

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
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BLACK UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM
AND RACIALIZED INCIDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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BLACK UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM
AND RACIALIZED INCIDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
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Abstract

This qualitative, single case study examined Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism and racialized incidents while attending a predominantly white institution. Guided by Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992, Ladson-Billings, 1998) the research questions were: (1) What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a predominantly white institution? (2) How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution? and (3) What strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution? Data analyzed included documents from the national, local, and university level, a demographic survey, and two 60–90-minute individual interviews with eight Black undergraduate nursing students from a large predominantly white institution (Robinson University) in the Midwest. The documents revealed Robinson University's history with addressing or ignoring racism and racialized incidents. The findings were displayed through personal narrative summaries regarding participants' experiences with racism. The findings revealed what strategies Black undergraduate nursing students use to handle racism and racialized incidents. These strategies include isolation, feelings of fear and worry, and determination. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are offered.

Dedication

Late Pastor Jesse Woodfork Jr.: you were that first person to teach me about God, His son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. You taught me about an everlasting love, that same love would love me when I didn't know how to love myself. My faith is rooted in what I learned from hearing you teach, preach, and live the Word of God. I'm thankful that you baptized me. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Late Claudie King (pawpaw): you were a hard worker, a miracle, faithful, an awesome girl dad, loving, an encourager, firefighter, you always told me "I'm the smartest girl", strong leader that led with actions (not many words), that demonstrated love, bravery, and wisdom.

Late Ernestine Chappel (grandma): taught and showed me humility, sacrifice, how to carry myself with dignity and grace, and the power of a mother's love. You were the heart of our family. You always encouraged me to be the best, to be kind, and to cherish loved ones.

Late Douglas Chappel: who taught me there is no such thing as a "box" and that I could do whatever I wanted to do. To not worry about other people's thoughts or opinions because I have my own mind for a reason. You told me to believe in myself and make sure I'm making decisions based on my personal aspirations and goals. You lived a life of strength, authenticity, fight, love, and courage.

Late Rosie Woodfork (mawmaw): the epitome of elegance, you always reminded me who and whose I was, how to carry myself in character and appearance with class, respect, and dignity. You taught me to keep Christ first in my life, let Him direct my path, and hide His word in my heart. You encouraged me and reminded me that God will never leave or forsake me.

Jesse Chappel (grandpa): you are a hard worker, provider, builder, teacher, and farmer. You taught me how to pray “Lord make us true, humble and thankful, taught me how to fish, could answer any question, taught me the power animals/nature, made me my first cup of coffee, taught me the most important thing in life was to love and follow Christ, and supplied endless ice cream and candy.

Fannie King (memaw): you showed and continue to show me the meaning of independence, strength, and how to stand up for yourself; taught me to cook, dining etiquette, and how to count money. You exemplify strength, boldness, a woman who worked and took care of her home, not afraid to speak your mind, and what has lived unapologetically from day 1...PERIOD!

My son, Samuel Claudie/My daughter, Pearl: I’ve prayed for you, fasted for you, cried for you, and hoped for you. I prayed that God would remember me just as He did for Samson’s mother, Rachel, and Hannah. I pray that you will grow up and have the desire to accept Christ in your life and follow His lead. The Lord told me that you will bring love and light to all those you encounter. That you would be a pleasure to raise. That you would not bring shame to me as your mother. I thank God for you and the miracle you are. You are my motivation; this is for you! To help provide the life you deserve filled with love, peace, provision, guidance, wisdom and knowledge, culture, joy, and laughter. Every time I wanted to quit; you wouldn’t let me! I named you Samuel because you were “asked of God” and “heard by God”.

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I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Phillipians 4:13

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. Exodus 14:13-14

And we know that all things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1-2

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8

As for God, his way is perfect; The word of the Lord is tried: He is a buckler to all them that trust in him. God is my strength and power: And he maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: And setteth me upon my high places 2 Samuel 2:31,33-34

He will fulfill the desire to them that fear him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them. Psalm 145:19

These scriptures held me in the moments when I wanted to quit, when I wanted to walk away. The Word of God was life and strength to me, all my life, including giving me the enduring power to complete this program.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Understanding Racialized Incidents and Injustices against Black People.....	2
The Experiences of Black Undergraduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions	4
Understanding Issues of Race and Racism in Nursing	6
Understanding Black Undergraduate Students Experiences with Racialized Incidents	7
Purpose Statement.....	9
Significance of the Study	11
Research Questions	16
Definitions and Key Terms.....	17
Research Positionality Statement.....	18
Methodology	20
Overview of Case Study Research.....	20
Description of Case.....	21
Participants and Sampling.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Chapter Summary	25
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	27
Beginning of Racism in the United States	27
Racism in Higher Education	30
Black Nursing Student Experiences with Racism in Healthcare Education.....	34
Black Nurses Experiences with Racism in the Professional Healthcare Setting.....	35
Blacks' Experiences in Healthcare Education and the Healthcare System	36
Racialized Incidents on Predominantly White Institutions Campuses	39
Black Student Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions and Racial Trauma.....	42
Institutional Responses to Racialized Incidents.....	46
Theoretical Framework.....	49
Applying Critical Race Theory	57
Chapter Summary	60
Chapter 3: Methods.....	62

Critical Race Theory	63
Researcher Positionality.....	65
Research Design.....	67
Historical Context of Case Study Location	69
Historical Experiences of Black People in Colvin.....	70
Higher Education in Relation to Historical Experiences of Black People in Colvin.....	72
Description of Case.....	73
Racialized Incidents at Robinson University	80
Data Collection	83
Participant Sampling.....	83
Demographic Survey	85
Interviews.....	85
Documents	87
Data Analysis	89
Document Analysis.....	89
Analysis of Interviews	93
Coding the Data	93
Trustworthiness.....	98
Ethical Issues	99
Chapter Summary	99
Chapter 4: Findings.....	101
Document Analysis.....	102
Themes.....	103
It Happened Again: Historical Perspectives on the Permanence of Racism	103
Understanding Institutional and Administrative Actions	105
Same Words, Same Actions: A Path Forward.....	108
Narrative Summaries	111
Narrative 1: Lemonte	113
Narrative 2: Sasha	115
Narrative 3: Lela	117
Narrative 4: Beulah	118
Narrative 5: April.....	120
Narrative 6: Nicole.....	121
Narrative 7: Eve	123
Narrative 8: Ruthie.....	124
Themes.....	126
Theme 1: Determination and Grit	126
Theme 2: Decision to Isolate to Protect Oneself	131
Theme 3: Fear and Worry of What May Happen Next	135

Chapter Summary	138
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion	140
Racism in Nursing.....	142
Colorism.....	144
Legislation.....	145
Institutional Responses	146
Racism is Endemic.....	147
Isolation for Protection	148
The Toll of Racism	149
Implications for Practice	150
Assist Black Students with Determination and Grit	150
Addressing Issues of Isolation for Black Nursing Students.....	151
Addressing the Feelings Fear and Worry when Dealing with Experiences with Racism ..	152
Examine and Remove	153
Racist Policies and Practices.....	153
Institutional Responses Strategies.....	155
How to Handle the Same Words and Same Actions.....	156
Implications for Future Research.....	158
Conclusion	159

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Demographics	84
Table 2: Documents.....	88

Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	186
Appendix B: Recruitment Email.....	187
Appendix C: Demographic Survey and Interview Protocol.....	188

Chapter 1: Introduction

Predominantly white institutions (PWI) seemingly serve as a breeding ground for racial tension among students. This can be related to “external forces and the events of the past decade [that] have helped to make these unresolved issues more salient” (Hurtado, 1992, p. 541). These external forces include “events that signaled the questioning of affirmative action practices, declining federal commitment to issues that affect minorities, renewed Ku Klux Klan activity, and increasing racial discord in urban communities” (Hurtado, 1992, p. 541). This occurs due to entrenched discriminatory policies and practices within American social institutions and the ongoing embrace of dominant culture while continuously devaluing Black culture and values (Coleman et al., 2012). In December 2023, racial slurs were shouted at Black basketball players from Norfolk State University, a HBCU, during a game at Illinois State University. Those who were found to be using racial slurs were removed from the game. The coach of Norfolk State stated, “I’m not letting anybody call my players a racial slur. Those are my kids, and I will fight for them. We have come too far in society to be called the N-word at a college basketball game” (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education [JBHE], 2023, para. 2). The number of racialized incidents specifically occurring at PWIs in the United States is on the rise.

The data shows that “between 2011 and 2016, the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) documented a 40 percent increase in campus hate crimes” (Nelson, 2019, para. 4). In 2020, 43 percent of campus bias incidents were based on race (Garces et al., 2022b). According to the U.S. Department of Education, “in 2020, of the more than 21,200 criminal incidents that occurred on the campuses of postsecondary institutions and were reported to police or security agencies, 571 incidents were classified as hate crimes” (Journal of Black in Higher Education

[JBHE], 2023, para. 2). These numbers illustrate how prevalent racialized incidents are at Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), especially toward Black students.

Understanding Racialized Incidents and Injustices against Black People

A racialized incident can be defined as campus hate or bias incidents that target marginalized individuals or groups (Briscoe, 2022). According to Hurtado (1992), “racial conflict was becoming commonplace on American college campuses throughout the 1980s, with more than one hundred college campuses reporting incidents of racial/ethnic harassment and violence in each of the last two years of the decade” (p. 539). Racialized incidents are common among PWIs across the United States (Griffin et al., 2010). Racialized incidents are a manifestation of a more deep-rooted issue, which is racism (Bell, 1995; Kelley, 2018a; Patel, 2015). More specifically regarding Black people, anti-Blackness is an expression of racism. Blackness is a socially constructed grouping of individuals in a society based upon skin color (Davis, 2001). Anti-Blackness is defined as “the beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviors of individuals and institutions that devalue, minimize, and marginalized the full participation of Black people” (Comrie et al., 2022, p. 74). Society and institutions oppress Black people through racism, “perpetuated through anti-Blackness within spaces” (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021, p. 52).

Anti-Blackness is a part of American history. Whether it is the systemic power held by white males, legislation designed to maintain power over Black people, or the ways society values “whiteness,” anti-Blackness is a present-day issue (Comrie et al., 2022). The rise of anti-Blackness is often attributed to the racist rhetoric from former President Trump and within his presidential campaign. According to Comrie et al., (2022),

Anti-Blackness impacts every aspect of our lives - from education to employment; housing to healthcare; access to transportation to the administration of our criminal legal system. Longstanding inequities across all these areas have combined to maintain the status quo over time and make it impossible for Black communities to compete or close the educational and wealth gap. These inequities are neither coincidental nor unconnected (pp. 76-77).

There has been a lack of attention on anti-Blackness in education. Anti-Blackness is reproduced within higher education through “institutional arrangements that enable Black subjugation (enslavement) and the extraction of labor from the Black body without engaging the body as a laborer, but as property (stereotypical narratives)” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 180).

Racism and exclusion were built into the foundation of higher education; from that stems manifestations of racism that we see today. Researchers suggest that overt racial conflict can no longer be seen as isolated incidents “but rather are indicators of a more general problem of unresolved racial issues in college environments and in society at large” (Hurtado, 1992, p. 540). Not only are racialized incidents common, but they also have a profound impact on the lives of Black students. Racialized incidents have been identified as a significant part of a Black students’ experience at PWIs (Allen, 1997; Patel, 2015). Numerous PWIs, “are said to prioritize white culture through an institutional culture that alienates Black students and makes them uncomfortable” (Bazana et al., 2017, p. 4). These biased practices are systemic in nature with the goal to maintain power and privilege for dominant culture population within the academy (Davis & Harris, 2016). Racism on campuses has become evident when, “white students, having absorbed years of indoctrination by families, peers, and mass media, come to the university with stereotypes about people different from themselves” (Davis et al., 2004, p. 422). This perspective

in particular is hard to rectify, but when attempting to tackle racialized incidents, this realization is essential.

I will be using the term Black, based on skin color, irrespective of culture or ethnicity (Sigelman et al., 2005). When referring to people of African descent as a collective group, capitalizing the “B” gives respect and dignity (Claybrook, 2021). Being Black is more than a descriptor, it is an identity. For this study, a Black person refers to a person belonging to a racial group, particularly of African origin with Black or brown skin (Claybrook, 2021). Race is a social construction (Bell, 1995). The social construction was “created to differentiate racial groups to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another” (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 159). In our current society, with the unrest among People of Color surrounding injustice, this sentiment is also reflected on higher education campuses across the country. I have chosen to focus on a specific PWI in this study due to the high number of racialized incidents that occurred against Black students. I want to bring to light the experiences of Black undergraduate nurses with racialized incidents. Other types of higher education institutions such as minority serving institutions (MSI) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have a strong cultural focus that supports diversity in which racial incidents are far less common (Patel, 2021). Also, for this study, the racialized incidents are referred to bias or racist acts toward Black people, with a focus on how racialized incidents affected undergraduate Black nursing students.

The Experiences of Black Undergraduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Black undergraduate students at predominantly white institutions often experience racism and discrimination. According to Dancy et al. (2018), “the history of U.S. higher education reflects a deep commitment to Black degradation as fundamental to the maintenance of a colonial order” (p. 177). There are many racialized practices within higher education that

produce “racialized educational environments and experiences within institutions” (Strunk et al., 2018, p. 62). While the majority of Black undergraduate students obtain their degrees from PWIs, these institutions can be marginalizing (Griffith et al., 2019). Marginalizing in that Black students are tasked with “working harder in effort to disprove or circumvent stereotypes” (Griffith et al., 2019, p.116). Black students attending a PWI must navigate being stared at, unfair treatment, and stereotypes (Griffith et al., 2019). These stereotypes come to be from a “systemic yet seemingly invisible process of racial priming [that] introduces white children to race-specific stereotypes about African Americans” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 561). According to Smith et al. (2007), “research continues to indicate troubling patterns of racial discrimination against Black university students occurring both in academic and social spaces” (p. 560). Racialized incidents are common among higher education institutions across the United States, particularly PWIs. Black students are often vulnerable to discrimination based on their race (Campbell et al., 2019). The literature tells us that Black students’ experiences at PWIs are different than their white counterparts. There are those in higher education that deny that racism exists or that Black students experience unequal education at all levels. But research is emerging to show that Black students’ outcomes are “demonstrably inequitable compared to their white peers” (Strunk et al., 2018, p. 62). Black students often make certain sacrifices during their time at a PWI to graduate and maintain their self-worth (Campbell et al., 2019). Thus, indicators of success should include degree attainment and an assessment of how a student feels at the end of the journey (Campbell et al., 2019). According to Givens (2016),

There has been a recent upsurge in political demonstrations by Black students around the country, calling attention to the lack of justice in the U.S. legal system for Black people

and exposing its relationship to the anti-Blackness that manifests within collegiate experiences (p. 55).

Black students at PWIs commonly lead racial justice demonstrations on campus (Hargons et al., 2022). When Black students engage in efforts to better campus climate or take a stand against structural racism, they are commonly confronted with backlash from the dominant culture (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Despite the frequency of racialized incidents, many Black students remain convinced that education is the ultimate tool for social advancement (Givens, 2016).

Unfortunately, racialized incidents continue to be a common occurrence in contemporary higher education institutions (Yao et al., 2021). This topic needs further investigation to open a dialogue between Black students and higher education about the importance of acknowledging experiences with racialized incidents. Higher education can use the information from this study to create a more inclusive learning environment for Black nursing students and for the Black student community as a whole. This aim is accomplished by acknowledging that experiences with racism and racialized incidents are prevalent, and learning how Black undergraduate nursing students engage in certain actions to deal with racism and racialized incidents while attending a PWI.

Understanding Issues of Race and Racism in Nursing

Nurses are the largest sector of the healthcare workforce (White et al., 2020). Within nursing, anti-Black racism is experienced by nursing students and working professional nurses (Caffrey et al., 2023). The prevalence of racism during nursing training and professional employment creates an unsafe and noxious environment for Blacks (Caffrey et al., 2023). In recent years, racism has been “declared a public health emergency” (Beard & Sanderson, 2022, p. 11). Prior research has shown that Black nursing students “reported feeling isolated, awkward,

and uncomfortable...[and]...excluded from important conversations and social groups” during their time attending a PWI nursing program (White et al., 2020, p. 157). The American Association of College of Nurses, in 2021, professed “making nursing education equitable and inclusive requires actively combating structural racism, systemic inequality, exclusion, and bias” (Beard & Sanderson, 2022, p. 12). This process involves acknowledging generational injustices and working to restructure nursing education in a more inclusive manner (Beard & Sanderson, 2022). Research has shown that Black nursing students experience racism at elevated levels (Caffrey et al., 2023).

Even after enduring racism during training, Black nurses continue to experience racism in the professional work setting, including excessive obligations to attend non-mandatory trainings, being disproportionately targeted for disciplinary actions, and being omitted from potential job opportunities, particularly those in management (Caffrey et al., 2023). Black nursing students often continue to encounter racism and/or discrimination in the workforce, from co-workers and patients (Joseph et al., 2021). For this reason, they offer a unique, underrepresented perspective on racism and its effects. Higher education is often presented as a time of discovery, fun, and purpose, but this is not always the case for Black students. Scholarship reveals that, “one cause for this disparity stems from the environment of PWIs, which are not supporting the personal, social, and cognitive development of Black students” (Campbell, 2016, p. 27). The environment at PWIs have established a culture where racialized incidents against Black learners are commonplace.

Understanding Black Undergraduate Students Experiences with Racialized Incidents

For Black students attending a PWI, the daily struggle with racism and racialized incidents often becomes the norm (Patel, 2015). Black students historically have been targets of

racism and discrimination in higher education (Campbell et al., 2019). Black students are still the minority in higher education (Grier-Reed, 2010). The constant toil of combating racism and racial trauma from racialized incidents impacts Black students psychologically, emotionally, and physically. According to Griffith et al. (2019), “isolated and cumulative discriminatory experiences can be cognitively and emotionally taxing and interfere with students’ ability to achieve at their full potential” (p. 115). Common emotions that are reported by Black students include anger, humiliation, decreased comfort, and increased feelings of threat (Swim et al., 2003). Due to the frequency of racialized incidents that Black students encounter at PWIs, they tend to use various coping mechanisms (Griffith et al., 2019). Grier-Reed (2010) notes the importance of “creating sanctuaries or safe spaces to help Black students make sense of and cope with their experiences at PWIs” (p. 181). These sanctuaries also serve as a place where Black students can form relationships and community within a PWI.

Black students at a PWI are more likely to experience race related stressors due to racialized incidents (Griffith et al., 2019). Research has shown that PWIs “do not facilitate a positive multicultural environment for all the students and that this failure has negative ramifications for minority students” (Campbell et al., 2019, p. 391). Having to exist in an environment where race is consistently noticeable and Black students are reminded of their minority status present multiple barriers (Campbell et al., 2019). Race is always present and active in the life of a Black student. Over the years, Black students have challenged race neutral ideologies that tend to disguise the unequal distribution of power in PWIs (Jones & Reddick, 2017). According to Jones and Reddick (2017), “anti-racist discourse absolves PWIs of any responsibility in substantively altering institutional policies and decision-making, effectively leaving the burden of racism on People of Color” (p. 204). While education is seen as an

opportunity for advancement within society, particularly by Black students, in reality education has “functioned as one of the primary locations of societal stratification and reproduction of inequality” (Patel 2015, p. 660). The manifestations of this perpetual inequality are seen in the frequency of racialized incidents and experiences that target Black students at PWIs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students with racialized incidents during their time at Robinson University (pseudonym). These experiences with racism and racialized incidents will be shared through narrative summaries. A narrative summary was written for each participant to illustrate their lived experiences with racism and racialized incidents. “The purpose of a narrative is to redirect the dominant gaze, to make it see from a new point of view what has been there all along” (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 6). These are their stories shared in their words to help better understand experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students with racism and racialized incidents.

Over the past 40 years there has been an increase in Black student enrollment at PWIs (Shadid et al., 2018). With the increase in Black student enrollment in IHEs overall and PWIs specifically, their struggles and experiences have become more evident, particularly the frequency of racialized incidents against them. Research has shown that Black student often have difficulty adjusting to campus life at PWI due to negative stereotypes and racism (Shadid et al., 2018). According to Kadi-Hanifil (2013), “while recognizing the presence of racism at a personal and institutional level, as well as the impact of whiteness in education, we owe it to ourselves as educators to pursue a deliberate course of action” (p. 84). Taking deliberate action is one way institutions can show they care about Black students, their safety and protection, and their higher education experience. According to the American Association of Colleges of

Nursing, based on data from 2020, “Black nursing students make up 11 percent of baccalaureate nursing programs” (American Association of College of Nursing [AACN], 2021, Figure 1). By exploring the experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students with racialized incidents, we can better understand how racism impacts their educational journey at a PWI.

Healthcare education is not immune from racism and negative stereotypes against Black students. For this reason, addressing racism in all forms within healthcare is vitally important for creating a more equitable society (South et al., 2020). Historically, Black nurses would often make home visits to those who were sick and shut-in (White & Fulton, 2015). Increasing the number of Black nurses would have the potential to improve health at the community level and help address health disparities within Black communities (White & Fulton, 2015). As a Black nurse and former student at a PWI, I want to uncover the significance of Black undergraduate nursing students’ experiences with racialized incidents. Additionally, this study will highlight the importance of their experiences with racialized incidents through counter stories. This work seeks to understand Black undergraduate nursing students’ experiences following two nationally publicized racialized incidents that occurred in the spring 2020 semester at Robinson University in a time when there was a demand for change in the campus climate.

This call to action is not only for individuals, but for communities and societies globally to work together to steer away from denial and dehumanization of Black lives (Watson et al., 2020). Oftentimes, no outcome measures are provided pertaining to plans or strategies to stand against racism on campus or actions to support the needs of Black students. The university’s leadership role is to enact policies in transformative ways that are specific to Black students and their wellbeing (Briscoe, 2022). Centering racism and detailing how racism is endemic to society is a core tenant of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995). The permanence of racism and the

impact it has on Black undergraduate nursing students during their educational experience are a factor that should amplify the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

Florence Nightingale, a white English woman, is credited with the foundation of the nursing profession by nearly all historians. According to Cineas and Schwartz (2023), Nightingale came to the forefront during the Crimean War through her work to coordinate care of soldiers. She later founded the first nursing school in London. The historical contributions of racial minority nurses have frequently been overlooked. Mary Seacole, daughter of a white Scottish soldier and a creole Jamaican businesswoman, was instrumental in treating cholera and yellow fever patients with her medical expertise. She also worked to raise funds during the Crimean War to care for sick and wounded soldiers. Seacole's work is rarely acknowledged in the history of the nursing profession despite being recognized throughout Central America and Jamaica. Seacole later applied to Florence Nightingale's nursing school and was denied. Nursing schools were expanded during the American Civil War, but non-white students were not allowed to attend. This type of discrimination and systemic racism has persisted and continues to present day impacting many Black nursing students, particularly those who attend PWIs (Cineas & Schwartz, 2023).

The racism that is targeted at Black nursing students often comes even before they arrive on campus. Black nurses face discrimination during the admission process as well as standardized testing for admission (Ackerman-Barger & Hummel, 2015). Both of which decrease access by Black nursing students which is consistent within history of the nursing profession. Black nursing students "face shared commonalities of experiences and obstacles at virtually every level of the profession, including schools and faculty" (Cineas & Schwartz, 2023,

p. 283). These systemic barriers work to prevent Black people “from entering the nursing profession and maintaining a career in nursing, and also presents insurmountable difficulties when it comes to advancing into executive management positions” (Cineas & Schwartz, 2023, p. 283). If a Black student is admitted to a nursing program, they are then put into inhospitable environments to face discrimination and racism which is arduous and challenging (Ackerman-Barger & Hummel, 2015). For many, these challenges are extremely difficult to overcome.

The trauma of racialized incidents directly affects Black nursing students and their overall well-being. Black students contend with both the chronic and acute trauma from race-related stressors. According to Nelson (2019), “Since 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center has documented 434 incidents of white supremacist material on college campuses. This leads to Black students being less likely to report a campus as inclusive” (para. 2). Clemson University noticed an increase in racial incidents against Black students during the time when President Barack Obama was campaigning, and after he won the 2008 election (Morris, 2014). Commonly, societal tensions and unrest are reflected in IHEs. IHEs are embedded within regional and national political contexts; this embeddedness “demands that institutions engage in national conversations and, in so doing, construct narratives of institutional identity in relation to the public landscape” (Connors & McCoy, 2022, p. 589).

The year 2020 is memorable for several events. The beginning of 2020 started with declaration of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the pandemic revealed persistent health disparities across all fifty states (Rodriguez, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered racial health inequities that disproportionately affected Black people (Pieterse et al., 2023). During the pandemic, Black people were more likely to depend on local news for COVID-19 information, consistent with history that Black people are more trusting of local

rather than national news (Redbird et al., 2022). The revitalized Black Lives Matter (BLM) was another source of information and a reminder of the systemic inequalities that affect Black people (Redbird et al., 2022). The inequities were not only apparent on a national scale, but specifically in Colvin (pseudonym), the site of this research, also.

Colvin is a state that has historically operated poorly as it relates to all racial groups, including Black people (Rodriguez, 2021). White patients in Colvin receive far better healthcare than Black people (Rodriguez, 2021). According to a state inequity report from 2021, “Black people in Colvin had the worst overall health rankings - a combined figure encompassing health outcomes, health care access, and health care quality - than any other state with a large Black population” (Branham, 2021, para. 2). The report detailed the healthcare of Black people in Colvin was “substandard” and there were “sizeable inequities” (Branham, 2021, para 6). Another alarming finding was that Black people in Colvin “had the highest rate of mortality from conditions treatable with access to healthcare” (Branham, 2021, para 7). The fact that Black people in Colvin experience inadequate health care in all domains compared to other states is very telling yet reaffirms the existence of racism and anti-Blackness.

