

# Is Perceived Racism a Barrier to Career Advancement in Nursing? Black Nurses' Perspectives

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## Introduction

- The enrollment and graduation of ethnic minority individuals has increased over the past decade, however, that has not translated into increased representation in nursing leadership or academia.
- AS the United States (US) racial landscape is becoming more diverse, the continued lack of ethnic minority in nursing leadership or academic positions remains a matter of concern.
- Education, discrimination, opportunity biases, and differential expectations are cited as factors discouraging Black Nurses (BN) from seeking or remaining in leadership or faculty positions.
- The paucity of existing studies prevent a good understanding of the barriers affecting BNs advancement to leadership and faculty positions in nursing.
- As nursing works to increase to representation of ethnic minorities in nursing leadership and education, it is imperative to examine and understand the factors that contribute to lack of Black nurses' representation in leadership and academia.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to:

- Examine how the perception of racism or racial bias by Black Nurses impede their motivation to seek and apply for nursing leadership and faculty positions, and
- Identify other perceived barriers that prevented Black nurses from moving forward with careers in academia or nursing leadership.

## Methodology

- A focused ethnographic study of 30 Black Nurses from various practice setting was conduction.
- Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection.
- Central Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided permission for the study.
- Each participant was assigned a pseudonym used throughout the study.
- Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants..
- Thematic data analysis was performed using Burnard and colleagues' method.
- Demographics of the participants:
  - Female: N = 26
  - Male: N = 4
  - Ages: 27 – 65 years
  - Years of nursing experience: 5 – 40 years
  - Bachelors degree: N = 13
  - Masters Degree: N = 12
  - Doctoral Degree: N = 5

## Results and Findings

- The result revealed interesting findings regarding opportunities, expectations, practice environment, perceived current leadership performance, and resilience emerged from the nurses' narratives of their experiences of racism on the job.
- The themes are clustered under 5 major themes and several subthemes.
  - Discrimination and stereotyping;
  - Nursing while black;
  - Fear;
  - Perceived leadership dynamics;
  - Resilience and Disillusionment.
- Although five themes were identified, four were established in the literature, and one – Nursing Leadership Dynamics (NLD) – was novel. A complex network of NLDs that served to both prevent the success of BAANs as well as threaten their job security and health was identified.

Discrimination and stereotyping

"When you are judged by your skin color, when someone questions everything you do, or when your peers don't think you are smart enough, you feel like you need to apologize for your skin color, for being black and for invading their space."

Nursing while black

"I did not bring that to my nurse manager, I was afraid she will not believe me anyway. ... She doesn't care much about me and she did not hide it. She doesn't even make eye contact with me." "sometimes I feel like I have to change who I am to be accepted."

Fear

"It can be a little difficult to speak up at times because you're black, because ... you know that your position is not as secure as somebody else's." "I am afraid of the close scrutiny, constant judgement and lack of support."

Perceived leadership dynamics

"...you are not a good fit, or you are not the right fit for this unit." That is the catch phrase for "you are not white enough and you don't belong here." "My nurse manager is not supportive of Black nurses on the unit especially when it comes to recognition."

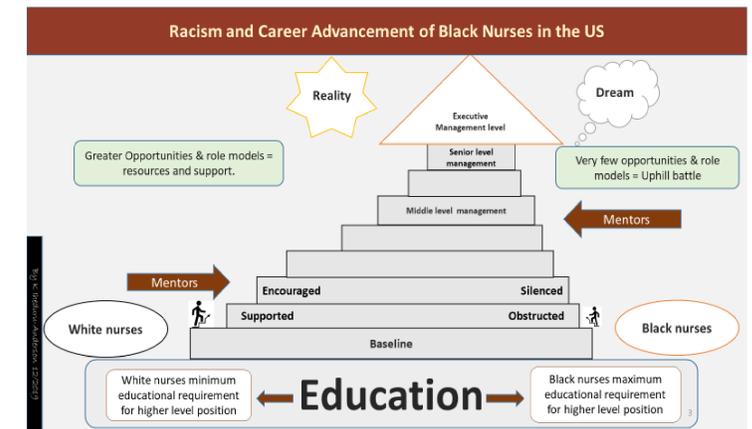
Resilience and Disillusionment

"The daily racism and discrimination I face in this profession is discouraging and demoralizing to be honest ... But I'm not going to let that stop me." "Sometime I want to give up, but I won't... I keep trying but it is very hard.."

Themes	Subthemes				
Discrimination and Stereotyping (DS)	Name impacts opportunity	Accent impacts opportunity	Disrespect	No apologies for being black and a nurse	
Nursing while Black (NB)	Targeting black identity	Pressure to conform	Different rules and standards for different people	Low expectations	
Fear	Fear of job loss	Silenced	Vindictive scheduling, Playing defense performance appraisal		
Nursing Leadership Dynamics (NLD)	Failure to fairly consider black nurse candidates	Lack of managerial and leadership support	Not the right fit	Racism is a "black people's problem"	Paying lip service to diversity and inclusion
Resilience and Disillusionment (RD)	They can't stop me	Why bother?	Turning a blind eye to discrimination	Black people have diluted voice	Interest in maintaining the status quo

## Discussion

- The Nursing Leadership Dynamics is the most significant and new finding from this study. They are comprised of a complex network of beliefs, social actions, strategies, and maneuvers that work together to prevent many of the participants from advancing their careers.
- Racist norms are embedded in the concepts of "professional" and "nurse leader" that contradict Black/African American nurses' identity
- These factors discussed above led to loss of confidence which in turn limited the aspiration for advancement to leadership.
- Many of the nurses reported that if offered the opportunity and support, all of them would have accepted the challenges of leadership/faculty role.
- This study also revealed that although many participating nurses who experienced racism went back to graduate schools, they were disappointed to realize that these advanced degrees did not help to improve their chances for career advancement.
- Findings suggest that nurses are reluctant to discuss racism in the profession. But many of the participants felt that their race and ethnicity were barriers to career advancement.



## Implication for Nursing

- Advancement of Black nurses to leadership and faculty roles is vital for the nursing profession as well as addressing issues of health disparity in Black people in the U.S.
- Institutionalized racism in nursing is a major problem that must be addressed. It remains a cultural concept seldom discussed in nursing.
- It is critical that nursing continue to work diligently to reverse the antiquated trend of black underrepresentation in the nursing leadership and academia.
- More studies are needed to assess factors that impede the advancement of Black nurses' to leadership and faculty positions.

## Conclusion

- Although black nurses are motivated to seek leadership position, perceived unequal performance expectations and employment bias decreased their motivation to seek these positions.
- Institutionalized racism in nursing is a major problem that must be addressed.
- Institutional racism remains a cultural concept seldom discussed in nursing . It is critical that nursing continue to work diligently to reverse the antiquated trend of black underrepresentation in the nursing leadership and academia.
- Further studies are needed to assess black nurses' perception and motivation to seek leadership and faculty position.
- This study identified a multi-faceted, tightly-woven system of NLDs that serves to continually institutionalize and enforce a white/black hierarchy and white supremacy in nursing at all levels in the US, including education.

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