Patients	2011
TEACH: Writing Effective Test Questions	2011
American Association of Colleges of Nursing	2010
Developing Critical Thinking and Reasoning Skills	2010
IUSB Nursing: EHR for Teaching (Cerner Software)	2010
American Association of Colleges of Nursing Teaching and Evaluation	2010
UCET End of Course Evaluations	2010
UCET Preparing annual reports	2009
UCET OnCourse CL	2009

Professional Development for Clinical Practice

MNRS 2016 Annual Conference	2016
SPN Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect	2016
Inaugural Shields Lecture: Nursing Theory	2015
Society of Pediatric Nurses: Measles, Rubella, Pertussis	2015
Society of Pediatric Nurses 25th Annual Conference	2015
American Nurses Association: Navigating Diversity in Nursing Practice	2012
Educational Review Systems: Confronting the Challenges of Pediatric Medication Safety	2011
American Nurses Association: Lead From Where You Stand	2011
Implementing Evidence-Based Nursing Practice	2011
Ruth K Palmer Research Symposium: Vulnerable Populations	2010
Certified Pediatric Nurse	2009-Present

Service to the University

Men in Nursing Student Group Faculty Advisor	2013-Present
Nursing Library Committee	2012-Present
Search and Screen Nursing Faculty Positions (2)	2012

Service to the University (Continued)

IUSB Faculty Senate Nominating Committee	2011
IUSB Majors Fair	2011
Search and Screen Nursing Secretary Position	2011
IUSB Prospective Students on Campus	2011
Search & Screen Dental Hygiene Faculty	2010
IUSB Assessment Committee	2010-2013
Nursing Assessment Committee	2010-Present
Chair	2014-Present
Nursing Faculty Affairs Committee Member	2009-2014
IUSB Health and Wellness Flu Shot Clinic	2009, 2012, 2013

Service to the Profession

Nursing Research Consortium NCI-President	2013-2015
NRC Board Member	2010-Present

Service to the Community

A Rosie Place Respite Hospital For Medically Fragile Children South Bend, IN	2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014
St. Joseph County Immunization Day Harrison School South Bend, IN	2010
Hope Ministries Meal Coordinator St. Bavo Parish South Bend, IN	2004-Present

Professional Memberships

American Black Nurses Association	2015-Present
American Assembly for Men in Nursing	2014-Present
American Nurses Association	2011-Present
Nursing Research Consortium-North Central Indiana	2010-Present
Nursing Research Consortium-North Central Indiana President	2013-Present
Midwest Nursing Research Society	2009-Present
Society of Pediatric Nurses	2008-Present
Sigma Theta Tau Nursing Honor Society	2007-Present
National League for Nursing	2006-Present
American Academy of Pediatrics Affiliate Member	1995-2012