In May 2020, George Floyd was arrested and killed by a white police officer. The outrage following his death led to many protests across the country. Later that summer, the shooting of Jacob Blake and death of Breonna Taylor continued to stir outrage and calls for police reform (History.com Editors, 2020). The jury returned with no charges for the officer the shot Breonna Taylor in her home (History.com Editors, 2020). History was made in November 2020, when President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris were elected to office (History.com Editors, 2020). The Biden administration served as potential source of hope amid the unrest and outrage following numerous killings and attacks on Black people by law enforcement. According

to Pieterse et al., (2023) “the urgency of addressing this pressing social issue is perhaps best exemplified by ... long-standing anti-Black racial ideologies and systems of racial oppression” (p. 235). 2020 was pivotal time in the United States in many ways, revealing prevailing inequities and the legacy of anti-Blackness.

There are some race-related incidents that make national news headlines, but there are many more that do not. The following incidents are from an ongoing database by the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2024) to show the frequency of racialized incidents at IHEs. In January 2023, a white student at the University of Missouri sent a message to a friend on social media referencing Martin Luther King, Jr. The message was then spread across campus. The statement read “if they would have killed 4 more ni\$\$e#s we would have the whole week off” (Journal of Blacks of in Higher Education [JBHE], 2023, para. 1). It was ultimately decided by the university president that the student was protected by First Amendment rights and no disciplinary action was taken (Campus Racial Incidents webpage, 2023). In November 2022, a Black student who attended Leigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania was attacked while walking to his dorm. He was attacked by two white men who yelled racial slurs and punched him in the face (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2022b). Blacks made up five percent of the 5,400 undergraduate student body at Leigh University (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2022a). At the University of Utah, in December 2021, students dressed up as Ku Klux Klan members and went through a residence hall to recruit members to a white supremacist group. Also, human excrement was smeared on a Black student’s door. Black students made up one percent of the undergraduate population at the University of Utah at the time (Campus Racial Incidents webpage, 2021). In November 2021, at Worcester University, a racial slur was written on a window in the common area in a resident hall. At Worcester University, in Massachusetts,

Black students made up seven percent of the undergraduate population (Campus Racial Incidents webpage, 2021). At Rhodes College in Memphis, September 2021, a banana was taped to the door of two Black students' dorm rooms. Regarding the incident at Rhodes College, the administration's response was described as "slow and insufficient" (Campus Racial Incidents webpage, 2021). All of the above racialized incidents have the potential for and caused physical harm to Black students. These racialized incidents are occurring throughout the country on various campuses which signals that racism is alive present-day.

Higher education was created to prepare white students, particularly men, for their future lives in society (Wilder, 2013). The prevalence of white supremacy has led to higher education, historically and present-day, being persistently white (Patel, 2021). Aside from racism, higher education was seen as a place to grow intellectually to achieve specific goals (Geiger, 2015). Higher education provided hope and learning for those who entered. This hope has been, at times, hard to hold onto within IHEs. Those who continue to hold onto hope will "take its cautions to mind and heart, crafting deeds and working up visions that are in the institution but not of it, knowing that the dream is still the truth" (Ferguson, 2012, p. 18). Coleman et. al. (2012), "documented that exposure to perceived racism and racial discrimination beyond one's ability to cope has serious implications for one's health to include heart disease, hypertension, and weaker immune system" (p. 490). Along with the physical effects of racism, Black students', "observations of and encounters with racism on campus increased their academic environment stress and diminished their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their persistence decisions" (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 92). Other studies report that Black students often struggle with feelings of anger, self-doubt, and alienation (Lowe et al., 2013). These experiences do not lend themselves to creating an atmosphere inviting to

Black students. Just as detrimental are the implications on the future Black nurses in the profession and power to address health disparities in the Black community (White & Fulton, 2015).

Exploring Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racialized incidents will reveal the inequity and unique challenges they face while attending a PWI. According to White and Fulton (2015), "Black nursing students reported that while they were more noticeable due to color of their skin, they were at the same time voiceless, alienated, and insignificant" (p. 171). These revelations can then provide a path to restore hope in higher education, by restructuring the system to operate in a more equitable, inclusive manner. Restoring the hope that one day the university can "define itself fundamentally as a decolonial project - as an interdisciplinary, transnational, yet vocational university that equips its students with skills toward the applied practice of decolonization" (Paperson, 2017, p. 36). The following section will detail nationally publicized incidents that occurred at Robinson University, including the two that occurred in the spring of 2020 that led to campus protests and sit-ins due to the repeated racialized incidents on campus. While each of these events occurred on the main university campus, there has been no research on Black undergraduate nursing students in the time following these events to detail their experiences with racism.

Research Questions

This study involved exploring the experiences of Black nursing students from a university where racialized incidents have been a common occurrence. PWIs have long been plagued with racialized incidents to include racially themed parties and graffiti of racial slurs (Garces et al., 2022a). Research has shown that there are negative consequences of recurrent exposure to racialized incidents (Garces et al., 2022a). Specifically, the effects of hate speech on

Black students include psychological harm and race-related stress which can then contribute to decreased academic performance (Garces et al., 2022a). By examining their experiences, I hope to gain insight from Black undergraduate nursing students regarding their experiences with racism specifically following two racialized incidents in 2020, and the effects of racism during their higher education experience. The research questions are: (1) What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a predominantly white institution? (2) How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution? (3) What strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution?

Definitions and Key Terms

The following section defines terms that are commonly used throughout this paper. This list of terms has been provided for reference with explanations of each term as they pertain to the study.

1. Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM): a political and social movement founded in 2013 following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Harvard University School of Law, 2023)
2. Critical Race Theory (CRT): was originally established by a group of law professors of color to expose racial inequities in the legal sector in the late 1970s (Bell 1995); CRT entered the field of education in the 1990's as a tool to aid educators to better understand race and racism (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Smith et al., 2007).
3. House bill 1775 (HB 1775): legislation passed in May 2021 in Oklahoma that bans teaching certain concepts around race and gender (H.R. Resolution 1775, 2021)

4. Institution of Higher Education (IHE): in most cases a college or university
5. Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN): a nurse who has graduated from a nursing program and commonly works under supervision of a registered nurse (Oklahoma Board of Nursing, 2023)
6. Predominantly white institution (PWI): an institution where the white dominant culture is the majority.
7. Racialized incident: a campus hate or bias incident that targets marginalized individuals or groups (Briscoe, 2022)
8. Racism: one group deems itself superior; the superior group has the power to engage in racist acts and racism has advantages to the superior group and negative implications for the other/ethnic groups (Taylor et al., 2023)
9. Registered Nurse (RN): a nurse who has graduated from a nursing program and is prepared for the full scope of nursing practice (Oklahoma Board of Nursing, 2023)

Research Positionality Statement

I am a thirty-six-year-old Black female who attended the University of Oklahoma (OU) for my undergraduate and graduate education. I'm from a middle-class family and I also consider myself currently a part of the middle class. I graduated from the OU College of Nursing in 2009. After graduation, I worked as a Registered Nurse in an intensive care unit (ICU) in Oklahoma City for two years. While there, I began my graduate education journey. I obtained a master's of science degree in Nursing Education from the OU College of Nursing in December 2011. After finishing my master's degree, I accepted a nurse educator position at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) Department of Neurology. In my current position, I work as a Registered Nurse and as a clinical instructor faculty member. I am one of the few Black faculty

on the OUHSC campus; I am the only Registered Nurse faculty on campus. In my clinical instructor role, I teach 3rd year medical students during their 4-week neurology rotation. Unfortunately, the percentage of Black students who attend the OU College of Medicine is low compared to white students. The few that I encounter share similar experiences to myself.

Being that I have attended a PWI during my undergraduate and graduate education, I know first-hand how racial incidents affect a person of color. During my sophomore year at the University of Oklahoma, in the spring of 2007, while walking with a friend on campus, two white males were walking toward us. As they approached, they looked at us and stated, “move out of the way n@%&rs”. I froze in place. I didn’t know what to do or say. They proceeded to keep walking as if what they said was ok. My friend and I just stared at each other, eventually went on our way, and a flood of emotions came over me. I was hurt, embarrassed, angry, and fearful. I wondered if I would continue to be called a racial slur or if more egregious actions would take place. I was angry that someone would call me that and not realize the hurt it caused. During my time at OU, I also experienced white peers, faculty, and staff questioning my speech. They made comments such as, “you are very well-spoken,” “is this really how you talk?” and “you talk like a white person.” These types of comments would classify as microinsults. Now that I am learning more about higher education, it is evident that students of color commonly endure racialized incidents, many that are never reported. According to Bell et. al (2020) “given the uniqueness and pervasiveness of anti-Blackness, it is no wonder that many Black scholars are interested in topics particularly relevant to discrimination and oppression” (p. 44).

My past experiences as a Black nursing student will help in this research because I understand how a student can feel a range of emotions after a racialized incident. Also, I can speak to persistence as a Black woman in a field that is majority white. Regarding possible

limitations on the research, my experiences are based solely at OU. I do not have any experience at other PWIs. Another limitation is that I never reported the personal racial incident that happened in 2007. I did not know the two white males and at that time did not know who to turn to for help. I am hopeful that I can continue to learn more about Black nursing students' experiences with racism. I feel that the higher education community should be aware of how racism can impact a student's well-being and their overall higher education experience.

Methodology

Overview of Case Study Research

This study was conducted as a qualitative research case study. Qualitative research allows for multiple realities formed by personal interactions and perceptions (Merriam, 1988).

According to Merriam (1988), a case study is defined as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance or phenomenon” (p. 21). Case studies are a common research method for educators within higher education. All methods for gathering data such as interviews are commonly used in case studies (Merriam, 1988). A case study is chosen because of an interest in “insight, discovery, and interpretation” (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). A case study method allows the researcher to get close to the participants through access to feelings, thoughts, and emotions (Merriam, 1988). The case was selected prior to data collection. This case is a single, bounded system meaning that it examines a single program.

Data collection requires empathy and sensitivity (Merriam, 1988). The participants in this case study were chosen through purposeful sampling. This type of sampling requires establishing a criterion and finding participants who meet the criteria. The data for this case study was collected using strategies of interviewing and document analysis. The participants participated in two virtual interviews using an established interview protocol. Documents

pertaining to the case were used for triangulation to strengthen and support the interview data (Bowen 2009; Merriam 1985). The documents in this case were public records from university, local, and national levels. Data collection and analysis are done simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). The goal of the analysis is to communicate understanding (Merriam, 1998). In this case, the goal is to share and communicate Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racialized incidents and what strategies they use to cope.

Description of Case

For this study, I focused on a single institution, a large PWI in the Midwest referred to in this study as Robinson University (pseudonym). At Robinson University there were 35 undergraduate Black nursing students in a class of 536 during the 2020-2021 academic year. In the following year, the number of Black nursing students reached 41 for the 2022-2023 academic year in a class of 927. According to the Robinson University Fact Book 2015-2016, five percent of students were Black and Black professors accounted for 2 percent of full-time faculty (Mussatto, 2016). Despite the growing numbers of nursing students, the number of Black undergraduate nursing students remains low. All participants in this study were undergraduate students. Robinson University has a history of highly publicized racialized incidents over the years. Throughout the history of the university, there have been periods of unrest among Black students due to discrimination and racialized incidents, some including violence (Harp, 2015). Black people were not permitted to attend Robinson University until approximately 1950. In a particular case, the first Black woman was admitted to Robinson University Law School in the late 1940s (Whattley, 2014). Despite increased Black student enrollment at Robinson University over the decades, the violence, discrimination, and racialized incidents ensued.

In 2016, a video was leaked showing two male students, members of Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity, saying a racist chant. Racial slurs were used in the chant (Mussatto, 2016). After the SAE incident, the Robinson University president banned the fraternity from campus (Mussatto, 2016). On February 11th and 24th, 2020 racialized incidents targeting Black students occurred in two different classrooms on the campus of Robinson University. On February 11th, a journalism professor used a racial slur in class while making a comparison (Hazelrigg, 2020). The professor was discussing Oklahoma history and the term “boomers” and presented a comparison to the class (Hazelrigg, 2020). The professor compared boomers to a racial slur, used to refer to Black people. Two weeks later, on February 24th, while reading a historical piece, a history professor recited a racial slur (Douglas, 2020). The professor felt that using the slur was appropriate since it was in a historical document. In the days, weeks, and months to follow, there was unrest among the Black student community and supporters. Students protested, held sit-ins, and presented the administration with a list of demands.

For this reason, Black undergraduate nursing students’ experiences were chosen to explore in as a case study. More specifically, this study will explore experiences with racialized incidents of undergraduate Black nursing students and strategies they used to cope. Black undergraduate nursing students’ makeup a small student demographic, yet they offer a much-needed perspective on their experiences with racialized incidents. Their experiences with racialized incidents that occurred during their training are often never inquired about, or validated.

Participants and Sampling

My research topic involves exploring experiences with racialized incidents of Black undergraduate nursing students from the nursing college at Robinson University. The aim of this

research is to reveal the experiences of undergraduate Black nursing students with racialized incidents following the 2020 racialized incidents that occurred on campus. Research has shown us that Black students have a vastly different higher education experience compared to white students, particularly at a PWI (Museus et al., 2015; Patel 2021). Since racial incidents are, and continue to be, a common occurrence, it is important to research experiences with racialized incidents. Racism in nursing “is likely to be ambient, that is, absorbed from living in a racially biased society and deeply rooted” (White & Fulton, 2015, p. 174). The struggle with racism “may reflect systematic bias and longstanding sociocultural environment where African Americans are viewed as inferior” (White & Fulton, 2015, p. 174). The experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students attending a PWI is unique in that these individuals will then be expected to go out and care for those in need regardless of race, culture, or background without the appropriate attention to their experiences with racism and how it impacts their trajectory. In most cases, the number of Black nursing students is much lower than white nursing students at PWIs. Since 2020, with nursing school enrollment expansion, the number of Black undergraduates remains lower than their white counterparts. This is the case at Robinson University.

This research study was conducted as a qualitative case study. The participants in the study were Black undergraduate nursing students who were in the nursing college from spring 2020 to spring 2023. Black nursing students were chosen because there is limited research on this specific undergraduate student population. Nurses are taught to treat every patient in the same manner with compassion, empathy, and to promote well-being, but commonly Black nurses encounter racism during their education and even into their nursing career. Qualitative research uses analysis to help make a problem more visible to the world (Crotty, 1998). This

research method is a suitable method to illuminate the issue of racism at this PWI. Racism and its effect on Black nursing students are a problem at PWIs. This work will help reveal the experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students with racism. In recent years, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, we have seen a shift in society to draw attention and awareness to systemic and perpetual issues with race and inequality. The power of experiences, allowing the participant to share their stories, works to reveal the truth about the depth and permanence of racism.

Theoretical Framework

Higher education is often referred to as the “way out” of a lower socioeconomic and social class status, but often the racism a Black student encounters proves that a Black person will always be seen as inferior (Bell, 1992). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was chosen as the theoretical framework for this case study. CRT draws upon law, social sciences, ethnic, and history literature (Delgado, 1989; Smith et al., 2007). CRT was founded in legal studies during the 1970s by People of Color legal scholars (Bell, 1995). CRT entered the education sector in the 1990s to help educators understand race and racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Smith et al., (2007), “CRT also provides the tools to listen to the experiences of Students of Color and document how these often-marginalized students respond to and resist the racism pervading their college campus” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 562). Derrick Bell (1992), the founder of Critical Race Theory (CRT) states,

Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society 's well. Even the poorest whites, those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working together is escape possible. Over time, many reach

out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them or to us (p. 1).

This case study will focus primarily on two of the tenets of CRT, permanence of racism and counter storytelling.

The persistence of inequality and inequity has led to little advancement within higher education in its relation to Black nursing students and their experiences with racism while attending a PWI. According to Hurtado (1992),

When ‘harmonious inequality’ is challenged by subordinates, dominant groups are forced to defend their privilege. This perspective suggests that mean-spirited acts of racial harassment on the part of white students may represent a reassertion of group dominance in an era when prevailing dominant group ideologies are in question (p. 545).

This reassertion of group dominance is markedly evident on PWI campuses through the growing number of racialized incidents. There has been a charge to mobilize Black scholars “who share commitment to equity, social justice, and human liberation and the ways African Americans are almost never permitted to break out of the prism (and prison) of race that has been imposed by a racially coded society” (Pasque et al., 2021, p. 4).

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the study purpose, study significance, and researcher positionality. The purpose is to reveal the experiences with racism for undergraduate Black nursing students. There has been a decline in recent years of Blacks entering the nursing profession (AACN, 2021). Black nurses currently make up eleven percent of the current workforce (AACN, 2021). This study is significant in that it aims to reveal these racialized experiences and show the reality of racism as experienced by undergraduate Black nurses during their time in higher education.

Higher education is commonly not welcoming to Black students and fails to provide Black students with the support needed throughout their journey. Historically, higher education was created for white men on the backs of Black slaves. In 2024, even though laws have changed now permitting Blacks to attend higher education institutions, racism has remained.

The next chapter will cover an overview of the literature on the history of higher education, racialized incidents against Black students, and experiences with racism among undergraduate Black nursing students and nurses. The chapter will first cover the current literature on racism in United States and racism in higher education to lay the foundation of this study. The history of higher education still plays a vital role in the experiences of undergraduate Black nursing students today. Once the history is presented, the other components of the literature review provides further details around racialized incidents, the relationship between Blacks and the healthcare system, and Black students and higher education. The relationship between higher education and Black students is essential in understanding the significance of racialized incidents and how they continue to occur on PWI campuses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will cover a review of the literature around key topics associated with this research study, starting with institutional racism in higher education to provide background on the depth and persistence through history. From there, the following sections will cover manifestations of institutional racism such as racial incidents at PWIs, experiences of Black students at PWIs, experiences and disparities of nursing and other healthcare students during their training, the current approach to racial incident response, and the legality of hate crimes. Each component works to reveal the academic, physical, and psychological impact that racism has on a Black student and how this study will reveal the experiences specific to Black undergraduate nursing students.

Beginning of Racism in the United States

Racism in the United States is deep-rooted, starting hundreds of years ago. Feagin and Bennefield (2014) describe “the U.S. as a country with systemic oppression - centuries of genocide, 336 years of slavery and legal segregation, about 85 percent of U.S. history” (p. 7). In the 1800s these practices were described as “our peculiar institution” (Williams, 2012, p. 42). This legacy of slavery and oppression against Black people led to the institutional and systemic racism that we still see today. Within racism, there is white supremacy which can be described as white privilege and discrimination against non-white and specifically Black individuals (Rabaka, 2007). Racism can also be defined as “the subordination of Blacks based on skin color” and “it is a self-perpetuating system of advantage based on race. It is prejudice plus power. White supremacy is the ideology that justifies white domination” (Bond, 2014, p. 11). W. E. B. DuBois was one of the first theorists to acknowledge and challenge white supremacy. DuBois described how Black people wish to “make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American,

without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face” (DuBois, 2008, p. 9). In this, we see the contrast between the struggle of Black people and the domination of white supremacy.

Slavery can be traced back to 1600s when Black people were taken from Africa and brought to United States as free labor (Museus et al., 2015). Anti-Black prejudice began with slavery and the need for labor (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Prior to this, most Europeans, particularly those who were educated, had a positive attitude toward Black people. They recognized the contributions by Black people in regard to their pioneering efforts in mathematics, medicine, libraries, astronomy, and learning centers (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By 1776, the slavery of Black people was thriving, particularly in the tobacco fields of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, making up more than 50 percent of the population (Shah & Adolphe, 2019). According to Watson et al., (2020) “Black dehumanization was accomplished by the complete control, debasement, objectification, experimentation, and denied basic human rights in slavery and later through the racist structure of the dominant white society” (p. 1365). In 1869, during the Reconstruction Era, came new segregated institutions, white supremacy principles, and racial terror against Black people. This only widened the gap between Black people and white people (Shah & Adolphe, 2019). In 1898, this would be the beginning of the Jim Crow Era. Jim Crow refers to a collective of statutes and laws that legalized segregation, which if violated could result in death (History.com Editors, 2018). During this time Black people were restricted to certain areas of the community and forbidden to eat or drink at certain places (Golemboski, 2018).

Due to being excluded from jobs, many Black people migrated to other places, in particular Northern states, to find work and possibly escape Jim Crow terror. In the 1920s often,

even in Northern states, Black people were met with “sundown towns.” This meant that Black people were not welcome after sundown, and even further excluded from certain sections of towns. Sundown towns can be explained as “towns [that] had explicit ordinances that legalized the intimidation tactics employed to maintain an all-white space” (O’Connell, 2019, p. 312). In the 1950s as the Jim Crow Era was coming to an end, the Civil Rights Movement began. In 1954, the Supreme Court passed *Brown v. Board of Education* which called for an end to segregation in public schools (Bell, 1980). This court ruling was monumental in the United States and in the Black peoples fight for equality. During the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, many other amendments and laws were passed. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Act contains 11 articles which were principally legislated as a response to discrimination and segregation (Back, 2020). The following year, in 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed which prohibited racial discrimination in voting. Both of these acts were passed in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement serving as hope for a better day to come for Black people. This better day of true racial justice,

Must aim not only to achieve conditions of autonomy, civil liberties, political representation, decent living and so on, but also to undermine the hegemony of white identity that attempts to control People of Color, even while applauding their efforts at advancement (Golemboski, 2018, p. 116).

Despite legislation to eliminate racism and discrimination, they both remained. Many sectors within society continued to enforce racist and discriminatory policies and practices. Espinosa and Mitchell (2020) state the “history of this nation and the violence, oppression, and discrimination faced by these groups in both legal and illegal (but condoned) ways, it is perhaps no surprise that many structural and cultural barriers constructed throughout that history still

remain” (p. 29). In 1968, during President Richard Nixon’s term, the “Southern Strategy” was put in place to continue to limit power and movement of Blacks. The goal was to continue white supremacy by using code terms such as “law and order” to continue the oppression of Black people despite the recent desegregation legislation (Staples, n.d.). The white-Black color line led to a binary perspective on race, which also contributed to entrenchment of white control over Black people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). White privilege refers to a multiplicity of advantages, profits, and values that come along with being of the dominant race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These advantages that whites have are also seen within higher education (Patel, 2015). Keeping this history in mind, along with more recent demonstrations of racism the problem, purpose and significance of this work will be explained.

Racism in Higher Education

Education “is often referred to as having the potential to level the playing field; in practice it has functioned as one of the primary locations of societal stratification and reproduction of inequality” (Patel, 2015, p. 660). Just as racism against Blacks was dominating in society, this was also reflected in the history of higher education. According to Parker and Stovall (2004),

Even though race is a mythology that has been socially constructed for purposes of control, power, and economic exploitation, racialism is fundamental to everyday life, the shaping of moral character, the formation and implementation of law, policy, and the study of social context in education and other social science fields (p. 170).

The historical foundations of IHEs contribute to white normative logics that then marginalize the experiences of Black students (Connors & McCoy, 2022).

In the beginning, higher education was designed to serve the white dominant majority and prepare white men for leadership roles (Museus et al., 2015). From its inception, higher education was built upon the backs of Blacks, while implementing policies to exclude Blacks from these institutions (Wilder, 2013). Higher education has continued to be a place operating in systemic, institutional racism and violence against Black students (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). Institutional racism is defined as a “public policy or practice designed for all but ends up discriminating against members of a specific racial group” (Ndemanu, 2017, p. 239).

Institutional racism, rooted in white supremacy, can be described as a system of power that normalizes white privilege and maintains whiteness within all sectors of life, including higher education (Bell et al., 2020). Additionally, there are contributing factors such as bias and priming. First, biases become evident when, “white students, having absorbed years of indoctrination by families, peers, and mass media, come to the university with stereotypes about people different from themselves” (Davis et al., 2004, p. 422). Second, according to Smith et al., (2007), racial priming is a socialization process wherein messages and racial beliefs are passed on to white children who then engage in color-conscious racialized actions during their life.

According to Wilder (2013), “human slavery was the precondition for the rise of higher education in the Americas” (p. 114). Black slaves were forced to build and work at many of the early American colleges and universities. The first three colleges in America, Harvard University, the College of William and Mary, and Yale University, were established between 1636-1740. They were built by Black slaves (Geiger, 2015). During this time, the difference between success or failure of an institution was dependent upon the access to slaves (Wilder, 2013). Wilder (2013) states that, “the American campus stood as a silent monument to slavery”

(p.137). Not only were slaves responsible for manual labor but they were also subjected to horrendous torture and punishments (Wilder, 2013).

Students often terrorized and abused slaves at these institutions and were rarely punished for their actions. Wilder (2013) describes how in 1772, a student named Beverly Robinson, an upperclassman who was the son of a trustee and heir to a slave trade line, spit in a slave's face and abused him for fun. Despite his inappropriate behavior and poor academic performance, he graduated in 1773, and later went on to become a trustee. There are numerous stories of slave abuse similar, and even worse, that occurred during the history of higher education in America (Wilder, 2013). Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Black bodies were commonly used for higher education research and experimentation. Black bodies were used for anatomical research and dissection of them was foundational. The use of Black bodies led to myths which were set in motion (Wilder, 2013). "American medicine exploited colored bodies precisely because the racial civilization placed them - free or enslaved, alive or dead - beyond the protections of the law or of moral civilization" (Wilder, 2013, p. 209). James Sims is honored as the founder of gynecology, but rarely is there mention of his inhumane experiments on Black people (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014). Historians account that Sims, "used an enslaved girl suffering from fistulas to kneel in agony while he inserted a speculum into her vagina and attempted to close ravaged openings by abrading their edges before suturing while other whites held her as she screamed" (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014, p. 9). Only when the technique was perfected did he "perform this surgery on whites, with anesthesia" (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014, p. 9). Examples of the use and abuse of Black people is present within multiple sectors of higher education.

A major Supreme Court ruling made in 1954, on the exterior, seemed to provide equity for Blacks, but it did not. Despite the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, policies were enacted

to limit the access to higher education for Black people. *Brown* set the stage for integration and diversity within the education system, yet efforts fell short to produce true racial integration (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Oklahoma was a state the despite the *Brown* ruling continued to support segregated higher education until the 1960s and afterward (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). During the Civil Right Movement in the 1960s, many Black youth also felt inspired and started to mobilize within communities and within higher education. Black students began to form organizations and alliances to help fight for justice. They also relied on the social aspect of fraternities and sororities to help in mobilization efforts (T'Shaka, 2012). During this time, as more Black people began to enter the academy, institutions began to implement barriers to prevent Black student access. Many institutions, for example, created new and more restrictive SAT requirements for entry as an effort to decrease the number of Black students (T'Shaka, 2012).

The status quo of higher education does not equate to progression and inclusivity. Higher education is often framed as a key piece of the “American Dream” but, “instead of breaking down ethnic and class barriers to economic and social opportunities, higher education is complicit in the maintenance and reproduction of social stratification” (Keene, 2008, p. 65). The history shows the depth and breadth of racism in this country and how “racism permeates U.S. history and this historical context is critical to understanding how racism operates in the present day” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 38). Higher education, when examined, is not the “dream” as advertised.

To adequately reckon with universities as white property, IHEs must be situated as part of the societal structure in the United States that has been created and maintained as part of a larger colonial endeavor. More specifically, the United States, underneath its public

rhetoric of meritocracy, upward mobility, and justice, is a nation founded on and invested in an ongoing project of settler colonialism (Patel, 2015, p. 661).

When IHEs are situated in this manner, the truth is revealed. The backlash against diversity and inclusion in higher education can be better understood by analysis of the history (Patel, 2015).

This revelation also aids in understanding why there has been recent unrest in higher education.

Those in power, as they have always been, work to maintain this power and perpetuate systemic oppression of Blacks (Patel, 2015).

Black Nursing Student Experiences with Racism in Healthcare Education

Before 1870, nursing was not recognized as a profession. There was no formal training. Nurse roles were based on gender, class, and race (Houlahan et al., 2022). During the Industrial Revolution, new job opportunities were created which led to the transition to hospital-based nursing. Prior to this, most nursing care was provided by women and in homes and communities. With the transition to hospital-based care, many hospitals developed education training programs which also capitalized on financial opportunities (Houlahan et al., 2022). Uneducated lower-class women, along with women of color, were deemed not fit to provide nursing care (Houlahan et al., 2022). Many Black women were working as unregistered nurses but were not permitted to enter the new professional schools (Cineas & Schwartz, 2023). Discrimination has persisted with nursing education, evidenced by Black nursing students' reports of negative experiences at PWIs, and the underrepresentation of Black faculty (Cineas & Schwartz, 2023). According to Cineas and Schwartz (2023), "Black nursing students often experience a high prevalence of perceived racism, a lack of inclusion, and a lack of support in educational and clinical environment" (p. 283). As a result, systemic racism continues to afflict nursing training programs.

Despite the needs for nurses that represent the current patient population, Black nurses made up only 6.7% of workforce in 2020 (Pusey-Reid et al., 2022). The data from the US census reported that Blacks make up 13.4 % of the population (Pusey-Reid et al., 2022). Segregation no longer exists among nursing schools; however, the profession is based on colonialism and systemic racism practices (Houlahan et al., 2022). To address these gaps, there must be changes to involve enrollment expansion and retention of Black student nurses.

Microaggressions are a common form of racism that Black student nurses encounter during their healthcare education journey (Pusey-Reid et al., 2022). Undergraduate Black nurses, based on prior research, report experiencing microaggressions and other forms of disapproval such as eye rolls from peers (White et al., 2020). The racism doesn't stop with peers; Black nurses experience racism from faculty manifested as unwillingness to help them, negative judgement, and placing Black nurses on pins and needles (White et al., 2020). In addition to racialized experiences during nursing education, Black nurses also endure racism in the healthcare environment.

Black Nurses Experiences with Racism in the Professional Healthcare Setting

Like what we have seen with racism during nursing education, racism is also present in the workforce for Black nurses. Racism is experienced in healthcare education during student clinical rotations and in the workforce after nurses graduate. In 2022 the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing was formed. A survey conducted by the commission found that 63% of nurses experience racism in the workplace (Kirton, 2023). The high percentage of nurses reporting racism is hard to ignore. The survey found that 66% of transgressors were peers and 60% were managers (Kirton, 2023). In addition, Black nurses often experience racism through unequal patient assignments (DeBose, 2023). Racism is a consistent issue for Black nurses. The

COVID-19 pandemic intensified the racism experienced by Black nurses. For example, studies revealed that Black nurses were denied personal protective equipment (Howarth, 2021).

The composition of society has and is continually changing with 40% of the population classified as non-white (Brodhead, 2021). In 2020, 11% of nursing graduates were Black; this is a 2% decline over the past decade (Brodhead, 2021). Despite the stability of healthcare and/or the nursing salary, the declining number of graduates is likely due to negative experiences of Black nurses (Brodhead, 2021). Healthcare is a demanding environment which has been linked to depression and poorer health. According to Brandford et al., (2023), “not only do Black nurses experience inherent stress of being a nurse but they may also be subject to additional stress caused by day-to-day experiences of discrimination” (p. 127). This additional stress over time has been a documented factor affecting mental health that leads to emotional responses consistent with depression (Brandford et al., 2023). The American Nurses Association (ANA) in a report admitted to excluding Black nurses starting in 1916 through mid-1960s (Hospital Employee Health, 2022). The exclusion of Black nurses was purposeful and systematic which laid the foundation for systemic racism practices within the organization (Hospital Employee Health, 2022). In 2021, the ANA issued an apology to Black nurses and state they are “really about trying to repair who we are as a profession” and “create a more inclusive space for all of our colleagues” (Hospital Employee Health, 2022, p. 118).

Blacks’ Experiences in Healthcare Education and the Healthcare System

Black people have a long history for caring for others, especially those in need (White & Fulton, 2015). There were Black nurses who served in the Civil War, including Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, who cared for injured soldiers at Union hospitals (National Women's History Museum, 2019). After the Civil War, many professional nursing programs began to open

in the United States. White nurse leaders worked to build the professionalization of nursing (White & Fulton, 2015). In Southern states, Blacks were restricted from these professional nursing programs through Jim Crow laws. Specifically, Blacks were often denied the opportunity to take the nursing entrance examination. If allowed to take the exam, Blacks were given a different exam which deemed them inferior (White & Fulton, 2015). Blacks were also denied access to other healthcare professions. According to Phillips and Malone (2014), “Similar to the low percentages of racial/ethnic minority groups in the nursing workforce, the number of racial/ethnic minority individuals enrolled in nursing schools is suboptimal to meet the diversity needs” (p. 46).

Data from National Survey of Registered Nurses shows that in 2018, Blacks nurses made up 7.8 percent of the workforce in the United States (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2018). Based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2018), “African Americans make up only 8.2 percent of physicians/surgeons, 10.6 percent of nurse practitioners while other allied health fields (e.g., dental hygiene, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy) remain largely white” (Whitt-Glover, 2019, p. 4). The low numbers of Blacks are also seen among other healthcare profession in the United States. In 2004, a report was published by the Sullivan Commission regarding the state of diversity among healthcare professionals. The report found that diversity in healthcare has not kept up with an ever-changing society resulting in a healthcare workforce that is not reflective of society (Whitt-Glover, 2019).

This lack of diversity in health professional schools leads to greater disparities in healthcare delivery, particularly when it comes to Black patients. Studies have shown that Blacks toil more in their interactions within the healthcare system, experience lack of access to timely treatments, and even die sooner than other non-white patients (Edwards, 2011). Lack of

diversity, “can lead to a healthcare workforce lacking cultural competence, or the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior required of a practitioner to provide optimal health care services to persons from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Whitt-Glover, 2019, p. 5). Interactions with patients is a major component of healthcare. The lack of knowledge on how to conduct these interactions appropriately further hinders Black people from receiving quality, vital care (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014). Research suggests that all relationships between white physicians and Patients of Color are based on power imbalances (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014). A power imbalance that has persisted throughout history between whites and Blacks. Despite being the 21st century, disparities continue to exist in almost every tier within healthcare to include providers, systems, and access to care (Whitt-Glover, 2019).

Beginning in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated injustices within healthcare. Institutional racism in healthcare is not a new phenomenon, but rather a persistent one (Lim et al., 2021). Research has shown that Blacks are treated vastly different by the healthcare system compared to whites. A study by Feagin and Bennefield (2014) concluded:

Among Medicare patients, Blacks with circulatory problems were much more likely to have a leg amputated than otherwise comparable whites, and Blacks with prostate cancer were much more likely than others to have testicles removed. Black patients with problems comparable to whites got less attention from nurses, fewer tests, and less sophisticated or no heart treatments. Other researchers have found significant racial differences in access to best therapies for HIV/AIDS, prenatal care, and child health services. Also, Blacks were less likely to be recommended for standard catheterization, compared to whites with similar occupations and medical histories. Another study found

Black patients with lung cancer were less likely to receive the best surgical treatment than white patients (p. 10).

There continues to be healthcare providers who subscribe to the myth that Black people's skin is thicker than white people, thus they have a higher pain tolerance (Lim et al., 2021). This myth has led to determinantal consequences, specifically in regard to pain management. Lim et al. (2021) offers that these inaccuracies are perpetuated due to "existing educational materials that continue to reinforce outmoded, harmful ways of thinking" (p. 132). The breadth and depth of inappropriate, inequitable experiences of Black people with the healthcare system are innumerable.

Racialized Incidents on Predominantly White Institutions Campuses

According to Bauman et al. (2019), "in the United States, demographic changes paired with continued inequity in academic achievement challenge institutions of higher education to be more responsive to historically underserved students" (p. 37). Underserved students are generally classified as low-income, racial and/or ethnic minority, or first-generation college students. Racial incidents often target Students of Color, including Black students. Race is identified as a top motivating factor in these incidents, typically stemming from bias. A bias incident can involve "conduct, speech, or expression motivated by prejudice" (Miller et al., 2018a, p. 314). Aguirre (1997), "estimated that at least one million incidents of ethnoviolence occurred on U.S. college campuses between 1986 and 1993" (p. 26). Ethnoviolence is defined as a product of systemic and socially constructed norms that permit dominant culture to engage in acts of violence and intimidation against marginalized groups (Davis & Harris, 2016). This review focuses specifically on racial incidents against Black students. According to Perry (2010), white males, particularly those in fraternities, are the most common perpetrators of racial incidents

against Blacks on higher education campuses. Studies report 80 percent of hate crimes reported in 2018 at higher education institutions were motivated by bias (PNPI, 2019). Data shows that “race was the motivating bias in 43 percent of reported hate crimes (347 incidents), while an additional 11 percent (88 incidents) were motivated by ethnicity” (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES] & National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2021, p. 4). These hate crimes can range from verbal to physical attacks. Ethnoviolence is present in higher education and is experienced by Black students through racialized incidents. The pervasiveness of racism and anti-Blackness has sustained campus cultures that continues to marginalize and dehumanize Black students.

Black students at PWIs are also often victims of inaccurate stereotypes based on race or ethnicity. Stereotypes lead to racial microaggressions, a common form of racism encountered by Black students. The prevalence and impact of racial microaggressions in education has been documented in more recent times. According to Ramasubramanian et al., (2017), “repeated exposure to microaggressions can also lead to racial battle fatigue, which can impact marginalized people; without addressing this form of racism, Students of Color will continue to feel marginalized on college campuses” (pp. 538-539). Microaggressions are described as a subtle, yet pervasive form of racism that can have lasting effects on victims. Racial microaggressions are by in large ignored and often not reported (Davis & Harris, 2016). Yet, microaggressions can be dehumanizing experiences for Black students at PWIs (Ramasubramanian, 2017).

Often, colleges and universities are among the few places where individuals from various racial, cultural, and socioeconomic can engage, and for some this is the most diverse environment they have experienced (Tatum, 2019). These stereotypes can have negative

consequences which can negatively affect academic performance, increase the power of internal negative stereotypes, and discourage academic goals (Han et al., 2018). This is the current culture in higher education, specifically at PWIs:

The racial climates across predominately white college campuses consistently indicate that there are disparate gaps in social satisfaction among racial groups, institutional neglect in regards to fostering interracial interactions, pervasiveness of whiteness in curricula and activities as the norm, and issues regarding race remain an avoidable topic at these institutions (Campbell, 2016, p. 27).

Higher education is one sector of society where there is also a lack of representation among the leadership, including faculty and administration. This lack of representation along with current higher education policies is a common compounding factor to the lack of diversity within the institution (Luster-Edward & Martin, 2019). This is one reason students of color are calling for more People of Color in leadership roles within higher education. Currently as it stands, university leadership is comprised mostly of white men (White, 2016). Students of Color often feel there is no voice to speak on their behalf and that there is a limited number of people who understand their experiences and can express their concerns with the current state of higher education. The literature has “persuasively argued that institutions of higher education reproduce inequity when their unwritten norms, ideas, and practices align with middle- and upper-class cultural norms” (Bauman et al., 2019, p. 46). Oftentimes, racial incidents are framed in ways to downplay the incident and/or its impact. According to Hughes (2013), by referring to an incident as “isolated” it then becomes easier to classify as race or inconsistent. The way in which racial incidents are framed definitely play a role in how they are interpreted and responded to by administration and the campus community.

Hate crimes continued to rise following the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump which presented a daily struggle for Black students at IHEs in general, and PWIs in particular (Taum, 2019). The mistreatment of Black students at PWIs directly correlates with national unrest movements centered around brutality (Briscoe, 2022). Despite numerous studies on racial incidents, scholarship exploring student's perceptions of incident response is lacking (Briscoe, 2022). There remains work to be done in order explore the experiences of Black students in the aftermath of a racial incident. Finders and Kwame-Ross (2020) found Students of Color are commonly accused of overreacting when they raise any concern or issue of race or racism. This invalidation is quite damaging. Finders and Kwame-Ross recommend:

Faculty, staff, and students in higher education to identify and practice the speech skills necessary to disrupt, at the moment of utterance, unexamined dominant speech acts and to sound and make real the proverbial call for a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus space (p. 28).

PWIs do not promote a positive multiracial environment for all students. This failure in turn has negative consequences for Black students (Bell, 1995).

Black Student Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions and Racial Trauma

Since the Civil Rights Movement there has been a drive for equality and the end of racial discrimination. According to Aguirre (1997), “despite efforts by the federal government to desegregate institutions of higher education in the United States, college campuses remain hostile and alien environments for minority (non-white) students” (p. 26). The literature clearly recognizes that Black students' college experience is vastly different than white students at PWIs. Despite the differences in experiences, the majority of Black people who obtain undergraduate degrees attended PWIs (Griffith et al., 2019b). Within PWIs, Black students are

marginalized, then also contend with racial stressors such as campus discrimination or being the only Black person in their classes (Griffith et al., 2019). The voices and experiences of Black students needs to be shared and heard. Unfortunately, many Black students become victims of bias-related incidents during their time in college and university environments (LePeau et al., 2018a). From a historical standpoint, IHEs can cause pain to individuals when they lose focus of their moral commitment and purpose (Arellano & Vue, 2019). This departure has been the root of racial tension and injustices within higher education. Just as Black people were dehumanized throughout history, this oppression continues today. Watson et. al (2020) acknowledges that perpetuation of systemic racism, which is anchored in white superiority, operates as a container and is essential to Black dehumanization.

Racial trauma from racial incidents affects the well-being of Black students in a variety of ways. Carter (2006) reports, “African American students felt that white faculty, students, and staff did not view them as full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems (p. 39). Exposure to racism and discrimination in conjunction with the energy needed to combat stereotypes can lead to harmful psychological and physiological stress (Nelson, 2019). Racial discrimination can lead to an increase in symptoms of anxiety which in turn can lead to a depletion of cognitive resources (Sosoo et al., 2020) and limit a Black student from reaching their full potential (Griffith et al., 2019b). Discrimination can stimulate negative emotional responses and psychological arousal which then leads to the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis that then releases cortisol. Cortisol release causes structural changes in the body that lend a person into a state of hypervigilance, triggering stress responses from non-threatening sources, and chronic vigilance that causes worry which is a core feature of anxiety (Sosoo et al., 2020). Allen (1997) details:

Unless those white institutions which are placement providers/partners with academic institutions develop anti-racist strategies within their structures, provisions and training, then Black students will continue to feel isolated, they will continue to get a second class service; they will continue to be expected to jump through further hoops than their white counterparts; they will continue to have to be twice as good as their white counterparts; they will continue to feel stressed, under pressure and under constant scrutiny (p. 183).

The literature acknowledges the role of Black students' experiences in trying to determine their own needs. The literature consistently shows that Black students encounter multiple forms of racism and discrimination at PWIs (Johnson et al., 2014). Yet there is a disconnect between higher education taking steps to meet these needs and addressing concerns of the Black student community. According to Campbell, (2016), Black students report gaps in social satisfaction in racial groups, institutional neglect in regard to cultivating interactions among various races and cultures, dominance of whiteness in curricula and activities as the norm, and issues regarding race remain an avoidable topic at these institutions. Frustrations and emotional distress among Black students arise from the feeling of being unheard over and over again (Tatum, 2019). Kelley (2018b) asks, "what does it mean for Black students to seek love from an institution incapable of loving them?" (pp. 153-154). Unfortunately, this is a very familiar experience for many Black students in higher education today.

The literature proposes recommendations for higher education administration in their dealings with the experiences of Black students. There is a hearty body of research from sociology, psychology, and higher education that documents the impact of racial incidents and marginalization of Black students (Garces et al., 2022). One recommendation appeals administrations to examine the institution as a "central and significant domain for how students

learn about racial matters can assist researchers and educational administrators in understanding how race, racism, and racial ideologies shape social experiences and educational outcomes for white students and students of color” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 560). Learning from the experiences of Black students can also serve as a tool to aid higher education if they are open to prioritizing the needs and concerns of Black students. There is much to be learned from the resilience of underrepresented students who face isolation and racism, and embedded within their stories are vital lessons about how institutions require change to meet the needs of all students (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). The power of the experiences of Black students is evident throughout the literature. The gap exists in the ability of higher education administration to earnestly hear these experiences and act accordingly to create a more inclusive, safe learning environment.

The literature is clear that racial incidents and discrimination can have numerous detrimental effects on the victims. Exposure to racism and discrimination can cause physical ailments such as hypertension, heart disease, and weaken the immune system (Coleman et al., 2012). Along with the physical effects of racism, Black students who observe and/or encounter racism on campus experience an increase in their academic stress and dampens their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their persistence decisions (Johnson et al., 2014). Other studies report that Black students often struggle with feelings of anger, self-doubt, and alienation (Lowe et al., 2013). Another consequence of racial discrimination is that it can lower academic performance which can lead to an “opportunity gap” that in turn can lead to limited academic success (Morales, 2014). There may be few Black faculty for Black students to work with, as research topics focused on oppression and racism are commonly held in low regard. Bell et al. (2020) advises that “those in decision-making positions should encourage and value self-relevant, social justice, and activist

research and ensure that Black academics' personal interest in their topic areas is not held against them in performance evaluation and promotion and tenure decisions” (p. 44). The negative effects of racial discrimination can be compounded which is particularly detrimental to Black students. Aguirre (1997) asserts, Black and other minority students, are vulnerable as they are seen as strangers in an institution controlled by dominant (white) values and policies. This in-turn renders the Black student powerless.

Systemic racism and its persistence are a major factor in the Black student experience. According to Powell et al. (2021), “accepting and understanding the deep-rootedness of racism as causes of inequity within U.S. society enables individuals to adequately address inequity among and within student experiences and outcomes” (p. 242). Black students make numerous sacrifices during their higher education experience in order to graduate and maintain their self-worth. By and large, Black students experience racism at PWIs which has a negative impact on their psychological well-being (Linley, 2018). Degree completion alone should not classify success; how a student feels at the end of their journey is a significant indicator of success (Campbell et al., 2019). Despite what ideals a PWI may portray of unity, they must acknowledge that the experiences of Black students are, in most cases, not consistent (Linley, 2018).

Institutional Responses to Racialized Incidents

The frequency of race-related student movements has increased recently in the United States in the wake of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Griffin et al., 2010). The response of higher education administration at PWIs is now being questioned to determine true intentions, authenticity, and the substance for real change. After numerous high-profile racial incidents against Black students, consistency and transparency have been identified as vital factors in crisis response (Fortunato et al., 2018). Historically, and in the present time, higher education has been

controlled by white men. According to Powell et al. (2021) “White supremacist narratives in higher education are disseminated via the reframing of racialized circumstances to influence institutional decision-making in favor of white people” (p. 243). The institution has the power to bring equity into the remedy or be the cause of continued unjust behavior, be it intentional or not (Bell, 1995).

When racial incidents are known to the higher education administration, the next steps are crucial in the effectiveness of the response. The steps taken must also be critiqued to refine response practices if there is a goal to support diversity and inclusion (Miller et al., 2018). One confounding factor is most higher education administrative leadership consists of white males. In a study conducted by Perry (2010), they found that “racism and other parallel forms of oppression are invisible to the dominant majority, who recognize neither their own privilege, nor the lack of such privilege among their minority peers” (p. 274). University leadership, specifically presidents, do not realize the power they have in addressing racial incidents and that responses can harm students (Briscoe, 2022). According to Briscoe (2022), university leadership “are not immune to perpetuating harm caused by racism when they, even unintentionally, appeal to color-evasiveness values of diversity and inclusion when confronting repeated racialized incidents on campus” (p. 1). Hate speech and other racial language demand that IHE administration respond intentionally to address any damage Black students experience in the aftermath (Garces et al., 2022). Too often the responses are color-evasive and inadequate to support inclusion (Garces et al., 2022).

Specifically, in regard to university presidents, they need to openly acknowledge the various forms of racism in their responses following a racial incident: systemic, historical, and institutional (Briscoe, 2022). Black students are looking for an institutional response that is

supportive of their emotional needs, a response that they consider genuine (Garces et al., 2022b). Also, the literature demands that higher education leaders “must first understand the racial realities of Black students in a broader context of collegiate climates” (Linley, 2018, p. 34).

One current strategy is the implementation of bias response teams. Bias response teams were initially implemented in the 1980s (Garces et al., 2022b). The function of bias response teams vary across IHEs. In most cases, bias response teams are an institutionalized process where members of the institution can report racial incidents. The report then goes to an administrative body made up of faculty, student affairs administration, and in some cases law enforcement (Garces et al., 2022b). Bias response teams follow up with those who filed reports and those who committed a bias incident. Most bias response teams maintain logs of bias/racial incidents, but do not have punitive authority (Garces et al., 2022b). Bias response teams do not have the same hierarchal status in relation to students as faculty do (LePeau et al., 2018b). This commonly leads to decreased institutional support and access to resources.

There is little empirical research on bias response teams. The research that does exist suggests that bias response teams make the appearance that an institution is working against racism and racial incidents, while in actuality they may “reproduce rather than challenge systemic inequities” (Miller et al., 2018a, p. 318). In most cases, the use of bias response teams allows an institution to address a specific racial incident while distancing from the real issues of systemic oppression and the work to transform the institution’s culture (Miller et al., 2018a). Bias response is frequently described as reactive while “allowing an underlying culture of exclusion to exist” (Miller et al., 2018b, p. 30). The literature details that in order to combat racism and racial incidents at IHEs, there must be a culture that is open to dialogue and awareness about racism (Linley, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) first appeared in the legal sector in the 1970s during examination of post-Civil Rights legislation by Derrick Bell (Bell, 1995; Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). More specifically, in protest for the lack of diversity at Harvard Law School (Carbado, 2002). CRT was created by People of Color critical legal scholars who were, “ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law” (Bell, 1995, p. 898). “CRT rejects the standard racial progress narrative that characterizes mainstream civil rights discourse— namely, that the history of race relations in the United States is a history of linear uplift and improvement” (Carbado, 2011, p. 1607). CRT was founded on core tenets which are: (1) race is a social construction, (2) interest convergence, (3) racism is endemic, (4) counter storytelling, (5) whiteness as property, (6) transdisciplinary knowledge to understand racism, and (7) the challenging of dominant ideology (Bell, 1995, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Bell was a vocal, powerful voice against *Brown* because “racial reform typically has occurred when the equality interest of People of Color converges with the interest of powerful elites, and “even when the interest convergence results in an effective racial remedy, that remedy will be abrogated at the point that policy makers fear that the remedial policy is threatening” (Carbado, 2011, p. 1608). Bell details how many whites will not support laws, including civil rights, that challenge their superior social status (Tate, 1997).

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) racism has been and continues to be a key factor in determining inequity. W.E.B. DuBois writes “the African American ever feels his two-ness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pp. 50-51). The tenets serve as the foundation of CRT and its purpose. First, race is a social construct. Race is a social construction, not based on biology (Bell, 1992).

This construction works to keep the line, through policies and practices, between the dominant group and subservient groups such as whites and Blacks (Bell, 1995). Second, interest convergence details that for Blacks to achieve equality their interests must converge with whites in power positions (Bell, 1980). Third, the reality that race is endemic in society; in that race is a part of the everyday experiences of Black people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Race and racism are permanent within society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Matsuda et al., (1993), “Jim Crow, which persists today in the form of private clubs and neighborhoods, is seen as less offensive than cross burnings” (p. 23). For a Black person race and racism are a part of their day-to-day lives.

Fourth is the power of counter storytelling. CRT sees the experiences of Black people as a strength (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For Black people, storytelling has a historical context, it is one of the oldest art forms (Museus et al., 2015). These stories “expose deficit-informed research that silence and distort the experiences of People of Color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). The stories also hold the power to be transformative through the sharing of these embodied experiences and the meaning taken from them (Tate, 1997). Counterstories can open one to see a new reality showing that there are other possibilities than the life we live (Delgado, 1989). Fifth, whiteness as property is implanted in the laws of this country. CRT details the complex relationship between race and property which leads to racial oppression of Blacks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Harris (1993), “through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present” (p. 1714). White people have at their disposal inherent benefits because they are white (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The “social relations that produced racial identity as a justification for slavery also had implications for the conceptualization of property”

(Harris, 1993, p. 1718). From this, the presumption of freedom was related to white and slavery became related to Black. Thus, being white was “a shield from slavery a highly volatile and unstable form of property” (Harris, 1993, p. 1720). Black lives were seen as inhumane and suffered devaluation. Since white people could not be enslaved, the divide between Black and white was crucial, serving as a line of protection for whites (Harris, 1993). Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be “white, to be identified as white, to have the property of being white” (Harris, 1993, p. 1721). More wicked and enduring “that the victimization of People of Color is that construction of whiteness as the ultimate property” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Whiteness and being white continues to be held in high esteem today.

Property can manifest in multiple ways. Education is a form of intellectual property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The quality of the education is based on “property values” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, p. 54). The more resources available the better-quality education an institution can provide. Based on this, CRT allows us to see that institutions that serve Students of Color are less likely to have the needed resources compared to institutions that serve whites students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT refuses to accept the view that “status quo arrangements are the natural result of individual agency and merit” (Carbado, 2011, p. 1608). Each of us inherit certain advantages and disadvantages whether it’s economic, cultural, or ideological based on race (Carbado, 2011). CRT works “by demonstrating how colorblindness can produce racial preferences and how color consciousness can neutralize and disrupt embedded racial advantages” (Carbado, 2011, p. 1609). This disruption works to reveal the many disadvantages that Black people inherited and continue to experience today.

Sixth, is using transdisciplinary knowledge to understand race and racism. CRT acknowledges that to better understand race and racism there must be inclusion of ethnic, social, history, law, and women's studies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Lastly, challenging the dominant ideology is the seventh core tenant. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), "CRT challenges the traditional claims that education institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (p. 26). This same race neutrality that often masks white privilege and maintenance of power and positions.

About thirty years ago, the first work with CRT in education was published (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The work of CRT theorists, who encountered pushback in establishing race as a factor of understanding racial inequality in society, led to the entrance of CRT in education with first published writings in the early 1990s (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Many of the CRT theorists, including Bell, Crenshaw, and Delgado, saw CRT in education as an extension of the work that had been started in law and the supporting structures perpetuate racism and solidify subservient and dominant power positions on campuses (Museus et al., 2015). CRT views the traditional curriculum as specifically intended to maintain white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), "this master scripting means the stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power" (p. 18). This divide leads to vastly different educational experiences of Black students compared to those from the dominant culture. Since its entrance into higher education, CRT "must therefore contend with the 'problem facing white people' of coming to grips with the demands made by Black and whites while at the same time avoiding the possibility of institutional change and reorganization that might affect them" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55).

CRT seeks to examine and explain the disparities in education pertaining to Black students (Closson, 2010; Zorn, 2018). CRT is based upon People of Color and their experiences, but similarities are seen within other minority groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT acknowledges that racism has become sophisticated, requiring a deeper understanding and analysis. Leung and Lopez-Knight (2020), detail the influence of CRT in the following passage:

CRT has been a necessary intervention that has centered race in its analysis of educational inequities. Pedagogically, critical race theorists have utilized the elements of the theory to outline a critical race pedagogy, which has shaped their own instruction and research. By foregrounding the embeddedness and normalcy of racism and its interactions with other forces of oppression in educational spaces, insisting on a contextual and historical understanding(s) of race and power, and centering the experiences—knowledge, ways of being—of Communities of Color through expressions that challenge dominant narratives, critical race scholars have (re)positioned race-radical liberatory pedagogical strategies to challenge white supremacy (p. 19).

The education system has been the constant primary site of the civil rights struggle in more recent times (Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006). CRT in higher education provides a lens “concerning the impact of white normativity on institutions of learning, the use of education as an instrument of white supremacy, and the role race plays in determining the very social and political structures of American life” (Curry, 2008, p. 35). Not only does CRT reveal the impact of white supremacy, it also aids in detailing how race, racism, and power structures dictate the plights of Black students in higher education (Allen et al., 2018). The CRT framework also works to validate the experiences of Black people in higher education, which is often disregarded. PWIs

continue to see in present day, how the identities of Black students are marginalized and not validated.

The Civil Rights Movement focused on lessening the role of race, while CRT “envisions race eclipsing everything” (Zorn, 2018, p. 204). There are many court cases that have ruled on race in regard to higher education access. *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* ruled that an educational institution cannot discriminate based on race. In the framework on CRT, specifically interest convergence, *Brown*, was enacted in order to gain power in an international context for the advantage of white elites within the political, economic, and legal sectors (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Morfin et al., 2006). Furthermore, CRT examines factors influencing the decision and the “structures of racial inequity that *Brown* served to reconfigure rather than dismantle” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 31). In 1973, *Adams v. Richardson*, ruled that Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Maryland, and Virginia had continued segregation operations. Despite being asked to submit desegregation plans, many of the schools did not, and in most cases did not suffer consequences (Allen et al., 2018). Through the lens of CRT, specifically interest convergence, these cases illustrate the true intentions of whites in the support of policies and laws that further support white supremacy and the continued marginalization of Blacks (Morfin et al., 2006). In the midst of court ordered access to higher education, Blacks still faced structural and systemic exclusion. According to Patton (2016) “race remained untheorized in education and proposed that analyses of educational inequity, must explicitly acknowledge the role of racism/white supremacy in education” (pp. 315-316). Also, the fact that most decisions regarding higher education access are being made by white men, compounded the issue around exclusion and discriminatory policies.

As higher education moves forward, there is a need for people who are, “willing to go beyond comfort, privilege, a false sense of meritocracy and elitism to take risks, speak the truth, and provide leadership to transform university culture” (Lukes & Bangs, 2014, p. 12). CRT was created with goals and a vision. A vision of social transformation through empowering marginalized groups and the removal of inter-connected structures of oppression (Ross, 2009) and exposing hidden and blatant inequities (Patton, 2016). CRT validates the covert and overt acts of racism that are experienced by Black students, calling for collective movements of resistance that challenges these experiences in order to make better higher education for future generations (Powell et al., 2021). Despite there being numerous studies on racial inequity in education, particularly pertaining to Black students, there are no published works that identify leadership practices specifically using CRT (Capper, 2015).

In recent years, we see CRT in the forefront of political movements for exclusion from education curriculum. CRT came to the forefront after former President Trump’s executive order trying to ban diversity training (Briscoe & Jones, 2024). This triggered efforts by state legislators in 44 states to ban CRT in classrooms, race discussions, and training (Briscoe & Jones, 2024). State bills are attempting to disrepute CRT stating that it may cause shame to students regarding responsibility for histories of racism (Briscoe & Jones, 2024). In 2021, ten states passed legislation limiting discussions on race and racism in schools, particularly at the K-12 level (Arnett, 2022). In 2022, there was another wave of anti-CRT laws targeted at IHEs. Oklahoma passed House Bill (HB) 1775 on April 21, 2021. HB 1775 states:

No enrolled student of an institution of higher education within The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education shall be required to engage in any form of mandatory gender or sexual diversity training or counseling; provided, voluntary counseling shall not be

prohibited. Any orientation or requirement that presents any form of race or sex stereotyping or a bias on the basis of race or sex shall be prohibited (H.R. Resolution 1775, 2021, p. 2).

In 2023, the Oklahoma Governor signed an executive order that targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion work in the state. The executive order states:

The order requires state agencies and institutes for higher education to initiate a review of DEI positions, departments, activities, procedures, and programs to eliminate and dismiss non-critical personnel. State agencies and institutions for higher education shall not utilize state funds, property, or resources to:

1. Grant or support diversity, equity, and inclusion positions, departments, activities, procedures, or programs to the extent they grant preferential treatment based on one person's particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin over another's.
2. Mandate any person to participate in, listen to, or receive any education, training, activities, procedures, or programming to the extent such education, training, activity, or procedure grants preferences based on one person's particular race, color, sex, ethnicity, or national origin over another's (Newsroom Oklahoma.gov, 2023, paras. 3-5).

In Georgia, Governor Matt Kemp described the push to eliminate CRT as a way “to protect our students from divisive ideologies like critical race theory that pits kids against each other” (Tagami, 2022, p. 1). Ohio has made similar moves in regard to banishing CRT in education. Senate bill 498 “is called the Anti-Racism Act and forbids the teaching in K-12 schools and higher education of various principles such as that one race, ethnic group, or biological sex is

inherently, morally, or intellectually superior to another” (Beard, 2022a, p. 1). In this bill, terms associated with CRT are used, but not CRT specifically. According to Golemboski (2018):

The struggle for Civil Rights must overcome not only the fact of racism and racial discrimination, but also the reluctance of ostensibly well-meaning white “allies” to cede control over the social, political and economic orders. The struggle for true racial justice, then, must aim not only to achieve conditions of autonomy, civil liberties, political representation, decent living and so on, but also to undermine the hegemony of white identity that attempts to control People of Color, even while applauding their efforts at advancement (p. 116).

CRT is continuing to evolve along with its influence in the fight for equity (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). CRT is being used in reform efforts for Blacks and their higher education experience (Patton, 2016). CRT has been described as a framework that allows one “to fully understand how race and racism affect higher education and perpetuate various forms of oppression and how the experiences in academia must be viewed as ‘valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data’” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 20). The experiences are those that primarily occurs a PWIs. Previous and past scholarship have made strides with CRT to illuminate the permanence of racism and counter storytelling (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT is a tool to help as Blacks strive for equality in a society where they consistently being devalued.

Applying Critical Race Theory

CRT provides the perspective that allows one to understand the role of race and racism in education. CRT is the frame that normalizes the documentation of the inequity in healthcare power systems and the practices that sustain them. According to Bridges et al., (2017), a “Critical Race Theory framework would posit the racialized power relationships are a

constitutive part of the health sciences” (p. 180). There is this consistent pattern of inequality, inequity, and persistence of power systems within healthcare higher education that is illuminated by CRT. CRT uses a “historical filter for explicating and analyzing past and present contexts that create specific learning environments” (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 95). For this work, two of the CRT tenets are particularly applicable the permanence of racism and counter storytelling.

First, counter storytelling is purposed to share the experiences with institutional racism. Counterstories “can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The story details values, culture, and the significance of the experiences as determined by the teller (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Storytelling is a treasured way of communication by sharing stories and experiences of People of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Smith et al., (2002), “counterstories also expose the racialized ideologies embedded in the discourses of those in power” (p. 565). Counterstories are a vital component of CRT and its use in educational research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These counterstories are often not shared, heard, or told (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories have many functions in research such as bring to light race and racism at an institution, build community among those who are sharing their experiences, and “they contest the perceived wisdom and knowledge of individuals at society’s center by offering context that understands and transforms established belief systems” (Taylor et al., 2023, pp. 39-40). Storytelling helps to strengthen the listener who may share the same experiences with racism (Delgado, 1989). Counterstories are essential in CRT “in a way not understandable to those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritarian” (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 38). These voices are the ones to express, reveal, care, resist, and “reiterate what kind of power is feared most the power of commitment to change” (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 38). The sharing of

stories build community in that many Black people share experiences with racism and learn that they are not alone.

Second, the permanence of racism is a useful tenant in education research. Despite being in the 21st century, race and racism remain and impact the everyday lives of Blacks (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Being a Black student within higher education is not a shield against racism or its effects (White, 2016). CRT becomes “an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and just relations of power” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). The socialization priming process occurs and exposes whites in an unconscious, systematic manner to “racist attitudes, stereotypes, assumptions, fears, resentments, discourses, and fictitious racial scripts” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 561). Based on this process, CRT works to reveal and expose racism and its various manifestations (Ladson-Billing, 1998). According to Bell (1992), “what we designate is racial progress is not a solution to the problem, it is a regeneration of the problem in a particularly perverse form” (p. 4). By continuing to use race as an exclusion only lowers the effectiveness of Civil Rights laws while making discriminatory and racist actions more oppressive than before (Bell, 1992). The regeneration can explain the rise of racialized incidents seen that target Black students on PWI campuses.

CRT has been and continues to be a powerful framework helping to disrupt systemic racism, within multiple sectors of society, including higher education. CRT can aid higher education in “recognizing patterns, practices, and policies of racial inequality” to dismantle them (Linley, 2018, para. 26). The frequency and nature of racialized incidents that occur at PWIs requires consistent examination to determine how the institution can fight to protect the Black student experience. Equality work must occur within and outside the walls of higher education

(White, 2016). To achieve equality as a society, we must work for “deconstruction of race, so that biological theories of inferiority and hierarchy cannot ever arise again” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 155). The perpetuating power systems have allowed for the continuation of racism in this country against Blacks. Racism has persisted in society; thus, it has also persisted on the campuses of IHEs in the United States (Museus et al., 2015). CRT has centered racism and provided the context needed to explore the depth of racism and the power of experiences of those who encounter racism. I used the framework of CRT to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students with racialized incidents and strategies used to cope with racism. CRT was chosen as the theoretical framework because “a critical race methodology in educational research challenges the dominant ideology, white privilege, and illuminates deficit-based research approaches” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 35). CRT makes known that race inequity and racism are embedded within the education system (Taylor et al., 2023). CRT is commonly used to study racism and its effects (Briscoe, 2022).

Chapter Summary

This chapter covered a review of the literature and the theoretical framework for this case study. The chapter reviewed the literature that detailed the history of higher education, racism in the United States, racialized incidents, and the experiences with racism of undergraduate, Black nurses. Through this review, one can see that racism is a long-standing issue, not only in the United States but in the sector of higher education. From the beginning, racism was built into higher education. Examples include using Black slaves for labor, denying them access to higher education, and enacting policies and practices to serve the interest of white culture and those in leadership positions. The policies and practices of higher education institutions exclude Black students’ voices, prioritize white culture as a means of interest convergence, and lack the

awareness to recognize the impact of racialized incidents against Black students due to permanence of racism. CRT was discussed in detail and provided the specific tenets applied in this study. Moving forward, the next chapter will describe the research methods of this case study.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this chapter, I describe my methodology and methods, including an overview of the research design, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical issues. This study used a single qualitative case study and reported the data using narrative summaries. Qualitative research is used when there is a specific issue that needs to be explored and to empower individuals to share their stories (Crotty, 1998). The intent of this study is to reveal Black undergraduate nursing student's experiences with racism and racialized incidents. Racialized incidents continue to occur across the United States, including Colvin [pseudonym for the state within this study] and Robinson University [pseudonym for the research site]. Thus, the information obtained from this study has the potential to be useful for other predominantly white institutions (PWI) desiring to provide an inclusive environment for Black students. The choice to explore the experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students was made due to this group often being overlooked in literature and so their stories can be heard. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a predominantly white institution?
2. How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution?
3. What strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution?

The research design will be detailed in this chapter. Within this chapter, I start with an overview of Critical Race Theory, and how this theory related to my data collection and analysis. Next, I provide a historical context of the case study site and Black people experiences with

racism in Colvin. This provided the information needed to amplify the significance of this study. Participant recruitment, study criteria, interview protocol, and demographics of the participants will also be discussed. Documents covering racialized incidents from 2020 will be described within this chapter. Data analysis for both individual interviews and documents are outlined within Chapter 3.

Critical Race Theory

CRT was developed by Critical Legal Scholars who were People of Color in the mid-1970s. CRT is a framework that reveals systemic racism in society (Bell, 1980; Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT tenets are: whiteness as property, permanence of racism, counter storytelling, interest convergence, challenging dominant ideology, transdisciplinary approach to understanding racism, and race is a social construct (Bell, 1980; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Whiteness as property can be explained as “American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness, although unacknowledged now, forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated” (Harris, 1993, pp. 1713-1714). Permanence of racism refers to racism being interwoven into American life (Bell, 1992). Counter storytelling as detailed by Delgado (1989), “enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone” (pp. 2414-2415). Interest convergence stands on the premise that Civil Rights laws continue to function in the interest of white people, even in the present day (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Challenging dominant ideology involves the stance that racism has contributed to present day advantages and disadvantages based on skin color (Matsuda, 1993). Understanding racism requires a transdisciplinary approach. According to Matsuda (1993), CRT borrows ideology from liberalism, feminism, and law. The transdisciplinary approach gives CRT the power to “advance

the cause of racial justice while maintaining a critical posture” (Matsuda, 1993, p. 6). Lastly, race is a social construct, not related to biological makeup (Bell, 1992). These tenets all align together to serve the ultimate purpose of CRT by giving People of Color a voice and the work of advancing racial justice.

Within this study, I focus on the following tenets of CRT: counter storytelling and the permanence of racism. First, the interviewing of participants allowed them an opportunity to share their stories, many of which have never been told (Merriam, 1988). CRT allowed a space for these stories to illustrate the prevalence and frequency of racism and racialized incidents. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), “counterstories also expose the racialized ideologies embedded in the discourses of those in power” (p. 565). CRT works by providing a voice to People of Color who might not have a voice any other time (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories provide a space for these personal stories to be shared and valued. The power of counterstories lies within sharing experiences that would otherwise not be told (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Second, within their stories, the permanence of racism is illuminated, detailing their daily struggle with racism during their higher education experience. The Black student experience in higher education is unique from any other demographic within an PWI institution. Despite progress that has been made since the Civil Rights Movement, no Black person is protected against incidents of racial discrimination (Bell, 1992). The uniqueness of the Black student experience at a PWI is often filled with trauma, racism, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization (Patel, 2021). The entrenched systems of oppression, racism, and exclusion continue to plague Black students in present day (Patel, 2021). Now that Black people can attend any PWI, their experience while there is often filled with racism, exclusion, and marginalization. Despite Black students having access to PWIs, the truth is revealed in their experiences.

The permanence of racism and counterstories were revealed during the interviews and document analysis. The documents provided quotes and details from Black students in the days following both racialized incidents in 2020. The sit-ins that were held, the demand list, and campus protests show the frustration of Black students following racialized incidents. Robinson University has a long history of racialized incidents. Repeated racialized incidents on campus point to a deeper issue which is the permanence of racism. CRT provides the avenue for Black undergraduate nurses to share their stories and provides the needed framework to situate and validate their experiences with racism.

Researcher Positionality

This personal statement was added to better understand how I came to conduct this study. Over the years, and while I attended this university, I have seen many racial incidents play out on campus. There was little to no discussion regarding student's feelings, perceptions, or thoughts in the aftermath, particularly at the nursing college. As a student who was preparing to care for people from all races, backgrounds, places, and cultures, that lack of awareness regarding inclusivity and cultural competence was disheartening. I position myself in this research first as someone who has been on the receiving end of a racial incident on campus. Second, as someone who has studied the history of higher education and now understands the systems of power that perpetuate institutional racism, racialized incidents against Blacks, and continued marginalization of Black students. I am now able to view racism and racialized incidents with more clarity having a more complete understanding of higher education.

I chose to explore Black undergraduate nurses because I was one at one time. I attended a PWI during my entire undergraduate and graduate journey. There were times when I experienced racism but didn't know how and who to talk to about it. I kept it all in and just continued to

progress through the program. I am passionate about the nursing profession and particularly Black nurses. Many Black students are afraid to pursue this career path due to fear of racism and exclusion. I want to be an example that you can achieve your nursing goal while staying true to who you are. I want to be an example that Black nurses are not to be thought less of because of the color of their skin. As a nursing student, I experienced patients questioning my age, my degree, or if I was qualified to be in nursing school. There have been times when patients did not want me to care for them simply because I was Black.

One evening, I walked into my patient's room to introduce myself at the beginning of the shift which was my usual routine. While I was introducing myself and writing my name on the board, the patient looked at me and said, "I don't want a colored nurse". I immediately left the room because I did not know what to do or say. Part of me wanted to tell him not to refer to me in that manner and the other part of me was not sure since he was a patient what I could or could not say. I told the charge nurse. The family came out of the room and apologized on behalf of the patient. I still was not sure what to think. The charge nurse talked to the patient and family and told them that what was said was inappropriate. I did not feel comfortable going back in the room with the patient because I wasn't sure what else he would do or say. The charge nurse ended up taking care of the patient with me that night. This event happened one month into my nursing career after graduating from nursing school. That experience has always stuck with me.

Fifteen years later, I still look back on that experience. Since then, I will be honest and say I still struggle with how people will perceive me and what people will say or do to me because I am a Black person. This was not the only time I had an experience with racism in the nursing profession, but it is definitely a memorable one for me. I come to this work as someone who has had experiences with racism in nursing school and during my nursing career. I can

speaking to the reality of racism and its presence in the day-to-day life of a Black person. I chose this study because it's a part of me and who I am. I strive to make things better for future nurses in school and as they enter the profession. I believe it takes a special type of person to be a nurse; it also takes certain psychological aspects that provides a Black nurse to endure racism and still have a heart to care for those in need.

The creation and history of higher education has provided insight that enlightened me to better understand the current state of higher education and its relationship with Black students. These systems of power are limiting the movement of PWIs in a way that continues to marginalize Black students. As an educator, I understand the influence I have, particularly when it comes to sharing my experiences with my students, but also in aiding them in navigating within the academy. I now realize the power it takes to be bold and reveal the truth that lies behind white-washed education that most people have and continue to receive. This study has shown me that courage is required to confront experiences with racism, the toll it has on Black nursing students, and to do the work in changing higher education to a more inclusive learning environment for Black students.

Research Design

Research is “producing knowledge about the world—in our case, the world of educational practice” (Yazan, 2015, p. 136). Qualitative research “assumes that there is multiple realities—that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception” (Merriam, 1988, p. 17). Qualitative research focuses on process and meaning-making. Qualitative research “implies a direct concern with experiences as it is “felt” or “undergone” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Meaning can be described as “how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their

social worlds” (Merriam, 1988, p. 19). This study follows the case study format established by Merriam (1988).

A qualitative case study, as defined by Merriam (1988), is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. 21). Specific to a case study design and gathering data, Merriam outlines the following criteria regarding how case studies should be created. First, a case study must exclusively use qualitative data sources. Second, case study requires the researcher acquire appropriate skills needed to conduct interviews and analyze documents. Third, data is collected from three main sources to include interviews, document analysis, and observations. Case studies are commonly used in research because “they get as close to the subject matter of interest as they possibly can, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires)” (p. 29). According to Merriam (1998), “a case study provides uniqueness for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (p. 33). For this reason, I chose case study as the research design to better understand racialized incidents and experiences with racism of Black undergraduate nursing students. Black undergraduate nursing students are often overlooked and hold experiences with racism that need to be shared.

This study explores the experiences of racism among Black undergraduate nursing students and the strategies they use to cope with these experiences. A case study research design “can be used to study a phenomenon systematically” (Merriam, 1988, p. 6). For this study, I chose to use a pseudonym for the institution and state. The case for this study is Robinson University, a PWI located in the state of “Colvin”. By selecting the case prior to collecting the data, this is a bounded system based on time by examining the 2020 racialized incidents (Merriam, 1988). Data within this study comes from three sources: interviews, document

analysis, and a demographic survey. The incorporation of multiple data sources works as triangulation to strengthen the data (Merriam 1988). According to Patton (1982), “the case study should take the reader into the case situation, a person’s life or a program’s life making accessible to the reader all the information necessary to understand the person or program” (Patton, 1982, p. 7). A case study method was selected to best reveal the racialized experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students. According to Swim et al., (2003), asking those targeted about their experiences with racism is more empowering than asking perpetrators. Targets are often described as the real experts on prejudice (Swim et al., 2003).

Historical Context of Case Study Location

The first known inhabitants of Colvin were Native Americans (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). Colvin is the first and only state to be made up of two territories. In 1803, the government established two military posts that would later become Colvin (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). In 1807, the U.S. government began to forcibly remove Indigenous Peoples from their land in the Southeast region of the U.S., an event known as the Trail of Tears (History.com Editors, 2009b). The removal journey occurred on foot, and some people were even bound by chains. It is estimated that 15,000 people died on the Trail of Tears (History.com Editors, 2009b). The Cherokee nation was forced to move along with other tribes such as the Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Ponca, and Winnebago to land west of the Mississippi River (Mandweo, 2022). Whites were eager to obtain this vacated land due to its rich fertile nature. White settlers felt that Native Americans were an obstacle to westward expansion (Mandweo, 2022). Many Native Americans resisted assimilating to European culture and the government devised a plan to take their land through bribes and signing land agreements under false pretenses (Mandweo, 2022).

Between 1840-1860, there was great progress among five of the Native American tribes. They obtained wealth through prosperous farming. They were able to establish tribal schools and seminaries (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). While some Native Americans were advancing, the owning of Black slaves increased (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). Many slaves worked on large plantations owned by Native Americans and other mixed-race individuals (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). Several tribes had adopted slavery practices from whites in neighboring places from which they came. When in Colvin, Native Americans either acquired slaves or brought them from previous living places (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914).

Around 1866, all Black towns were created by emancipated slaves throughout Indigenous Native American and Colvin territory. These towns were safe havens for Black people; there was less racial discrimination and prejudice (Colvin Historical Society, 2016). During the years 1865-1875, tensions continued to rise between Native Americans and white “boomers” who were eager to settle in the land (Thoburn & Holcomb, 1914). The term “boomer” refers to a person who considered Indigenous and Native American territory as unassigned and open to anyone for settlement (Wikipedia, n.d.). In 1893, the largest land run began with over 100,000 white people moving into the Cherokee strip in Colvin and claim land that belonged to Native Americans (History.com Editors, 2009b). On March 23, 1889, President Harrison issued a declaration that these lands would be available for white people to claim on a first-come basis (Nix, 2016). On April 22, 1889, approximately 50,000 land seekers rushed into the “unassigned lands” to make their claims (Nix, 2016). No one was supposed to enter until the designated time; those who entered early were named “sooners” (Nix, 2016). In 1890, three public institutions of higher education were established. In 1907, Colvin became the 46th state (Nix, 2016).

Historical Experiences of Black People in Colvin

During the segregation era, Blacks were banned from various places in Colvin. Following World War I was a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), with exponential growth in the 1920s, and lethal tactics against Blacks (Johnson, 2020). The KKK along with Jim Crow made life difficult and deadly for many Blacks. In the years leading up to 1921, a Black community was beginning to thrive. Many Black professionals established businesses along Greenwood Avenue in Howard [pseudonym], Colvin (Hill, 2021). Many Black leaders from across the country looked on Greenwood as a symbol of entrepreneurial spirit and success (Hill, 2021). Booker T. Washington, famous educator, is credited with naming the Greenwood District the “Negro Wall Street of America” (Hill, 2021). The Greenwood District spanned thirty-five blocks and housed more than eleven thousand Black residents in 1921 (Hill, 2021). The Howard Race Massacre occurred on May 31, 1921, following the report that a Black male attacked a white female elevator operator. There is no record of the police interview with the elevator operator (Hill, 2021). The day following the alleged attack, the *Howard Tribune* published an article reporting the alleged attack (Hill, 2021). Based on this news, a large group of white men showed up to the county jail in rage. Black men also came down to the jail to check on the alleged attacker. Chaos ensued with guns fired on both sides. Twenty people were killed in that moment (Hill, 2021). This was the beginning of the worse massacre in American history (Hill, 2021).

For the next twelve hours “neither the city of [Howard] nor [Colvin] state officials did anything to stop the violence and destruction that the white mob proceeded to unleash upon the Greenwood community” (Hill, 2021, p. 672). Police and the local National Guard were active participants by assisting the white mob with a plan to stop the *Negro rebellion* (Hill, 2021). Fear and jealousy rose up among the white community as Blacks’ economic success increased (Johnson, 2020). For many within the white community of Howard, “putting those uppity Negros

back in their place became a rallying cry” (Johnson, 2020, p.181). The morning of June 1, 1921, thousands of whites gunned down Blacks trying to flee the area. Most of the businesses and homes in Greenwood were set on fire. The white mob prevented fire fighters from extinguishing the flames (Hill, 2021). In less than twenty-four hours, “the entire Greenwood District - more than a dozen churches, five hotels, thirty-one restaurants, four drugstores, eight doctors’ offices, two dozen grocery stores, a public library, and more than a thousand homes-lay in ruins” (Hill, 2021, p. 673). Howard’s Black community rebuilt Greenwood by the early 1940s with more than 200 Black owned businesses (Johnson, 2020). For several decades, however, there were no public ceremonies or memorials for those who died in the massacre or to commemorate the events of May 31-June 1, 1921 (Nix, 2016). More attention was put on removing this tragedy from history. The *Howard Tribune* removed the front-page news story and as a result, the massacre was rarely mentioned in history books, taught in school, or even talked about (Hill, 2021).

Despite Black people forming their own communities, there were still many places in Colvin where they could not go. The term sundown town referred to the fact that Blacks were not welcome in certain areas, particularly at night, and this was enforced through intimidation and violence (Nix, 2016). Many of these sundown towns bordered highways such as Route 66 which ran from Illinois to California, running through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Places such as restaurants, businesses, and motels were not accessible to Blacks (Nix, 2016). In 1936, Victor Green, a Black postal worker wrote a book titled “Negro Motorist Green Book” which served as a travel guide for Black people in this region (Nix, 2016). The book was no longer published after 1966 (Nix, 2016).

Higher Education in Relation to Historical Experiences of Black People in Colvin

Even with higher education institutions in the state, those communities were not welcoming of Blacks (Harp, 2015). Civil Rights activist and teacher, Clara Luper led students into a segregated drugstore in Colvin City in 1958. This was one of the first sit-ins in the United States (Colvin Historical Society, 2016). This sit-in lasted for several days before the drugstore served the protestors and desegregated three other stores in other states (Colvin Historical Society, 2016). This was a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement in Colvin. Yet, the legacy of anti-Blackness persisted in the state. In April 2021, HB 1775 was passed to ban CRT and other education concepts that analyze race and gender (H.R. Resolution 1775, 2021). In December 2023, an executive order was signed by Governor Stitt under the title of “defunding discrimination” targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education (Nix, 2016). Laws, executive orders, and policies continue to be passed and enacted to marginalized Black people and limit access and representation in healthcare, education, and government.

Description of Case

Robinson University, a public institution, was founded in 1890 in Colvin. A year after the land run in 1889, the Territorial Governor George Steele signed a bill to establish three institutions of higher education (Barajas & Burr, 2015). One of the institutions would be considered a state university. The people of the county were able to acquire the funds of \$10,000 and 40 acres of property to establish the first building on campus in 1892 (Barajas & Burr, 2015). The next priority was establishing a Board of Regents for the university. David Boyd Ross, son of a Midwestern family was selected as the first university president (Barajas & Burr, 2015). He arrived in August 1892 and had less than a month to hire faculty, acquire student housing, and establish classrooms and offices for the first incoming class. The territorial government offered free tuition to all potential students (Barajas & Burr, 2015). The university

recruitment efforts promised “any young man or woman who has finished the course in a good country school may enter the University and find educational work and a welcome” (Barajas & Burr, 2015, p. 5). Despite this promise to “any” young man or woman, Black people were not allowed to attend the University until 1949 with the admission of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher (Barajas & Burr, 2015).

In 1945, the national division of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began a search for potential plaintiffs to assist with a segregation campaign. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was a member of the NAACP. She graduated with honors from Langston University with a degree in English May 1945 (Wattley, 2014). She had a desire to attend law school but did not want leave home, so the Robinson University law school was the only option despite the segregation laws (Wattley, 2014). When the regional NAACP director, W.A.J. Bullock approached Ada, she agreed to step up and become a plaintiff against segregation. She knew and stated that being a plaintiff would require “not only brains but the willingness and ability to withstand a long and bitter controversy” (Wattley, 2014, p. 76). Furthermore, she knew that Norman was legendary “for its exclusion of Black people and its status as a sundown town” and had a reputation of a “Negro-hating community” (Whattley, 2014, p. 76). She was determined to end segregation, not only for herself but for other Blacks in higher education. She submitted her first application for admission to Robinson University Law school in January 1946. Despite gaining sympathy from President Cross and having a stellar academic record, the pressure from the Board of Regents forced President Cross to deny her admission to the law program. She received a letter from President Cross stating, “Title 70, Sections 452–464, inclusive, of the [Colvin] Statutes, 1941, prohibits Colored students from attending the schools of [Colvin] and makes it a misdemeanor for school officials to admit

Colored students to white schools, to instruct classes composed of mixed races, or to attend classes composed of mixed races” (Whattley, 2014, p. 81). Ultimately, “the Board of Regents has specifically instructed the president of the [Robinson University] to refuse admission of Negroes, giving as a basis of their decision the statutes of [Colvin]” (Whattley, 2014, p. 81).

Following receipt of the letter, President Cross conveyed his sympathy to Ada and encouraged her as she pursued the fight for desegregation (Whattley, 2014). Shortly thereafter, a federal case was filed for the admission of Ada to Robinson University Law School. On April 6, 1946, she filed a petition at the state courthouse for admission to Robinson University Law School. Robinson University administrators debated on how to handle “the Negro problem” (Whattley, 2014). Despite Ada’s legal team arguments, on April 29, 1947, the Supreme Court upheld the denial of her petition. A decision was made to create a “substantially equal” law school at the state’s predominantly Black university, to accommodate Ada. Ada was determined to keep fighting and achieve her goal of enrolling in and attending Robinson University Law School. This case, along with many other similar cases made headlines across the country, particularly in the southern states. Ada applied to Robinson University Law school again in 1948. Six other Black students also submitted applications to graduate programs at Robinson University. Those Black students were Ivor Tatum, Mauderie Hancock Wilson, Mozell Dillon, Helen Maxine Holmes, James Bond, and George McLaurin (Whattley, 2014). Since the programs they desired were not offered at the in-state predominantly Black university, they put the *Sipuel* decision to the test. On February 16, 1948, Ada’s application was denied along with the six other Black students who applied to other graduate programs. The turmoil around race and admitting Black students was becoming a problem, university administrators knew something had to be done (Whattley, 2014).

The Regents was informed of the six Black students who applied to graduate programs. It was determined that four of the students were qualified and the program they wanted was not available at the in-state predominantly Black university (Whattley, 2014). On March 22, 1948, the Board of Regents received a letter from the Attorney General Fred Hansen, stating “that unless they took “prompt action” to establish the graduate programs sought by the six Black applicants, the applicants would be entitled to admission to the Robinson University the next semester” (Whattley, 2014, p. 201). George McLaurin was admitted as the first Black student at Robinson University. Despite this, Ada was still not accepted to Robinson University Law School. On June 15, 1949, Ada once again went to the admission office at Robinson University Law School and was denied entry (Whattley, 2014). Shortly after, university President Cross ordered that Ada be admitted, this brought an end to a three-and-a-half-year fight to become a Robinson University law student (Whattley, 2014). On June 20, 1949, Ada entered Robinson University Law School. The *Sipuel* case was pivotal in Black students’ admission to higher education across the country.

The university was desegregated in 1955. In 1956, Prentice Gautt became the first Black football player (Harp, 2015). The first Black faculty member arrived in 1959, Melvin Tolson Jr. (Harp, 2015). In 1967, Dr. George Henderson became the third Black faculty member on campus. He and his wife gained attention by also being the first Black family to purchase a home in the city where Robinson University was located (Harp, 2015). Following the purchase, Dr. Henderson and family received death threats and threatening phone calls with racial slurs (Harp, 2015). The relator that sold them the home was blacklisted (Harp, 2015). President Cross and other faculty offered support to Dr. Henderson (Harp, 2015). President Cross resigned in 1968. He and Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher maintained a special bond over the years as they continued efforts

to fully integrate the university (Harp, 2015). President Cross' tenure has been described as "his example will always challenge us to be faithful to the best that is in us" (Harp, 2015, p. 95).

Under the leadership of President Hollomon from 1968-1979, a professional police department on campus was established (Harp, 2015). This stemmed from the need to assist with campus unrest and national issues happening at the time. During this time, the Robinson University Afro-American Student Union was an expression of cultural identity that was birthed from lack of progression in race relations (Harp, 2015). The need for cultural identity prompted students to write a "Black Declaration of Independence" which included fourteen requests. The requests included "race-specific offices for student affairs and admissions, minority representation on campus athletics coaching staffs, athletic competition with Black schools, and a Black studies program" (Harp, 2015, p. 100). After being made aware the requests, President Holloman denied most of them but stated that he would have a dialogue with Black students (Harp, 2015). In the years of 1970-1971, under President Pete McCarter, racism was still an issue on campus. In April 1971, vandals placed Ku Klux Klan crosses in the lawn that belonged to Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, a historically Black fraternity (Harp 2015). Protests continued on campus. The Afro-American Student chairman demanded an end to institutionalism racism in the Law School during the annual luncheon (Harp, 2015).

Even as protests and unrest centered on racial inequities persisted, President Paul Sharp chose to focus his efforts on "achieving parity with Black students" (Harp, 2015, p. 115). He made a promise that he would continue the affirmative initiatives, but many Black students felt that these actions were insufficient (Harp, 2015). Many students came from segregated towns and had hopeful expectations of inclusion and an appreciation for diversity on campus. In reality "they found themselves surrounded by unwelcoming white students and even hostile professors"

(Harp, 2015, p. 115). Arsonists set out and attacked four resident halls. The rumor was that fires were started in incite a race riot. Fistfights were common between Black and white students (Harp, 2015). A huge fight occurred between the members of the Black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha and the white fraternity Phi Kappa Sigma. Shouting racial slurs at Black students was a common trigger for violence on campus (Harp, 2015). The Board of Regents was warned to intervene before Black students were injured (Harp, 2015). Dr. Henderson warned “the extent of the verbal and physical conflicts on campus was grave and because of it Black-white relationships were edging closer to the edge of irreparableness” (Harp, 2015, pp. 115-116). Dr. Henderson also advocated for Blacks to be promoted to upper-level administration positions and for the appointment of a Black Regent (Harp, 2015). President Sharp instructed administrators to work on fostering communication with Black students, incorporation of Black history courses, and the hiring of Black faculty and staff (Harp, 2015). In 1973, the Black Ethnic Studies program was founded. Gloria Smith became the university’s first Black Dean at the college of nursing and Walter Mason was appointed at the first affirmative action officer (Harp, 2015). Later in 1973, the university instituted a biracial residence hall which became the largest integrated housing unit in Colvin (Harp, 2015). This served as a first step in total campus integration. Despite plans to improve race relations, demonstrations on campus continued; on occasion they would involve violence.

In the fall of 1990, over one hundred students protested outside the administrative building to “demand a new policy against racial harassment” (Harp, 2015, p. 159). In response to the protest, a skinhead group posted racist fliers on campus buildings. This worked against efforts to increase Black student enrollment. In 1988, the “Strategy for Excellence” had a goal to increase minority enrollment by twenty-five percent (Harp, 2015). 1990 is documented as the

university's most successful recruitment term for minority student enrollment, "yet fewer than two thousand of the university's nineteen thousand students were minorities" (Harp, 2015, p. 159). President Van Horn created a task force to assist with drafting a harassment policy and asked, "white students to extend a hand of friendship to minority students" (Harp, 2015, p. 160). Black students felt the action of the president was "making a mockery of the whole issue" (Harp, 2015, p. 160). In 1990, the official racial harassment protocol was revealed. According to policy, racial discrimination was defined as "conduct directed at others because of their race, religion, or national origin which could cause violence or property damage" (Harp, 2015, p. 160). Offenses were to be reviewed by a panel of students, faculty, and staff. University administrators reserved the right to execute penalties which could range from reprimands to expulsion (Harp, 2015).

Under President John Morris in 1994, Project Threshold was created. This program was a minority student recruitment and support program. The program was developed recognizing that admitted Black students were struggling academically. This was attributed to the fact that "many Black students had not received an education equal to most white students and had significantly lower American College Testing (ACT) scores upon graduation" from high school (Harp, 2015, p. 167). To aid this gap, the University College unit offered "academic advising, counseling, and tutoring at no cost to Black freshman with identified needs" (Harp, 2015, p.168). Project Threshold was able to gain federal funding and expanded its efforts (Harp, 2015).

Starting the mid-1990s into the 2000s, President Boren worked to build community on campus. He felt that the lack of shared experiences among social and economic sectors led to gaps in the community. He stated, "we need a national intervention about forming diversity and community and being part of each other's lives" (Harp, 2015, p. 174). He felt that allowing students to choose their roommates had "unintended consequences" (Harp, 2015, p. 175). This

had led to homogenous spaces in which students had less opportunity to learn from other students regarding social, economic, and cultural aspects. He made it to where students could not choose their residence hall or who their suitemates were. In his view, if students couldn't group up according to hometowns or race, "all students would become part of the university community" (Harp, 2015, p. 175). Based on data from 2022, minority student enrollment at Robinson University is 38% with Black students making up 5% of enrollment (US News, n.d.). Based on 2024 rankings, Robinson University placed #124 among national universities (US News, n.d.).

Racialized Incidents at Robinson University

There have been multiple racialized incidents at Robinson University, several of which made national news. In 2015, a racialized incident occurred that involved students from Robinson University and the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. On March 7, 2015, a 10-second video was released of two white male students, who were members of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity, chanting using racial slurs (Clark, 2015). The members were recorded chanting on a bus headed to a private fraternity Founder's Day event. This video quickly made national headlines and sparked outrage throughout the country (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015). The university president acted quickly and banished the chapter from campus (Mussatto, 2016). The fraternity's headquarters released a statement saying the chant was not part of the "Sigma Alpha Epsilon tradition and was no way endorsed by the organization" (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015, p. 1). An anonymous member of SAE in Texas from 2004-2004, however, reported the chant is used often and this incident at Robinson University is not isolated (New, 2015). The campus was full of unrest, some students even marched on the SAE house prior to its closing (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015).

Many Black students felt these actions were due to a much deeper issue, which is racism. A few days following the video of the fraternity members, another video was released of the fraternity house mother. The house mother, an older white woman, was seen laughing and using racial slurs while singing to a rap song (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015). The video was originally released in 2013 through the Vine social media platform (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015). The house mother acknowledged it was her in the video and understood “how the video must appear in the context of the events that occurred this week” (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015, p. 2). This only intensified the unrest that was already occurring on campus. Due to this, Jean Delance, a high-school football star player withdrew his commitment to Robinson University (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015).

SEA has a long history of racism and racialized incidents. Chapters from across the county have been faced with multiple sanctions due to members using racial slurs and engaging in discriminatory behavior (Fernandez & Perez-Pena, 2015). In 1982, at the University of Cincinnati, SEA was suspended after hosting a racist party around Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday (New, 2015). In 1992, at Texas A&M University, SEA members hosted a jungle party that consisted of dressing up in Blackface and re-enacting slave hunts (New, 2015). In 2000 at Oglethorpe University, members of SAE threw bottles and shouted racial slurs at Black athletes during a track meet (New, 2015). In 2006, at the University of Memphis, two members of SAE were suspended for harassing another member for bringing a Black woman to the house. In 2013, at Washington University in St. Louis, the chapter was suspended after some new pledges were ordered to use racial slurs at a group of Black students (New, 2015). In 2014, a SAE chapter was suspended due to throwing a “cripmas” party where the dressed up as gang members (New, 2015).

The fraternity was founded in 1856 in Alabama, the only fraternity founded in the antebellum South (New, 2015). SAE has a creed known as the “True Gentleman” (New, 2015). As of 2015, SEA was the largest fraternity while having “played a disproportionate role in some of the most offensive incidents in recent decades yet remains a house in good standing at more than 200 campuses” (New, 2015, p. 4). After the incident at Robinson University, the university president stated that the chapter would never be able to return to campus (Mussatto, 2016).

Both students were expelled from Robinson University. One of the students who participated in the chant apologized during a public press conference (Clark, 2015). He stood alongside Black community leaders and pastors. Garland Pruitt, who was the president of the Colvin City branch of the NAACP and Colvin City attorney stated the apology was accepted (Clark, 2015). A meeting was held with the university president, members of SAE, and Black campus leaders. The SAE members apologized to the Black student leaders for the chant. The university president stated the apology was accepted (Sridhar, 2015). The university president appointed a new Vice President of University Community who he stated would have “diversity and sensitivity as part of the portfolio of that office” (Sridhar, 2015, p. 1). Diversity and sensitivity training would be implemented for all incoming and current students (Sridhar, 2015). In the end, 25 students were disciplined for their involvement in the incident. In 2019, the first Black Regent was confirmed in 20 years (Associated Press, 2019). Robinson University has been dealing with the aftermath of that 2015 racial incident.

In 2020, two more racialized incidents occurred that again made national headlines involving two university professors using racial slurs in class (Hazelrigg, 2020; Lewis, 2020). In the aftermath of these two racialized incidents, sit-ins and marches were held and demands were made to the administration. These reactions were unique in that they had not occurred following

previous racialized incidents. Robinson University was chosen as a research site because of its long history of exclusion of Black students and racialized incidents, many of which gained national attention. Both the university and state have a legacy of anti-Blackness. Historically, the university was not accessible to Black people or welcoming to them in town. Over the years, damaging racialized incidents have continued to occur targeting Black students.

Data Collection

Participant Sampling

The research participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is described as the process of specifically sampling a certain group that will provide answers to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Typically, purposeful sampling is used “to yield the most information about that phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 62). The participant sample was Black undergraduate nursing students enrolled from spring 2020 to spring 2023. The participants were selected in two different manners. First, a recruitment email (Appendix B) was sent to students enrolled during the years 2020-2023 at the university nursing school. Second, snowballing was used which allowed participants to identify other potential participants for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowballing is a recruitment technique where participants are asked to identify other possible participants. Once the participant expressed interest in participating in the study, they were presented with a consent for the study. The consent form contained details of the study which outlined the interview process and data collection. Participation was voluntary. The study was approved by my institution’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Participants were able to withdraw consent at any point during the study process.

Prior to the initial interview, each participant completed a demographic survey (Appendix C). The demographic survey was conducted to determine more specific data about each participant. Following the demographic survey, the participants participated in the first interview (Appendix C). A total of 8 participants were recruited for this study. At the end of the first interview, a second follow-up interview was scheduled. The interview data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed prior to the document analysis. The interview data was analyzed first to ensure proper reporting of each participant's experiences with racism. Conducting two interviews aided in capturing the totality of their experiences. After the interview data was analyzed, I collected eight online documents, and they were analyzed. The document analysis helped me provide context to the information obtained from the interviews.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Classification	Major
April	23	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Beulah	22	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Eve	27	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Lela	34	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Lemonte	24	Man	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Nicole	30	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Ruthie	25	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing
Sasha	27	Woman	Black	Bachelor of Science	Nursing

Demographic Survey

Demographic surveys are used to collect background information from the participants. This background information provided context to the data and aided in the data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There were a total of eight participants in this study. The demographic data was collected from each participant included their age, race/ethnicity, classification, and major. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity (see Table 1).

Interviews

Interviews with each participant served as the primary data source for this study. According to Merriam (1998), interviews are used to “obtain a special kind of information” what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 72). Interviews are used to obtain information that cannot be observed. Work by Merriam (1998) also shared, “we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world” (p. 72). Thus, the purpose of the interview is to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Merriam, 1988, p. 72). The interview process places emphasis on the stories people tell and the communication of these stories.

The interview protocol was conducted in a semi-structured manner as this allowed for probing when applicable based on question responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured interview provided the flexibility and open-ended questions needed to collect the stories of each participant’s specific experiences with racism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured method was effective in identifying patterns among participants. These patterns will be detailed in the findings section. The interviews were conducted via Zoom. The Zoom platform alerted each participant when the recording began. Zoom also provided the option for transcription, so this served as a backup option for transcription purposes (Grey et. al., 2020).

Zoom provided the best platform to reach participants who might not have been in Colvin at the time of the study so that all eligible participants could be involved in the study if they desired.

Using Zoom eliminated the expense and time of traveling for the interview process. Also, due to ongoing COVID-19 concerns, Zoom is a safe option to eliminate the spread of infection (Grey et al., 2020). The interviews were recorded via Zoom which is password protected for confidentiality purposes (Grey et al., 2020). The recordings were stored on the researcher's personal laptop, which is also password protected. The recordings will be stored for a total of 6 months and then permanently deleted from the device. The recording served as reference for interview transcription and analysis. Only the researcher has access to the transcripts and recordings.

Two interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes. The first interview began with an introduction of myself and then an introduction of the participant. This was done to help establish rapport prior to the interview questioning. The first interview focused on determining if the participant experienced racism during their time in nursing school. Also, participants were asked to describe how experiences with racism impacted their well-being, engagement on campus, and academic progress. Questions that were asked during the first interview included: *Can you tell me about a racial/racist experience you had on campus while in nursing school? How many experiences with racism have you experienced while in the nursing program? How did your experiences with racism affect your involvement in college? Do racialized incidents that occur on campus affect your well-being? Do you feel the 2020 racialized incidents led to an increase in experiences with racism?*

The second interview focused on reflection and allowed the participants to share additional experiences as desired. At the beginning of the second interview, I provided time for

reflection on the first interview and an opportunity to discuss any feelings or emotions since that time. Questions from the second interview included: *Since the first interview, are there any other experiences with racism you want to share? What were and are your emotions since sharing your experiences? How did you feel being asked about experiences with racism?* I wanted to provide this opportunity for reflection and offer empathy. Throughout the interview process, I considered my own experiences with racism and noted by own positionality as a form of trustworthiness. Once each interview was completed, they were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

The information collected in the two interviews was used to form a narrative summary for each participant. The narrative summary served as the counter story, as a research method. CRT provides the method and space for these personal lived experiences of Black people to be shared (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The narrative summary details each participant's experience with racism and racialized incidents during nursing school. The narrative summaries included direct quotes to provide the reader with a better understanding of the context of their lived experiences with racism and racialized incidents. The narrative summaries are an integral part of this study because the stories can come to life and illustrate the permanence of racism in the lives of Black undergraduate nursing students.

Documents

A total of eight documents were collected for this study (e.g., national and local news articles and campus newspapers). The documents pertain to the 2020 racialized incidents that occurred on campus and the aftermath of those events. An online data search was conducted to obtain the documents. The search was conducted using the phrases "2020 racial incidents at [Robinson University]". Using this phrase alone resulted in numerous articles covering the

racialized incidents from both local and national news sites. I chose to select documents from three levels: national, local, and university (Table 2). These three levels helped to provide a holistic view of the incidents, the aftermath, and proposed interventions.

Table 2

Documents

Document Title	Date of incident	Date of document	ID Number
Cramer, Maria (2020, February). <i>University condemns comparison of “Ok Boomer” to racial slur by professor.</i> NYTimes News. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/12/us/ok-boomer-peter-gade-colvin.html	February 11, 2020	February 12, 2020	1
Hassan, Carmen (2020, February). <i>Another University of Colvin professor uses the n-word.</i> CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/24/us/colvin-professor-n-word/index.html	February 24, 2020	February 24, 2020	2
President Harroz statement https://www.ou.edu/web/news_events/articles/news_2020/letter-from-interim-president-harroz-feb-24	February 24, 2020	February 24, 2020	3
KOCO staff (2020, February). <i>Robinson University investigates another incident of professor using racial slur in class.</i> KOCO news. https://www.koco.com/article/ou-investigating-another-incident-of-professor-using-racial-slur-in-class/31086551	February 24, 2020	February 24, 2020	4
Keith, Emma (2020, February). <i>Second university professor uses racial slur in classroom; university responds.</i> Norman Transcript. https://www.normantranscript.com/news/second-ou-professor-uses-racial-slur-in-classroom-university-responds/article_200e0e70-5765-11ea-a45e-47d855989d84.html	February 24, 2020	February 25, 2020	5
Jacobo, Julia (2020, February). <i>Robinson University promises changes after student sit-in protests use of racial slurs.</i> ABCNews. https://abcnews.go.com/US/university-robinson-promises-student-sit-protests-racial-slurs/story?id=69255274	February 11, 2020 and February 24, 2020	February 27, 2020	6
Flaherty, Collen (2020, February). <i>Demanding Provost resignation.</i> Inside Higher Education. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/28/Colvin-students-want-change-form-new-provost	February 11, 2020 and February 24, 2020	February 27, 2020	7
Douglas, Blake (2021, February). <i>BERT sit-in one year later: What has changed at Robinson University?</i> Robinson University Daily. https://www.oudaily.com/news/bert-sit-in-one-year-later-what-has-changed-at-ou/article_66ed6f78-7782-11eb-bd0c-c30cc89c001a.html	February 11, 2020 and February 24, 2020	February 21, 2021	8

Determining the accuracy of the documents is a component of the research process (Merriam, 1988). According to Merriam (1988), “documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context” (p. 109). The purpose of the documents was to grasp the totality of these incidents and determine what information was available to the public. Seven of the eight documents were written in February 2020 in the days and weeks following the racialized incidents in this case study. One document was written in 2021 as a one-year follow up to the 2020 incidents. The documents were analyzed through coding cycles aligned with the theoretical framework. This allowed for relevant information to be separated from irrelevant information (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis also helped with meaning-making of data from interviews (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1988), “data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research” (p. 119). Merriam (1998) described that data analysis of a case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit” (p. 193). Explaining the case is key in a manner that can be understood is key in data analysis. Data analysis is an interactive process by which the researcher is tasked with producing believable and trustworthy findings (Merriam, 1988). In this process, “data are consolidated, reduced, and, to some extent, interpreted” (Merriam, 1988, p. 130). In all, data analysis makes sense of the data.

The data sources for this case study consisted of the demographic survey, interview data, and documents. The interview and document data were analyzed independently. The use of both interview data and documents worked together to strengthen and support the findings. In this case, I analyzed the participant interviews to answer the research questions.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is defined as a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents - both printed and electronic material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Like other analysis methods in qualitative research, the purpose of document analysis is to gain a better understanding and develop knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The analysis process involves finding, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing data from the documents. The evaluation step equates to making sense of the data (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis renders quotations, passages, or excerpts that can be orchestrated into common themes (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is commonly used in conjunction with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation such as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). There are specific functions of document analysis within qualitative research.

Document analysis provides additional support for the case study by providing context. First, documents provide context which may include background and/or historical information surrounding the research case (Bowen, 2009). The documents gave a description of the day and time when the incident occurred on campus from students, even some who witnessed the incidents. Second, documents can aid in developing questions that need to be asked. These can be new or additional interview questions for the participants (Bowen, 2009). Third, documents can serve as additional research data (Bowen, 2009). Options for these documents may include catalogues or archives. Fourth, document analysis can assist with following any changes or developments pertaining to the case (Bowen, 2009). Lastly, documents function to “corroborate evidence from other sources” (Bowen, 2009, p. 30). I used document analysis to provide additional data related to the case.

Examining the documents collected by different methods helped me corroborate the findings across the data and “thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single case study” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The documents in this study were collected from national, local, and university news sources. When evaluating documents, Bowen (2009) stated “it is important that the documents are assessed for completeness and balance” (p. 33). Throughout this study, each document was assessed to determine the date of the article, which components of the racialized incidents were documented, documentation of personal accounts, and if they included any other supporting documents. Most of the documents were written in February 2020, which is the month when both incidents occurred. The documents provided context about the 2020 racialized incidents by detailing the incidents, immediate reactions from students administration, and the campus environment during the days and weeks that followed. Some of the articles documented personal accounts from students and/or student groups who witnessed the incidents. Quotations from the documents were extracted to provide insight into the experiences from those impacted by the racialized experiences. The documents also contained statements from the university president in response to student demands as well as the official president press release.

The information gathered from the documents helped to better understand the impact of these two racialized incidents on Black undergraduate nursing students. The data collected helped to develop additional analytical questions pertaining to the case. For example, was the administration’s response effective? What type of learning environment is being cultivated on campus? Lastly, documents function to “corroborate evidence from other sources” (Bowen, 2009, p. 30). All of the documents in this case were consistent in their account of the racialized

incidents, detailing the aftermath, sharing the response of the university president, and follow-up one year following the incidents.

I followed recommended steps from Bowen (2009) for conducting document analysis. First, I conducted an online search for “2020 racial incidents at Robinson University”. The online search provided numerous results. From the results, I then chose documents from three different levels: national, local, and university. I wanted to provide the perspective from each level on the 2020 racialized incidents. All together to provide a clear picture of the research case and context to better understand the purpose and significance of this study. Next, I conducted an initial read of the documents. The initial read of documents was to thoroughly examine the documents (Bowen, 2009). After the initial read, I analyzed the documents using a first and second coding cycle strategy. In the first coding cycle, I used descriptive coding. Descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase most often a noun, the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldana, 2021, p. 134). The second cycle coding involved combining similar codes by looking for patterns to identify and form themes from the documents (Bowen, 2009). According to Bowen (2009), “codes and the themes they generate serve to integrate data gathered from different methods” (p. 32). In the end, I used the codes to write themes, which can be found in my findings section.

The documents described the events and included quotes from interviews with individuals who were witnessed to or impacted by these incidents, including Black students, Black student leaders, BERT leaders, and campus administrators. Just as each participants shared their stories with racism and racialized incidents through the interviews, the documents provided first-hand accounts from individuals following the incidents. As outlined in Chapter 4, interview participants shared stories expressing their feelings of fear, frustration, and worry, because for

many of them they had previous lived experiences with racism prior to nursing school. Similarly, the statements in the documents, speak to the frustrations of Black students due to recurrent racialized incidents and lack of institution response on addressing these issues.

Analysis of Interviews

Each interview was analyzed based on Merriam's (1988) case study guidance and in conjunction with CRT tenets. According to Merriam (1988), information collected in interviews "either consciously or unconsciously from all that he or she knows, is simply the informant's perception" (p. 84). This personal perspective is what is pursued in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988). During this process, data is "sifted through, combined, reduced, and interpreted in order to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalizations based on a preponderance of the data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 121). Data analysis works to make sense of the data. Through analysis, the insights can aid in identifying future research options as well as expansion of current knowledge (Merriam, 1988).

Identifying pattern and themes among that data helps to make sense of the data. Specifically looking for patterns "demands a mindset that will allow for unifying constructs to emerge" (Merriam, 1988, p. 149). Each transcribed interview was reviewed for accuracy. The participants were provided the opportunity to review their interview transcript to ensure accuracy of their responses. The transcripts were uploaded and stored in Dedoose, a web-based data analysis program. Dedoose was chosen because it is user friendly and secure. One feature of using Dedoose is that it can display the coding labels by color for classification (Saldana, 2021). Each participant provided a pseudonym that was used in presenting the demographic data and quotes for confidentiality purposes.

Coding the Data

The interview coding process occurred in cycles. A code in qualitative research “is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2021, p. 5). A couple preliminary coding techniques were used on the data. First pertains to data layout. The transcripts were printed with field notes associated with that individual interview. Passages were separated based on overall topic. According to Saldana (2021), “formatting choices are a part of the analysis and may reveal or conceal aspects of meaning and intent” (p. 29). Second, I engaged in pre-coding prior to the first cycle of coding. Pre-coding involves highlighting, underling, and designating momentous participant quotes (Saldana, 2021). I reviewed the interview transcripts and looked for powerful quotes at first glance. Some of the quotes that I highlighted during this process included “too many to count”, “I kept to myself from day one”, and “we usually don’t have one of y’all in the program”. These quotes helped me begin to dive into the data as I conducted the other coding cycles. By doing so, I was able to lay the foundation for the first, second, and third coding cycles.

The coding cycles “suggest that the qualitative analytic process is cyclical rather than linear” in that “codes and categories organically expand and contract during the analytic process” (Saldana, 2021, p. 88). An important step is determining which method is appropriate for the study. This decision is often based on research questions and the answers being sought (Saldana, 2021). I decided on coding techniques based on first cycle coding which is composed of seven subcategories. From those I used the following components to include affective (emotions, values, and qualities of human experience), literary and exploratory (allows open-ended exploration), and methods of theming the data (extended phrases that capture the essentials of meanings) (Saldana, 2021). During the theming of data, some of the codes developed were

“devalued”, “cold/numb”, and “isolation” and that showed emotions and values. Codes such as “defining racism” and “personal experiences” were identified as I worked to theme the data and organize the initial codes. The study research questions “suggest the exploration of personal, interpretive meanings found within the data” (Saldana, 2021, p. 91). Within one transcript the participant stated, “these incidents have made me cold and numb, so I just work hard to be a good person and not let racial motivation hinder me”. This statement was coded as “cold/numb” during the first cycle. Another essential coding method is embedded coding, also known as sub-coding. Embedded coding is necessary in qualitative research studies that involved multiple participants and data forms (Saldana, 2021). Embedded coding consists of assigning a secondary code based on the primary code; this is to “detail or enrich the entry” (Saldana, 2021, p. 121). Each code from the first cycle was assigned a secondary code such as “emotional” and “real-life”, which aligned with affective coding. That same statement was then coded as emotional. These secondary codes helped realize the emotional, psychological, and physical aspects from the data based on the participant responses. The secondary code helped with organization and preparation for second cycle coding.

Second cycle coding “are advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods” (Saldana, 2021, p. 296). The method used in the second cycle was axial coding. Axial coding “aims to link categories with subcategories and asks how they are related” (Saldana, 2021, p. 308). Axial coding is particularly useful when analyzing interview transcripts (Saldana, 2021). During this cycle, redundant codes or those deemed not useful may be dropped or codes could be combined based on similarities (Saldana, 2021). These decisions are made once the entire document has been reviewed. Some of the codes were combined, such as “devalued” combined with “insignificant”, “cold/numb” combined with “dull”. A statement

from the data reported, “at this point I am dulled and numb to these incidents”. This statement was coded as “cold/numb” after originally being coded as “dull” during the axial coding process. Another statement from the data reported “I kept to myself from day one”. This statement was coded as “isolation”, and this code was kept during the second cycle. Isolation was a common theme within the data and will be detailed more in the findings section. There were some codes that were redundant and thus combined with other codes. The interview transcripts contained descriptions of emotions, physical actions, and personal experiences so some codes were combined to better illustrate the experiences of racism. Axial coding is the step in between the first cycle and third cycle, which is theoretical coding (Saldana, 2021).

I conducted third cycle coding, where I used theoretical coding which refers to “all categories and concepts now become systematically integrated around the central/core category, the one that suggests a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon” (Saldana, 2021, p. 314). Theoretical coding details the relationship between categories while moving from analysis to a theoretical perspective (Saldana, 2021). Theoretical coding aided in determining the findings from this case study while using CRT. Theoretical coding is used to identify “a key word or key phrase that triggers a discussion of the theory” (Saldana, 2021, p. 314). The interview data was then categorized based on the two tenets of CRT that are featured in this case study, permanence of racism and counter storytelling (Bell, 1992).

First was the CRT tenet permanence of racism, which describes how racism is woven throughout and embedded within society (Bell, 1992). Through theoretical coding, a relationship is made between the key phrases in the data and CRT. The statement “too many to count” was selected. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), racism is so involved in the makeup of society’s social order that it seems normal. Secondly, for counter storytelling this is where each participant

describes their experiences and how they counter these experiences. Counter storytelling, a tenet of CRT, is the way one's provides voice to these experiences with racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter storytelling "recognizes the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). From their stories, the data shows the prevalence of racism and racialized incidents in higher education system (Bell, 1992). Within the data, the permanence of racism, illustrated through participants sharing their counter stories, was revealed in all the experiences that were shared by the Black undergraduate nurses in the study.

In this study, I report the participants' experiences with racism and racialized incidents as narrative summaries. None of the participants witnessed the racialized incidents of spring 2020 first-hand. The interview questions aimed to examine to extent to which these racialized incidents affected them despite being in a different location. This allowed for the uniqueness of their story to be shared and highlighted while describing their thoughts and perceptions surrounding the racialized incidents and their lived experiences with racism. According to McCormack (2000) narrative summaries should be written "in a way that does not inscribe our writing with a narrative authority that rewrites a participant's story in a way that is becomes our story only" (p. 312). A narrative summary allows for the write to highlight the uniqueness of each participant's story (McCormack, 2000). The narratives were analyzed to answer the two research questions: What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a PWI? and How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a PWI? These themes will then answer the final research question: What strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and

racialized incidents at a PWI? The findings, including the narrative summaries will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

This study applied multiple qualitative research methods to build trustworthiness. To impact education, studies must be trusted (Merriam, 1988). It is imperative in educational research that those reading the findings trust the results and feel assured that the study is reliable and valid (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1988), “studies need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, educators, and other researchers” (p. 164). By triangulating the data, “the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Triangulation helps guard against charges that the findings are an artifact “of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias” (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Within this study, I collected interview and document data to ensure data was triangulated.

Secondly, I worked to address my own biases. As the researcher, I took into consideration my thoughts and worldview at the beginning of the study to capture the true experiences of each participant (Merriam, 1988). As a Black nurse who has had experiences with racism and racialized incidents, I had to take into consideration my own experiences and biases. This was done to fully depict with accuracy the experiences of each participant. By addressing my own positionality and biases I worked to establish internal validity within the study (Merriam, 1988).

The analysis for this study is rooted in revealing the experiences with racism of undergraduate nursing students and how this informs higher education regarding the experiences of Black students while attending a PWI. The documents in this study were chosen from multiple levels to include national, local, and university to provide greater context and better capture the totality of the 2020 racialized incidents. The research design was selected to produce a body of

work that will aid and inform higher education about Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism and the work needed to foster a more inclusive learning environment.

Ethical Issues

As a researcher, I have identified certain limitations that pertain to this study. First, particularly within a case study, the researcher is the primary tool in data collection and analysis. In most cases, “training in observation and interviewing is not readily available for case study researchers” (Merriam, 1988, p. 34). The researcher is left to depend on their own instincts and abilities throughout the research process (Merriam, 1988). As the researcher conducting my first study, I have little experience in research. My limited experience in research is a limitation to this study. Second, only one institution was the study site. Exploring one institution is a limitation of this study. There are other PWIs in Colvin that have and continue to have experiences with racialized incidents. By exploring other institutions, this could reveal data that could potentially reveal similarities among them. Third, only nursing students were participants in this study. There are many other healthcare colleges to be explored in regard to understanding institutional racism. Additional studies may need to be conducted to determine the prevalence of racism and experiences with racism among all the healthcare colleges at the university. Lastly, the study was conducted in 2023, three years following the racial incidents in question. Since years have passed, students may have relocated and there may be some loss of memory and/or distance of the incident.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research design and analysis strategies were described. Analysis of the documents and interview data was informed by tenants of CRT through a detailed coding process. Strategies for establishing trustworthiness of the research were described. Ethical issues

and limitations for this study were provided. According to Merriam (1998), “one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon” (p. 202). The next chapter will outline the findings of the study. Themes were pulled from the data to make meaning of how racism continues to impact the lives of Black undergraduate nursing students.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism and racialized incidents while attending a PWI including how these experiences were exacerbated by recent racialized incidents, and the strategies they used to combat racism. The research questions for this study are: (1) What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a predominantly white institution? (2) How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution? (3) What strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and racialized incidents at a predominantly white institution?

In Chapter 2, I described the theoretical framework used in this study, CRT. Specifically, permanence of racism and counter storytelling are used and exemplified in this study. In Chapter 3, I outlined the methodology and methods used in this study, which was a qualitative single case study. I collected eight online documents and interviewed 8 participants for this study. Throughout the findings, tenets of CRT were illustrated in the interview and document themes and the narrative summaries detailing participants' personal experiences with racism.

This chapter will detail the document and interview analysis, themes from the data, and narrative summaries for each participant. The participant themes include determination and grit, isolating themselves to guard against racism, and feelings of fear and worry regarding experiences with racism and racialized incidents. Participants expressed these emotions particularly following an experience or incident as to what may happen next to them or other Black students on campus. The themes described by the participants answer the research question *what strategies participants used to combat racism and if recent racialized incidents*

exacerbated their experiences with racism while attending a PWI. The narrative summaries speak to their individual experiences with racism. Themes from the document analysis speak to the reason for repeated racialized incidents on campus while providing a historical perspective and information about how this institution responded to racialized incidents.

As you read this chapter, you will learn more about Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism while attending a PWI. You will hear about these experiences in their own words. You will also learn about strategies Black undergraduate nursing students use to combat racism while attending a PWI. Also, you will see how the history of Robinson University continues to affect Black students in present day, reflections of racial protests from decades earlier, and understand the current institutional response following racialized incidents. Overall, the findings will provide a holistic view of Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism and racialized incidents while providing a historical perspective on Robinson University and its current institutional response.

Document Analysis

A thorough review of eight documents provided context for the 2020 racialized incidents that occurred on campus. Document evaluation is a “process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced, and understanding is developed” (Bowen, 2009, pp. 33-34). Four of the documents were from national news sites, two were from local news sites, and two from the university news site. Seven documents were written in the same month that both incidents occurred and one document was published one year later. I chose these documents to get a campus, local, and national perspective of the 2020 racialized incidents. The context of the documents is particular to the political climate at the time and in the aftermath. Currently,

there are no research articles on Black undergraduate nursing students following the 2020 racialized incidents at Robinson University.

Themes

It Happened Again: Historical Perspectives on the Permanence of Racism

Common threads were identified among the documents analyzed in this case, not just on a local level but also on a national level. In the *Demanding Provost resignation* [7] the opening statement reads “it happened again.” This statement references two racialized incidents that occurred at Robinson University within two weeks in the spring of 2020. Robinson University has long been plagued with recurrent racialized incidents occurring on campus. The university president, in his official statement response given in the *President Statement* [3] states “we are all weary of racially charged incidents within our university community.” In 2020 the racialized incidents involved two different professors using a racial slur during class. One professor used a racial slur while making a comparison during class. The other professor read aloud a racial slur while reciting a historical piece. Both incidents were deemed “pedagogically unnecessary and hurtful” by the Black student community. In the *Another [Robinson University] professor uses the N-word* [2], the journalist reports that “for the second time in two weeks, a professor at [Robinson University] has been accused of using the N-word.” The Black Emergency Response Team (BERT) immediately responded to the incidents. Their response is provided in the *Second University Professor uses Racial Slur in Classroom* [5],

We understand that many feel our hurt and our pain, but yet not everyone has the traumatizing experience of being Black on campus, of having a marginalized identity on this campus, of being consistently oppressed on the daily by the systems that exist at [Robinson University]. We want to make clear that the students directly affected by the

incident are in need of support, care, rest, and love. If you're a white person in this country, having benefited from a system of white supremacy, you just don't say that word in a context – it's really that simple.

This expression reveals the hurt that was inflicted on Black students, whether directly or indirectly, when racialized incidents occur.

Robinson University president acknowledged the incidents as well as the pain it had caused. He stated in the *[Robinson University] Investigates Another Incident of Professor Using Racial Slur in Class* [4] “our community has experienced incidents in the last two weeks that have certainly caused pain, but more importantly have been reminders of trauma caused by racism and structural issues both past and present.” The reference to structural issues helps to understand why racialized incidents continue to occur at Robinson University. According to a BERT member he states in *the University Condemns Comparison of “Ok Boomer” to Racial Slur* [1], “it was not the first time a professor at the campus had used the slur in class and justified uttering it for educational reasons.” This is particularly disheartening and traumatic for Black students who have and continue to attend Robinson University. In the history of Robinson University there has been persistent racism against Black students. Historically, some of these racialized incidents involved violence on campus. During those times, Black students engaged in hunger strikes and sit-ins to demand changed within the university. Following the 2020 incidents, for the first time in recent history, the same strategies were used. Black students and those who supported them, “staged a sit-in outside the president’s office.” One of the BERT members describes how “we will continue to do a sit-in, we will continue to do a hunger strike until our demands are met.” In the *[Robinson University] Promises Change After Student Sit-in Protests Use of Racial Slurs* [6] it documents how “students at the resulting sit-in posted a list of

demands that includes the resignation of university provost, mandatory equity training for all faculty, staff, and students, and creating a multicultural center for all marginalized groups.” The demand list was presented to the university president and other administrators.

The sit-ins and hunger strikes were used historically following racialized incidents at Robinson University. A Robinson University Black professor emeritus describes in *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8] “they are not young, unorganized students they have continued activism and drive towards their goals after the sit-on were over – stirred memories of a moment he shared with Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr. decades prior.” This historical view allows one to see how committed and dedicated the Black students were in 2020 to making a change. Based on their actions of holding a sit-in and hunger strike the professor emeritus details in the *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8] “they apparently had read extensively about how the students did in the 1960s. They took the blueprint and ran with it.” BERT discussed with the university president and administration that the repeated racialized incidents points to a much deeper issue which is racism. Following the immediate aftermath documented in the *[Robinson University] Promises Change after Sit-in Protests Use of Racial Slurs* article [6] BERT leaders “agreed to continue discussions with administration and advancing those discussions with other student, faculty, and staff leadership. Despite the high frequency of racialized incidents at Robinson University, the incidents in 2020 caused a more robust and demanding response from the Black student community.

Understanding Institutional and Administrative Actions

Following the 2020 racialized incidents, there was an intense call for change within the institution regarding the handling of racialized incidents. This call for change started with demanding the resignation of the university provost. The main reason for this demand was

detailed in the *Demanding Provost Resignation* [7] stating “students fault the provost for what they call his long record of “silence” on matters of diversity and inclusion.” He had been silent following racialized incidents in 2015, 2019, and again in 2020. In the *Second University Professor Uses Racial Slur in Classroom* [5] BERT leaders detailed:

Students would like to see accountability for those who commit racist incidents, and that the last few presidential administrators at [Robinson University] have not fulfilled student demands regarding responses to on-campus racism. We are tired of the meetings, we are tired of the town halls, we are tired of promises with no action. We are simply tired of not being treated as human beings on this campus.

Despite demanding the resignation with rationale, the university president stated this demand would not happen. BERT’s responses have a common thread of feeling devalued, oppressed, and being treated as inferior on campus.

In response to the 2020 racialized incidents [*Robinson University*] *Promises Changes After Sit-in Protests Use of Racial Slurs* [6] “[Robinson University] administrators say they will make changes in the wake of a sit-in by students protesting two incidents in which professors used racial slurs while teaching class.” Non-performative details such as were provided regarding potential changes that we going to happen at Robinson University. In the [*Robinson University*] *Investigates Another Incident of Professor Using a Racial Slur in Class* [4] a statement was shared from the university president stating, “we have identified areas of agreement that will move the university forward.” Other university administrators stated, “we’re going to try to figure out a way that we can resolve the real issues that we have, in a way that we can go forward.” The university president stated in the *Another [Robinson University] Professor*

Uses the N-Word [2] “the university will release details about an incident response protocol they are developing in the near future.” He also stated in the *President Statement* [3]:

While it is unfortunate that another incident would occur before we could roll out this action plan, we are resolute in addressing these matters with decisive action. It is our responsibility to ensure that [Robinson University] fulfills its promise to lead in bringing society closer together.

Based on these statements, there were not many actionable details given about how they planned to resolve the real issue, acknowledging what the real issues were, or details on developing sounder incident response protocol.

The one change that was described and eventually implemented was mandatory diversity training. In the *Second University Professor Uses Racial Slur in Classroom* [5] the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) administration stated, “they had to provide a level of care when we’re educating so that everyone feels safe, everyone feels included and we are not intentionally or unintentionally isolating people.” Robinson University implemented mandatory diversity training for all faculty, staff, and students. Prior to this, the diversity training according to BERT as stated in the *University Condemns Comparison of “Ok Boomer” to Racial Slur by Professor* [1] “was not mandatory, the faculty who need it are not taking it.” Making diversity training mandatory was one of the items listed on the demand list presented in the incident aftermath. The demand for multicultural spaces for minority groups on campus “was out of the question from the beginning” as stated by university administration in the *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8]. The COVID-19 pandemic was the reason given as to why the university would not be able to build or provide multicultural spaces. BERT and the Black student community felt the progress following

the 2020 racialized incidents “was at a slower rate than anticipated” which was stated in the *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8].

BERT stated in the *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8] in the days following the 2020 racialized incidents, they received advice from a Black professor emeritus. They were advised to “hold our ground, do whatever it takes to hold our ground, and remain focused on the goals regardless of the pushback from the administration.” One BERT leader stated that “at the end of the day, I can go hungry again if I need to, that’s not a problem for me.” The Black professor emeritus who had supported and encouraged BERT and other supporters during this time stated his appreciation for:

The student organizers who continue to engage with [Robinson University] administration. They have continued the ongoing civil rights campaign in the way they need to in order to be taken seriously and accomplish their objectives. I have seen that the next generation of me has done quite well.

BERT, the Black student community, and other supporters remained committed to the cause of combating racism and racialized incidents. Amid Robinson University’s actions and inactions, Black students continued to fight for equality and equity on campus. Moving forward has not always been clear, especially when little to no details were given about action plans. Black students at Robinson University must continue to take a stand and use their voice and strategies to bring about change for themselves and those to come later.

Same Words, Same Actions: A Path Forward

BERT and the Black student community expressed their frustration with the typical racialized incident response that usually consists of press conferences, town halls, and unfulfilled promises. Prior to 2020, in 2019 the Black Student Association presented a list of demands to the

university president. This demand list was presented during protests following a video of a Robinson University student using racial slurs in Blackface. At that time the demand list consisted of the following as reported by *Second University Professor Uses Racial Slur in Classroom* [5]:

A zero-tolerance policy for hate speech in the student and faculty codes of conduct, an increase in multicultural faculty and staff, additional financial assistance for multicultural students and programs, and four-year curriculum dedicated to educating the community about social and cultural issues.

Some of these demands were repeated in the 2020 demand list which further enhanced frustrations of lack of action and unfulfilled promises. The words are being said about making a change, but the actions are saying something different.

In 2020, the diversity training was not mandatory as had not been updated since 2015. The DEI office released a statement in *Second University Professor Uses Racial Slur in Classroom* [5] stating that, “[Robinson University] will be reconfiguring its diversity training for students, which has been in place since summer 2015.” BERT took this opportunity to make a call for change not just within the colleges where the incidents occurred, but on a larger scale. BERT released a statement that was reported in *University Condemns Comparison of “Ok Boomer” to Racial Slur by Professor* [1], “I hope this is a wake-up call that our college needs more diversity, and professors need to be trained in how to include all students.” This call for change would continue to expand in the following days, to include the entire campus including all faculty, staff, and students. The demand list contained items that targeted each group within Robinson University.

Because BERT and the Black student community had become tired of the same words and same actions they decided, “on a higher-profile response than previous press conferences and marches” *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8]. Despite BERT intensifying the level of response they, “expressed frustrations at the watering down of the sit-in demands” *BERT Sit-In One Year Later* [8]. These frustrations were birthed from the administration’s response that calling for the provost to resign was not an option. Also, there was no funding for multicultural centers for minority groups on campus. BERT remained steadfast and planned to continue to push for changes on campus following the 2020 racialized incidents. In the *Demanding Provost Resignation* [7] article, “BERT organizers said they’d met with administrators again and planned to issue new demands for checks and balances within the offices of the president and provost.”

In the days following the 2020 racialized incidents, BERT and other Black student leaders met with various Robinson University administrators to present the demand list and help to devise a path forward. In the *[Robinson University] Promises Changes after Student Sit-In Protests Use of Racial Slurs* [6], “we identified areas of agreement that will move the university forward.” The first step that was decided upon in moving forward was diversity training. The university president described that training in his *President Statement* [3]:

The first is a new required diversity, equity, and inclusion training regimen for all [Robinson University] faculty, staff, and administration to complete. This training will address our implicit bias, it will force us to consider our words and actions and the implications that follow, and more. We are also developing an incident response protocol, that quickly employs culturally restorative justice practices designed to create a pathway to reconciliation through education and the changing of behavior. We will be providing more details on these and other action steps in the near future.

While the diversity training was implemented in Fall 2021, the rest of the plans were yet to be determined. The lack of details and action plans led to the continued frustration within the Black student community. This had also been compounded by the lack of response and change following previous racialized incidents at Robinson University. When students say they are tired of the same words, same actions, it's because they have lived through these experiences before. Unfortunately, racialized incidents at Robinson University are not uncommon. For many Black students they are tired of the same responses because they continue to live in an environment of exclusion and the pain of repeated racialized incidents. The call for change is for the entire institution in order to foster a more inclusive and safe learning environment for Black students.

Narrative Summaries

This research study focused on revealing the experiences with racism of undergraduate Black nursing students at Robinson University. The study involved in-depth interviews with 8 undergraduate Black nursing students. The first theme acknowledged the personality characteristics as detailed by the participants needed to endure the racism. Those characteristics include determination and grit. Participants described how both determination and grit were required to survive the higher education environment while enduring persistent racial experiences, those that occur against them personally or against others. The second theme referred to the actions taken by the participants to safeguard against racism. The participants' reported isolation is a common action, but in the end, it did not fully protect them. The third theme described thoughts of fear and worry that participants reported feeling following the racialized incidents and experiences with racism. A narrative summary for each participant documents their experience with racism while attending this PWI.

These narratives reveal the experiences of racism and the fortitude it takes for Black undergraduate nursing students to endure and achieve their educational goals. Attending a PWI comes with many challenges for Black nursing students, not just academically but in the experiences with racism that they encounter. This study required bravery in order share their personal experiences with racism. These stories have been asked because no one has ever asked about their experiences with racism. The goal was to provide a space for these stories that was filled with empathy, understanding, and respect. Identifying themes that involve physical and personality aspects work together to expose the power of racism.

Through the lens of CRT, each story that was shared allows one to see the permanence of racism. The stories, or counter stories, reveal that racism is endemic within society. CRT provides the necessary guide to better understand the prevalence and depth of racism through the viewpoint of People of Color. CRT provides the viewpoint for one to see how telling these stories are, in that they illustrate the daily struggle with racism of Black undergraduate nursing students.

The Pervasiveness of Racism

Throughout each participant's interview, participants shared compelling stories of the permanence of racism and the role that racism has had on their everyday experiences and lives within the nursing program. Bell's (1992) work described "American society as we know it exists only because of its foundation in racially based slavery, and it thrives only because racial discrimination continues" (p. 12). I would like to acknowledge the bravery and resilience that it takes to share these experiences. These stories are troubling especially when society wants us to forget our country's racist history; yet racism continues to be a part of day-to-day life for Black people. Black nursing students are often forced to seek refuge and support outside of the PWI.

Because the participants describe their experiences with racism and racialized incidents, their stories will be presented as narrative summaries. Each summary will answer two research questions: (1) What are Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism at a PWI? and (2) How have Black undergraduate nursing students' experiences with racism been exacerbated by racialized incidents at a PWI?

Narrative 1: Lemonte

Lemonte is a 24-year-old Black male who is originally from Georgia. After coming to Colvin he had to adjust to being in predominantly white spaces, including higher education. Lemonte chose the nursing profession for its stability even though he was somewhat concerned about being a man in a field predominantly of women. He felt that nursing would provide the stability he would need to sustain a family structure in the future. He lived off campus and commuted daily to nursing school and clinicals during his time in the program. Based on his previous experiences with racism in predominantly white institutions, he decided that he would keep to himself while in the nursing program. He stated that he “did not really engage with any campus activities unless it was required.” He had previous experiences of exclusion from study groups, peers not wanting to partner with him, and difficulty getting assistance from professors. He reported heightened anxiety around attending nursing school and wondered if he would have access to needed resources to achieve academic success. He reported that “I have ADHD so I already struggle with concentration etc., and this made it even more challenging for me to focus because the environment around me felt toxic.”

When asked if he had an experience with racism while at the PWI he detailed the following experience:

During a clinical rotation one time while placing a catheter on an older white female patient with assistance from a female. Once we were done the patient called 911 from her hospital room and reported that she was raped by a Black man. Security came to the floor, and everything was able to get addressed and was found not to be true but this was very traumatic. This is a very harrowing story, that almost feels unreal. He was simply doing his job caring for the patient and had the police called on him.

He described how he questioned his choice of the nursing profession and if he should continue in the program. He reported that he is still haunted by this experience. At times, he felt that he was “on edge” during patient interactions because of what happened to him. In the end, he decided to continue, and graduated with honors.

Lemonte typically felt “on edge” when interacting with patients who made racist or discriminatory comments. Based on his experiences he stated:

I will always be impacted by the injustices done to me or around me. I know that mentally I have to prepare for the worst and hope for the best when I am dealing with people who don't look like me because of their views and stereotypes. I was often uncomfortable, anxious, and depressed when in the setting of others because of the unknown.

There are times when it is hard for Lemonte to control his feelings of being “on edge” but he knows ultimately, he has a responsibility to care for patients.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents, he described the handling as “typical and disingenuous.” He reported,

Black students are devalued and not respected to the extent that someone alleged to be educated and in a teaching environment felt comfortable enough in themselves and

leadership of the school to say these horrific words and display behavior without consequences or concerns.

He admitted that he did not have high hopes based on previous responses to racialized incidents. In the end he hopes “there could be more done and more involvement/collaboration with Black people to help foster an inclusive environment on campus.” He went on to say that “I knew that the actions of this professor were absolutely unjust and that I was indirectly impacted by hearing of the incident and I knew how the students must have felt in the moment.” The effect was felt despite Lemonte not being present when the racialized incident occurred. Following the incidents, he reiterated the point of feeling “on edge” not just in patient interactions but also on campus in regard to what other experiences with racism may occur prior to his graduation.

Narrative 2: Sasha

Sasha is a 27-year-old Black female who grew up in Africa and moved to the United States during middle school. She attended PWIs all her educational career in the United States. She chose nursing because she eventually wanted to become a nurse practitioner and work in an intensive care unit. She does not have any family in Colvin. She lived with her husband and two children. She was happy to find out that she had been admitted to the nursing program. She knew that she may be one of a few Black students based on her previous schooling but was still excited to begin the program. She reported experiences with racism occurred on the first day of nursing school. Upon entering the classroom, another student said to her, in front of her other peers, “we usually don’t have one of y’all in the program, but this should be good”. Sasha immediately felt embarrassed and speechless. She did not know what to say in response. Her peers were all looking at her. She was the only Black student in the class at the time.

Being a person that does not like attention drawn to themselves, this experience was very uncomfortable for Sasha. She did not respond to her peer but continued walking to her seat. She did not like the way this made her feel. She did not feel welcome in that space. She understood the “y’all” to mean a Black person or Person of Color. Initially, she thought nursing school would be like schooling she had experienced before, but she did not expect this type of experience on the first day. She was used to “staying in line” but she was not expecting to be called out on the first day based on the color of her skin. She was not able to find any support groups to cope with that racist experience. She described how she “wishes there was an active BIPOC club to talk about racial issues and how to combat them.” Being so, she limited her involvement on campus to protect herself from other experiences with racism and because she did not feel it was a safe space. Her focus was maintaining her personal standard of academic excellence while in the program. She completed the program and is now on her way to becoming a nurse practitioner.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents she described the response as the “same old thing, nothing new, no concern felt from the administration.” As she further described her thoughts surrounding the incidents and experiences with racism, she felt that the handling was “not well, it wasn’t until there was public outrage that some actions were taken.” She went on to say that she thought a response should be “an actionable and appropriate response when an issue is identified, not back tracking and attempting to cover up for a public image and avoid the consequences of cancel culture to the perpetrator.” She detailed how following the incidents she felt more “timid, dis-engaged, not asking questions as I did not feel safe. One could argue, my performance could have been better but who knows.” As she reflected on the 2020 incidents she

stated, “there is a lot of work that needs to be done for all marginalized communities to feel included, wanted, respected, and diplomacy.”

Narrative 3: Lela

Lela is a 34-year-old Black female from Colvin. She considered herself to be an introvert. She became interested in the nursing professions because she enjoyed learning about the human body. Her goal was to pursue a graduate degree and hopefully become a nursing professor. She didn’t have any intentions of being involved on campus because of her personality but also because she wanted to safeguard against racism and discrimination. She had gone to all PWIs for her previous schooling. When asked if she had an experience with racism while in school, she detailed the following:

I had taken care of a client whose daughter made a formal complaint regarding NG tube placement. The protocol for the facility was to remove those who cared for the client and who documented in the records from the unit until the investigation was concluded.

When I was notified to complete tasks in a different department on a different shift until the investigation was completed, I learned that the other nurses on the client’s record was still allowed to work on the unit and did not have to participate in the investigative process. I was told by the administrator that the client complained of a “white overweight woman” and although they knew I didn’t fit the description that required me to proceed with the process anyway.

Lela continued to carry this experience with her and reported persistent anxiety during certain patient interactions.

When she was initially asked if she had any experiences with racism, she responded, “too many to count”. One thing from this experience that was the most hurtful was that the

description given in the complaint did not match Lela, not even close. Despite this she still had to face consequences and changes. This experience made her feel fretful of what was to come when she would begin her nursing practice as a registered nurse. She detailed how “she can’t help but to think what if it was you and how it makes you anxious of the ‘what ifs.’ You are constantly on guard and sometimes avoid being your authentic self due to how you may be perceived.” She did go on to pursue a graduate degree like she had planned. She continues to reflect on this experience but stated she was determined not to let it deter her from achieving her academic and career goals.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents she described the response as “automatic with no thought for Black students or their well-being.” In this case, she felt that the university “wanted to sweep it under the rug and just move on” with no “real intent on making a change.” Following the incidents she stated, “it made me stay to myself and minimize my participation in other areas”. She went on to say that she had experienced racism from “instructors, nurses, and my peers” while in the nursing program, some of which happened after the 2020 racialized incidents.

Narrative 4: Beulah

Beulah is a 22-year-old Black female from Colvin. She chose to stay on campus while in nursing school. She is very shy. She was home-schooled from kindergarten through high school. Attending college was her first experience with public education. She looked forward to living on campus and getting the full college experience. She decided on nursing school because she loves helping and taking care of people. She felt that it would be an excellent way to give back to those in need. She was ecstatic when she got her acceptance letter. Since she was shy, she often kept to herself during the program. She reported having pleasant and healthy interactions with

faculty. She was overall very happy with the program. When asked about any experiences with racism, she describes a story that happened during clinicals. She described the following, “a patient asked me about my education.” She goes on to detail:

I don't ever talk about my education. You know, unless they ask. She asked me where I went to school and I told her I went to Robinson University. She asked me first if I had an associate and then I was like no, I have a bachelor's degree. And then after that she was not very happy with me and she didn't appear this way with anybody else. Any other nurses or anything like that. Just with me.

She was taken aback by this experience because she was not expecting a patient to ask this type of question. Beulah reported feeling devalued in that the patient assumed she had not completed bachelor's program and assumed that she was in different degree program that had less curriculum components. Instead of inquiring about her degree, the patient had already assumed she was attending a program that is lesser than a bachelor's degree program. She felt very uncomfortable and unwelcome when interacting with the patient and family following this experience. She was happy when the clinical shift was over. This experience is something that she reflects on from time to time. She described how this experience changed her and led her to be “guarded” particularly when taking care of white patients. She continues to worry how she will be perceived and if she will have to continue to battle assumptions. This experience shows how people make assumptions based on skin color. Not that anything is wrong with an associate degree, but the family automatically assumed she was in a program with less curriculum just because she was Black.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents she described the handling as “just enough to say they did something.” The response seemed as if the administration wanted to do as

little as possible and wanted everyone to forget about it. Following the incidents she reported some uneasy feelings especially when she would be on campus. She said at times she “felt anxious and uneasy” because she wasn’t sure what would happen next or if there would be repeated racialized incidents. Despite her feelings she prepared for graduation. She did not report any other experiences with racism following from the 2020 racialized incidents.

Narrative 5: April

April is a 23-year-old Black female from Colvin. Since she was small, she dreamed of being a nurse, then continuing to graduate school and opening her own practice. April is very outspoken and does not have a problem speaking up for herself. Her grandmother, who wasn’t able to attend college, paid for April to attend nursing school. When April was admitted she and her grandmother were excited. She chose not to live on campus. April attending nursing school influenced some of her other family members to pursue nursing too. The racialized experience she shared occurred while at clinicals during nursing school. She reported there was a time while at clinicals some nurses were talking aloud about who was working the next day and three of the ladies’ names started with K and the ladies said, “oh we could be the KKK...One lady said, ‘oh I don’t think you should have said that’”. April stated she “was offended and uncomfortable and I was removed from that clinical rotation.”

April was happy to be removed from that specific clinical rotation due to her experience with racism. She discussed how she was somewhat fearful during other rotations if she would continue to have experiences with racism. She was dealing with racism in the nursing program, so when it happened at clinicals she was very upset and disturbed. April described herself as an exemplary student who takes academics very seriously. She was not only going to nursing school for herself but for her grandmother. She desired to do well, not just for herself and her academic

standards but to also honor her grandmother's sacrifice. April went on to graduate despite the experiences with racism and her grandmother was there to witness her achievement.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents, she described:

This just reaffirmed what me as a Black person and other Black people often say this racism is alive and well in America and especially in Colvin. Deep seeded hatred and thoughts that others have just because of the color of your skin has not changed. It is unfortunate that these situations happen that bring notice to what Black people and students experience daily just because of their ethnicity.

April stated that following the incidents she "was better able to recognize inappropriate behaviors of those in faculty positions of leadership. I am extremely cautious and aware of all situations and know that because I am Black things may be misrepresented." For this reason and her previous experiences with racism, she only interacted when necessary for academic purposes. She went on to say following the racialized incidents and her own experiences with racism that "society has made me cold and numb, so I just work hard at trying to be a good person without any racial motivations to hinder my growth or view of people."

Narrative 6: Nicole

Nicole is a 30-year-old Black female from Colvin. She previously graduated from a licensed practical nurse (LPN) program and returned to nursing school to obtain a registered nurse bachelor's degree. Nicole described herself as strong, confident, and not easily intimidated. She was married and a mother of three. She had a passion for nursing, and for this reason she decided to return to school to expand her career opportunities. She did not live on campus. She was looking forward to meeting new people in the program. Once the program started, many white students questioned her on where she lived and the car she drove. She was caught off

guard by the questioning. As she described, she “held her own” and let those who were asking know it was not any of their business.

One day while at clinicals, she was assisting in the care of a white patient. When Nicole walked into the patient’s room to assist the nurse, she shared the patient “told me that they don’t want me to touch them because I was Black.” Nicole stood there and did not touch the patient. She stated how she wanted to “check” the patient, but she knew it would not be professional. She was upset that someone in need of care would be stuck on the color of her skin. She had to catch herself because her first instinct was to address what the patient said. She had experienced this before and by this time she was “fed up.” She had experience working on a unit where Black nurses were the majority. She discussed how she has not been able to understand how sick patients who need hospital care, despite illness, make comments based on race. As she moved forward in the profession, she detailed how now she tries to assess the atmosphere regarding whether a patient will be accepting of her as their nurse. She described how she does her best to determine if “you get that vibe, so I try to stay away from people that were like that, so I didn’t have to experience that.” This is one strategy she used to potentially guard against experiences with racism, particularly in patient care interactions.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents she described the response as “typical”. She described how students were protesting, engaging in hunger strikes, and having sit-ins and the administration continued operations as usual. Even when presented with a demand list, they did not seem to even consider the reasoning behind the demands or what it would mean for the Black student community. Regarding experiences with racism following the racialized incidents, she described how “patients and families seem to be bold in expressing their racist ways and

thoughts”. She felt this could also be due to the “Make America Great Again” movement which was occurring around the same time.

Narrative 7: Eve

Eve is a 27-year-old Black female from Colvin. After graduation, she joined a nurse travel agency. She decided to become a nurse because she has other family members who are nurses and other healthcare professionals. She grew up learning and hearing about the healthcare field. She always knew that she would become a nurse. She is currently undecided on pursuing a graduate clinical degree. She is currently enjoying traveling and the flexibility of her work schedule. While attending the PWI, she stated there was a sense that she “should be lucky to be there”. She felt that experiences with racism “can be systematic and not so out in the open.” Based on this, she did her best to “not get caught up in any situation that could lead to her being removed from the program.” She knew of some students cheating but she knew to avoid certain groups and places because she did not want to “expose herself to being caught up or blamed for something she did not do.”

During the pandemic, she detailed an experience with racism she had with a patient. She shared:

While caring for a patient during COVID she consistently defecated on the floor during my shift. She did not do this when other nurses were working as the patient was able to walk. During my shift, she demanded I clean up the stool because that is what I’m supposed to do. It was evident she treated me differently compared to white nurses.

Eve expressed that she understands that nurses are responsible for cleaning up patients, she does not feel she is above the work. She was upset by the fact that the patient treated her differently and specifically participated in certain actions while Eve was caring for her. She also described

how the patient would make racial comments during their interactions. In addition to cleaning her up, Eve had to endure the inappropriate comments being made. One comment involved calling Eve “the help”. Eve felt that since she was a student, she couldn’t do much about the situation besides hope she was not assigned to that patient again. During her time in healthcare, including clinicals, she described how “sometimes Caucasian patients can have a sense of entitlement and sense you are the help. And it's like, no, ma'am, I'm not the help. I'm your nurse.” Eve also described how she did her best to let go of this situation, but it did cause added stress and anxiety in future patient interactions, especially when she became a nurse.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents in relation to experiences with racism, she described the response as “lacking substance”. She expressed concern if the proposed interventions and plans would be able to change the culture at Robinson University because racialized incidents are common on campus. She had already decided that she would take extra caution on campus and interactions with peers, so she continued in this manner following the 2020 racialized incidents. She did notice an exacerbation in experiences with racism, in conversation she heard around the use of racial slurs. She reported hearing several of her white peers say “it wasn’t that big of a deal” in reference to the 2020 racialized incidents. Eve said to herself “they do not really understand” how these types of events are harmful and disruptive to a Black student.

Narrative 8: Ruthie

Ruthie is a 25-year-old Black female from Colvin. She didn’t decide to become a nurse until after her freshman year in college. She was searching for a career that would provide stability and security. She has a few family members who work in healthcare, so she had some exposure to healthcare professions. She was relieved once the decision was made. She met with

her advisor to inform them of her decision to pursue nursing school. She shared her story of how “when I decided to apply for nursing school, there were many, including my advisor at the university, that advised me not to apply because they didn’t accept many minorities.” She was advised to “explore other career options...At first this frightened me, but I chose not to be deterred so I proceeded with my plan to apply.” Ruthie reached out to her mother after meeting with the advisor and she encouraged her to continue with her plan of applying to nursing school. She applied and was accepted into the program. She was proud of herself that she stayed focused and did not become distracted by outside voices.

Upon starting the nursing program, Ruthie reported being very “nervous”. She was nervous about the workload but also how she would feel once she was there. She wondered if she would feel welcome especially after what she was told by the advisor. Even though she applied in spite of the advice she received, she reported how, “she would just stay to herself, focus on the program, and work hard to stay on track for graduation.” She went on to say regarding staying to herself, that “she would limit her time on campus after completing program classes and training sessions.” She had attended a predominantly white middle and high school. Based on this, she had experiences with racism prior to entering Robinson University. She was hopeful things would be different but after the interaction with the advisor, she realized this may not be the case. She ultimately decided that it would be best “to keep my distance and not get too engaged in order to decrease the risk of experiences with racism.” She went on to successfully complete the nursing program. She joined a travel nursing agency upon graduation.

When asked about the 2020 racialized incidents she describes how she felt the implementation of diversity training was chosen because it’s something that can be done relatively quickly, but the real question is if it will be effective. She reported noticing an increase

in experiences with racism following the 2020 racialized incidents, particularly in patient interactions. She also thought this could be due to an increase in expressions of racism following former President Trump's time in office and the movement he started.

Themes

The themes in this study answers, *what strategies have Black undergraduate nursing students used to combat racism and racialized incidents at a PWI?* The themes reflect emotions, inner personality aspects, and actions of Black undergraduate nursing students during their time at the PWI. Based on participants' responses, they reported what they felt it took to endure the experiences with racism and the racialized incidents. Many participants shared how they had to rely on their inner self to keep advancing through the program while dealing with experiences with racism and racialized incidents. Participants also shared the actions they took with the hope of protecting themselves from experiences with racism.

The first theme acknowledges the personality characteristics detailed by the participants they needed to endure racism. Those characteristics include determination and grit. Participants described how both determination and grit were needed to survive the higher education environment while enduring persistent racial experiences; those that occur against them personally or against others. The participant's reported isolation is a common action to protect against experiences with racism. The third theme describes participants' thoughts of fear and worry experiences with racism and racialized incidents can cause. The themes aid in understanding the magnitude of experiences with racism and racialized incidents can have on undergraduate Black nursing students.

Theme 1: Determination and Grit

Participants described various strategies they used to combat racism and racialized incidents at the PWI. There are numerous academic fields that require determination to achieve long-term goals. Participants described how they had to have determination and grit to withstand the racialized incidents that they experienced and those that occurred on campus. Grit can be defined as “consistency of interests and perseverance of effort” (Datu et al., 2017, p. 169). Determination is a component of grit. According to Datu et al. (2017),

Consistency of interests refers to the extent to which individuals constantly focus on achieving their long-term aspirations. Perseverance of effort, on the other hand, concerns the degree to which individuals can endure challenges and adversity while sustaining personal effort and determination to attain their long-term ambitions (p. 169).

Many of the participants described the determination and grit that was needed to achieve their ambitions and goals which included graduation from the nursing program.

When speaking about determination and grit, Sasha stated, “you don’t know who your ally is if you have concerns, so you go on with your day to day. I knew I had to be strong for myself.” Sasha shared that she knew she had to be strong and deal with the experiences with racism because she, “did not know how to articulate the issue in nursing school or who to turn to. I didn’t want to be kicked out or did I want to possibly deny opportunity to a future Black student in the program.” Her concerns about being able to stay in the program as well as who she could trust, led her to rely on her inner strength to continue day by day. When asked about how many experiences with racism she experienced, Sasha had reported she, “had over ten experiences with racism that came to mind.” Regardless of the number of experiences with racism, her worry about staying in the program surpassed the need to share these experiences

with someone. She reflected on how competitive it is to get selected for a nursing program and she felt it was best to just deal with it and graduate.

Similar to Sasha's response on determination, Lela stated, "I used it as fuel to get through the program and prove them wrong, so it enhanced my ability to succeed." She ultimately used her experiences with racism as the power to defy the odds and break any stereotypes or preconceived assumptions about Black undergraduate nursing students. Lela went on to describe that she was determined by having a "made up mind" to excel and graduate from the program. She reported she had numerous experiences with racism while in the nursing program, they were "too many to count." She too, used these experiences to propel her through the program and not stifle her from achieving her goal.

Participants also shared that they had to have grit to combat the amount of racism they experienced in nursing, especially during the heightened racialized incidents that occurred on campus. Despite having such experiences, Lela and Sasha were able to share what it took for them to endure and finish the program. In the same manner, April shared her perspective on determination and grit. She detailed the perseverance it took for her to succeed and graduate. She knew she had aspirations following nursing school so achieving her goals was of the utmost importance. April shared:

Those experiences made me stronger. I was determined to not let anything stop me. I was the only Black student that completed my nursing program. While in my program I would often seek out faculty for assistance and was always advised to read everything, know everything - no guidance or help. While my white peers would discuss a different experience of receiving help and tips for exams and how to digest the information. This also made school challenging but also gave me motivation to continue to push past the

evil spirits that were around me. It made it very difficult for me to succeed and I had to seek outside resources to assist me and spend additional money for materials to help me understand content. This made me stronger because as long as I was in class with everyone, I got the same information so I made sure that I knew the content very well so I would be successful no matter what the situation.

The determination and grit needed to overcome racism and continue to pursue educational goals is not something that can be overlooked. In this sense, determination and grit can refer to the personal stamina of a Black nursing student to continue despite experiences with racism and racialized incidents. Determination and grit are tied to personality traits. The ability to endure the racial climate and still achieve their goals is not an easy task (Patel, 2021). Experiences with racism and racialized incidents is a task that Black nursing students along with Black students in general did not ask for, yet it has been placed upon them.

April shared in detail what it took for her to succeed in comparison to her white peers. She detailed specific examples of how she was treated differently and what steps she had to take to finish the program in spite of the circumstances and treatment she endured. In April's case, her fight to finish was not only for her, but for her grandmother. Her grandmother served as a big support system and was also paying for April's education through nursing school. April described having her grandmother's support was vital in her determination to complete the program. Strength and determination are needed in a multiplicity of ways for Black nursing students as they navigate a PWI.

Based on her experience in the clinical setting, Eve described how she had to remain strong even when she felt that she was being bullied. She shared, "I felt like they were really kind of bullying me out because they didn't show me the same patience as other students." She

was training with white preceptors during clinical time and reported, “I didn’t let them break me in a sense. I was determined to not let them win.” She noticed the difference in treatment but decided to persevere even in the midst of it all. She has previous experience with determination because she recalled how counselors attempted to steer her away from the nursing profession. She stated, “they didn’t take me seriously when I expressed my interest in becoming a nurse.” Based on this experience she had built her strength and determination. When she arrived at the nursing program, she was seemingly prepared for the additional experiences with racism and racialized incidents.

Nicole, who described herself as a very outspoken person, stated she knew she “had what it took despite being the only Black in the nursing class.” She went on to say that she knew she “had to have grit” and she “doesn’t let people treat me any kind of way.” She had worked as a LPN before and had experience being the only Black student in a nursing program. So, when she entered the LPN-RN program she was prepared once she saw that again she was the only Black student. Her previous experiences in higher education and being the only Black student in her program not only prepared her but showed her what traits she needed. She needed strength and determination to keep progressing despite how she had been treated. She knew she wanted to obtain a RN degree, her previous experiences proved to her she had what she needed to succeed.

Lemonte shared similar feelings of determination based on his experiences while in the nursing program. He had experiences where patients would refer to him using racial slurs. He informed his clinical instructor and, in most cases, would be reassigned to a new patient. When those experiences happened, no one asked him how he felt after being called a racial slur. After having been reassigned multiple times throughout clinicals and based on clinical instructor responses, “he knew he had to push through.” The experiences with racism with patients and the

lack of response of clinical instructors led Lemonte to see that it would be up to him to remain focused and committed to his goal of becoming a registered nurse despite his feelings of hurt.

Determination is often thought to be innate and attributed to the culture of Blacks based on historical persecution and discrimination. Even if the determination is within, it adds additional pressure to Black nursing students while also learning complex nursing content. Even after her experience with racism, April was able to lean on her determination to help get her through. Higher education has a culture where determination and grit is expected while also expecting that Black nurses will not succeed or struggle significantly. Lela made a point to “prove them wrong”. She described how she had to focus on who she was and what she knew she could achieve to provide the strength she needed. The permanence of racism molds many Black nurses to become resilient with the resolution to bear what comes their way. Black nursing students need to be strong and confident; it is unfortunate that in most cases that strength comes from experiences with racism.

This section explored the characteristics Black nursing students reported needing during their time in the nursing program when dealing with experiences with racism. The participants were faced with how to deal with their experiences, use them as fuel, or become overtaken by them. In the study, the participants reported transforming their experiences into power that propelled them to keep progressing in the program. The drive to succeed despite racism is admirable because the impact of racism can be great. To overcome that and continue the journey takes inner determination and grit. Sadly, the experiences with racism often don’t end once their time in higher education comes to an end but it continues in the workforce.

Theme 2: Decision to Isolate to Protect Oneself

This section discusses the strategies used by undergraduate Black nursing students to combat racism and racialized incidents. Several participants described how they isolated themselves from other peers, faculty, and staff for protection. This tactic typically stemmed from previous experiences with racism and served as a potential safeguard against future experiences. Nicole stated that she protected herself by “not making too much noise” while in the program. Nicole accomplished this by not drawing too much attention to herself. Nicole came into the nursing program knowing that she was going to isolate herself. When asked how and why she made this decision, she stated she knew it would be best based on previous experiences. She had already experienced racism in higher education, so by the time she made it to nursing school she had a plan in place. Nicole was a LPN and was returning to higher education to obtain a RN degree. She had attended a predominantly white LPN program and from that she knew she needed to do something different this time. Nicole shared that when arrived in the program she, “kept to myself from day one.” Even in that, she still experienced racism.

When asked how experiences with racism affected their involvement on campus, April shared, “I limited on campus because I didn’t feel welcomed or comfortable. I also didn’t want any negativity to come to me, so I just stayed away.” She felt that isolation was the best way to avoid any negativity or experiences with racism that may jeopardize her graduating from the program. Her entire education journey was at predominantly white institutions, so she was very familiar with the environment. This was instrumental in her decision to limit her time. An unwelcoming culture is often felt when Black nursing students at a PWI arrive, and continues to be revealed as they matriculate through higher education.

Sasha shared the following regarding strategies she used to combat racism. She reported, “I did not wish to become too involved but I wish there was an active BIPOC group to talk about

issues and how to combat them.” In her case, there was no outlet for her to help cope with racialized incidents and experiences with racism. Sasha stated how isolation was the one thing she could think of to protect herself from other experiences with racism. She had a desire to be involved initially but quickly realized there was not a space for her voice. She stated, “I was timid, disengaged, not asking questions as I did not feel it was a safe space”. These feelings were triggered by the experience of racism that occurred on the first day of the nursing program. In her case, isolation pertained to physical isolation of being disengaged as well as isolation felt since there was not a space or support system for her during the program.

Lela also felt that based on her experiences with racism, which she reported were “too many to count” that isolating was the only choice to potentially protect herself. She stated that she had experiences with racism “from teachers, nurses and peers.” For that reason, “it made me stay to myself and minimize my participation in other areas.” Experiences with racism can come from a variety of places. There are multiple locations that a Black nursing students may encounter racism during their time in a nursing program. That fact that Lela stated there were too many experiences to count is disheartening. Adding further harm is the fact that racism can show itself in numerous places and via different types of people, which was the case for Lela. Most nursing programs require the students to attend classes most of the day, similarly to a traditional workday schedule. To think that Lela spent most of her time surrounded by people who hurt her with racism allows one to see this sad reality for Black nursing students.

Similarly, Lemonte described how he “often stayed to me, went to class, and left. I never remained on campus.” However, he went on to say that “students isolated themselves from me, so I was alone after trying to make acquaintances and join study groups.” The number of males entering the nursing profession is growing but they still are much less than females. Lemonte

offers an even more unique perspective in that he is a Black male. He felt that other students isolated themselves from him, yet he also isolated himself. He provides a male perspective on experiences with racism while representing another minority student demographic within nursing school and the nursing profession. Hearing that Lemonte had difficulty joining study groups is really distressing. Nursing school curriculum is extensive and in-depth. Many students form and join study groups to break down the learning material and aid each other in studying and/or memorizing the required information. Aside from a desire to make acquaintances, Lemonte simply wanted to join a study group but was not able to do so based on the color of his skin.

Beulah was a senior in 2020. She described how she would hear conversations about the 2020 racialized incidents and how a lot of her white peers felt that it was not a big deal. During this time, she described “feeling alone during 2020 because a lot of other students were in support of free speech”. She saw and heard how many of her peers felt regarding the incidents and the use of a certain racial slur. Beulah stated during this time “she felt uncomfortable.” She reflected on the fact that she was a senior and would be graduating in the coming months. She did her best to not let her peers’ actions or conversations dampen her spirits because she had worked very hard during the program to graduate.

These findings are an illustration of how isolation is used by Black undergraduate nursing students during their time in higher education, specifically at a PWI. The permanence of racism in higher education makes the journey ever more arduous for many Black nursing students. The power and privilege of dominant culture excludes Blacks nursing students in higher education that leads them to not feel safe. According to Houlahan et al. (2021), “Black nursing students, with few peers or Black faculty with whom to connect, often experienced social isolation and loneliness” (p. 5). Undergraduate Black nurses remain in the minority, even after enrollment

expansion following COVID-19 pandemic, so isolation is a common thread among them, even more so at a PWI.

Isolating oneself can be viewed as a potential safety method to guard against what may happen during nursing school while also being proactive in protecting against racialized experiences. Isolation also refers to feelings of being alone and/or not having the support needed to deal with one's experiences with racism. Isolation, specifically the planning of isolation, is unique to this study. One participant reported coming in to nursing school having already decided to isolate herself. This is telling in how the role of racism and racialized incidents can alter the typical behavior of a nursing student. Isolation in the literature commonly details how Black students at PWI feel isolated in a sense they don't belong or fit in with dominant culture and the lack of space or opportunity to express themselves and their culture (Davis et al., 2004). This study in particular reveals how Black nursing students pre-planned to isolate, largely based upon personal experiences with racism and racialized incidents. In the experiences reported in this study, this mechanism was not effective in protecting participants from experiences with racism or racialized incidents. All eight participants reported lived experiences with racism and racialized incidents despite taking well-intentioned precautions.

Theme 3: Fear and Worry of What May Happen Next

Several of the participants reported having more than one experience with racism and from that, they started to have feelings of fear and worry about what was to come. Lemonte detailed how he:

Will always be impacted by the injustices done to me and around me. I know that I must mentally prepare for the worst and hope for the best when I am dealing with people who don't look like me because of their views and stereotypes. I was often, and even until this

day, am uncomfortable, anxious, and depressed when in settings of others because of the unknown.

This statement of his feelings came after reflecting one of his more traumatic experiences with racism while in nursing school. Years following that experience with racism, he continues to have the feelings of anxiety and depression.

Lela shared the same sentiments in this regard. She stated, “you can’t help but to think of the ‘what ifs’ and it makes me anxious. I am constantly on guard and at times avoid being authentic due to how you may be perceived.” The thought of the “what ifs” was enough to cause anxiety for Lela and even had implications for how she presented herself. These feelings were intensified “due to the fear of retaliation or impacting my progression in the program.” This is not only a concern for Lela but for other undergraduate Black nursing students. Nursing school admission is highly competitive, so for a Black nursing student to get a spot in a program is an exceptional accomplishment. Lela and other participants in this study understood the gravity of being admitted and worked to ensure they do not lose the opportunity.

After her experience with racism, April described how she became “constantly worried about the tactics that would be used to get me out of the program, so I was never comfortable or felt as if I was able to enjoy being in the program.” April worked very hard to get into nursing school and she was looking forward to making memories but in her case most of those memories were not pleasant. As a Black nursing student, you realize how important your presence is in a field where white people continue to be a majority in the nursing workforce. Sasha previously shared that she did not feel there was a safe space for her to discuss her racialized experiences. Because of that, she never shared her feelings or experiences with racism until asked during this study. Another reason she didn’t share was out of fear. She detailed how she “didn’t want to be

kicked out or did not want to possibly deny the opportunity to future Black nursing students in the program.” She was not only considering herself but those potential Black nursing students who would come after her.

Nicole shared, “that’s why I do my best to check the vibe before certain interactions, specifically with people of other races. Despite me trying to assess the situation prior to my interactions, the feelings of anxiety are still there.” These feelings of anxiety stemmed from her previous experiences with racism during her times in both of her nursing programs. Nicole has learned that even though people are in need of care, this at times does not prevent them from using harmful words, racial slurs, or rejecting her as nurse participating in their care.

Eve also shared similar feelings to Nicole in regard to interactions with non-Black patients. Eve shared “a lot of fear and worry about interactions with white people and being on a PWI campus intensified since former President Trump was in office.” She felt that the sense of entitlement was more evident. She detailed that the entitlement of white people was probably always there, but since 2020 is more overt. Eve shared the view that the sense of entitlement is there because “white people haven’t worked through the process of things that has been engrained into their thought process, they are using a bandwagon mentality.” During and following her experiences with racism, she has seen the reality of the “bandwagon mentality.” Eve’s feelings of anxiety continue to happen, but she is hopeful that as the newer generations come of age, that some of older, racist mentality if eventually die out.

The stories and statements of the Black undergraduate nursing students in this study illuminate the permeance of racism, not just in society, but its ever presence in higher education. Even when a Black learner is in higher education to gain knowledge to help themselves and others, racism is present. When a Black nursing student is taking care of those who are sick and

in need, racism is present. Experiences with racism are continually presenting themselves in the lives of Black nursing students. The impact can be lasting, even from one experience.

Considering that most Black nursing students have multiple experiences, this only adds more toil to their journey.

Chapter Summary

These findings illustrate a sad but true reality for Black undergraduate nurses attending a PWI. The stories shared by the participants reveal the struggles of Black nursing students. The stories also illustrate the permanence of racism in higher education. Completing nursing school is not an easy feat; coupled with racism experiences, that journey is even harder and more strenuous. These stories are often not shared because of fear that they won't be believed or, because no one has asked them about their experiences with racism. Based on my own history with racism, I felt compelled to search out for these stories to share the truth that so many Black students endure while in higher education. The depth of these stories not only last for a moment but for a lifetime. A nurse takes an oath to care for people of all races, cultures, backgrounds, and identities while bearing the weight of unrelenting racialized experiences. The counter stories highlighted here describe distressing experiences with racism. The first theme, determination and grit speak to needed characteristics of Black nurses to endure the racialized experiences. The second theme, isolation, is a common action used as an attempt to protect oneself from racism. Lastly, fear and worry often torment Black nursing students regarding wondering what future experiences with racism or racialized incidents may happen. This study showed that isolation does not completely protect students from racialized experiences. Using CRT to make meaning of participants' counter stories, this study offers a look into the life of Black undergraduate nursing student and allowed for an enhanced understanding of racism and its permanence. These

themes jointly highlight the great need for a more inclusive and safe learning environment for Black nursing students. The final chapter will outline implications, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

In this chapter I discuss the findings and provide recommendations and implications for practice and future research. First, I connect my findings to current bodies of literature and describe how my work is similar while highlighting the unique contributions of my work. Next, I share how my work assists educators and administrators in understanding and addressing the unique experiences of Black undergraduate nursing students attending a PWI. Revealing these experiences with racism and racialized incidents should push higher education administration to see the sad truth of what Black students are contending with while on campus. Black nursing students often endure racism in silence, while striving to attain their educational goals. This study brought to light the experiences with racism of eight nursing students, the action of isolation as a means of protection, the emotions of fear and worry of what may happen, and the reliance on determination to persist even when faced with racism.

Discussion

Colvin has an enduring legacy of anti-Blackness that continues to be revealed in present day times (Wattley, 2014). From the day-to-day struggles with racism to legislation being passed targeting Black history, education, and representation, the need for change is urgent. This study directed attention to experiences with racism of Black undergraduate nursing students following two highly publicized racialized incidents on campus. In a time when Black students were calling for change in administration and campus culture, Black nursing students continued to experience racism. Historically, PWIs were built by Black slaves (Wilder, 2013). According to Reynolds and Mayweather, (2017), “resistance to racism has a long history on American college campuses” (p. 284). As seen throughout the history of Robinson University, Black students have had to fight for equality, equity, and protection. In the 21st century, the permanence of racism is

still ever-present in society and on PWI campuses (Patel, 2021). Bell (1992) states, “the fact of slavery refuses to fade, along with the deeply embedded personal attitudes and public policy assumption that supported it for so long and the Civil Rights gains, so hard won, are being steadily eroded” (p. 3).

Although this study focused on two specific racialized incidents at Robinson University, it is important to acknowledge that there were other racialized incidents impacting Black students occurring during this same time involving colorism and racial slurs. In March 2020, a recruiter from Oklahoma College visited a local high school and asked Black students to line up based on skin color, from lightest to darkest (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2020). This led students to cry, and the recruiter was asked to leave the building. The recruiter was later fired from the university (Journal of Black in Higher Education, 2020).

Other incidents happened on college campuses, as reported by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2020). In April 2020, a professor at Wake Forest University used a racial slur while reading a document regarding court cases involving the Ku Klux Klan. Racial tensions continued to amplify as COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) called attention to police brutality against Black people. In June 2020, at Wesleyan College a student posted a statement involving a racial slur on social media during BLM protests. He was later suspended. Second, a retired adjunct professor used derogatory term for Black people in response to BLM protests. The university released a statement saying they were working so that no student would be required to take a course with that professor. Third, a college dean released a derogatory statement on social media regarding BLM. The position of dean was rescinded; several students then came forward to report other racist acts by that professor. Lastly, in November 2020 at Gordon College, a racial slur was written on a BLM shirt and hung in the

dormitory laundry room. This led to a student sit-in involving more than 100 students. Gordon College is a private Christian college where Black students makeup 4 percent of the undergraduate body. All these incidents occurred in 2020, the same year and around the time of the racialized incidents at Robinson University.

2020 was a year that involved much hurt and pain for the Black community. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, media outlets televised the deaths of multiple Black people at the hands of law enforcement, with little to no penalty of the officers. These deaths led to unrest and protests and calls for change across the United States. According to Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021), “it is imperative that educators not only challenge anti-Blackness but also pay attention to the mechanisms of racial oppression and white supremacy (p. 51). Anti-Blackness and racism “reside within institutions as well as ideologies of whiteness, white supremacy, and fear of the Black body” (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021, p. 51). The pandemic also uncovered systemic racial inequities within the healthcare system and revealed the lack in healthcare access and care among Black people in Colvin. Collectively, racialized incidents against Black students, the state of health care inequity among Black people, and executive orders banning diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, speak to the permanence and prevalence of racism, not only in Colvin, but across the United States.

Racism in Nursing

Based on a study by Leath and Chavous (2018), “a growing body of research has begun to explore how race-related campus experiences influence Black students’ adjustment at PWIs, and findings indicate that racial stigmatization in the form of racial microaggressions, as well as overt interpersonal discrimination and isolation and exclusion from campus activities” (p. 126). The stories within my study were powerful and insightful to understand the life of a Black

undergraduate nursing student. They not only dealt with a complex degree program but also experiences with racism and racialized incidents. Race continues to be “conceptually underdeveloped in the health sciences” (Bridges et al., 2017, p. 180). They encountered these experiences with racism all on the account of the color of their skin. According to Bell (1992), “no African Americans are insulated from incidents of racial discrimination” (p. 3). Despite it being the 21st century, racialized incidents continue to occur and affect the lives of Black students. The stories they shared are informative in that regardless of the dominant narrative, racism remains present and prevalent. Love (2010) stated,

Nursing schools teach the language of the profession, teach fitting in, thinking “as nurses think,” and to reflect and adopt the “right” behaviors based on dominant nursing norms and professionalism” becomes a fallback word that maintains majority ideologies about dress, language, and behaviors (p. 343).

Nursing education has systemic practices that marginalize Black students and perpetuate white ideology in the curriculum. Teachings within the nursing profession suppress Black culture and individuality while requiring certain behaviors and ways of thinking consistent with white ideologies. For this reason, after Black nurses’ graduate, they continue to have experiences with racism in the healthcare profession.

Not only do nurses have to work in a demanding setting but they also must deal with day-to-day experiences with racism due to the perpetual racist practices among training programs and within the nursing profession. According to France et al. (2004), Black nursing students commonly feel “discounted which seemed to predominantly emerge from the lack of relationships, collegiality, and support among classmates. From within this phenomenon emerges the experience of alienation and ethnic isolation which then compound the inability to navigate

the system” (p. 32). Nursing students are exposed to a variety of stressors and may seek help to cope (Attis-Josias, 2023). Literature also has documented the continued struggle that Black nurses face after graduation once they enter practice. Black nurses continue to experience racism and discrimination in the workplace from patients and coworkers (Brandford et al., 2023). Sadly, these experiences with racism often do not come to an end for Black nurses.

The stories of experiences with racism by Black undergraduate nurses are consistent with previous literature on racism toward Black nursing students and nurses. According to Cineas and Schwartz (2023), “Black nurses report the highest incidence of personal experience with racism which negatively impacts their professional well-being” (p. 282). Historically, the nursing profession was only open to white women. “The professionalization of nursing in the United States was based on colonialism and racist practices” (Houlahan et al., 2022, p. 1). The profession has continued to be seen as a place for whites, not Blacks or other underrepresented populations. Black nurses report that connecting with white faculty is difficult because they often feel that white faculty are culturally insensitive (Beard, 2022b). In this manner, seeing a Black nursing student or nurse as abnormal is not appropriate. Among nursing education and the profession, “systematic oppression can occur at institutional levels, therefore schools of nursing and nursing as a profession will need to examine the assumptions and imbedded biases in education” (Love, 2010, p. 343)

Colorism

Under the umbrella of racism, colorism is a major factor in the experiences with racism of Black nursing students and as they continue in the profession. According to Brown (2023) “colorism is deeply rooted in the United States, as colonialist notions of manifest destiny and white Christianity were used to legally and culturally cement white supremacy at the core of the

U.S.A.” (p. 457). Colorism refers to the preference of lighter skin compared to darker skin. This preference stems from slavery and “differential treatment is rooted in white supremacy and colonialism the resulting division among enslaved Africans” (p. 457). The difference in treatment and value based on skin color continues in the present day. Regarding patient interactions, commonly white patients prefer to have a white nurse instead of a Black nurse (White & Fulton, 2015). Patients often make this decision solely on perceptions of skin color without considering skill level, experience, or nursing knowledge (White & Fulton, 2015). The skin color of Black people prompts prejudiced patients to make assumptions about the racial identity of the nurse and act based on learned stereotypes. I can speak from experience. Upon walking into a room, a patient did not give me a chance to complete my introduction before stating that they would rather have a white nurse care for them.

Legislation

The number of racialized incidents is on the rise, particularly at PWIs in the US. PWIs were not created for Black people and thus systemic policies and practices were implemented to keep Black people out (Kelley, 2018b). Even with the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black people have continued to face barriers and inequity inside and outside of education spaces (Patel, 2021). The persistence of racism in higher education must be acknowledged. According to Bensimon (2018), “A critical race consciousness, therefore, is the only appropriate and necessary stance from which to address the consequences of whiteness as the ruling logic of higher education reforms and create genuine equity” (p. 97). This study works to bring to light the experiences of Black undergraduate nurses with racism and racialized incidents. Working to create a more equitable learning environment in higher education is a very difficult charge, but it starts with acknowledging the truth and giving validation of these experiences with racism.

Within Colvin, there is recent legislation to eliminate CRT with the passing of HB1775 in 2021, and the state government is working to de-fund diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education (H. R. Resolution 1175, 2021). In 2020, an executive order was signed by former President Trump, placing a ban on diversity efforts deeming them “divisive concepts” (Flaherty, 2020b). These pieces of legislation worked to intensify the racial climate by attempting to silence Black voices about their experiences. These actions only add to the perpetuation of racism in this state, higher education, and the healthcare system. Colvin has chosen to not confront or address racism. State legislation that prevents equity work only continues to breed a society that operates in and perpetuates racism.

Institutional Responses

Higher education, specifically PWIs, are being summoned to recognize the permanence of racism and accept the counter stories as true. In the education literature, it has been well documented that Black students’ experiences in a PWI is vastly different than white students (Davis et al., 2004). The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 was reflected on college campus across the country. According to Subramaniam and Alcalde (2022), “the explicit linking of examples of injustices to Black bodies emphasizes the dire need to call upon institutional leaders to recognize the weight of their words and the absence of their actions” (p. 18). The actions of the institution are what count the most regarding showing Black students their value or lack thereof.

The findings from the documents revealed the continued struggle with racialized incidents on campuses. Racialized incidents occurred at Robinson University in 2015, 2019, and 2020 making national news headlines. The Black student community expressed frustration with institutional response through protests, sit-ins, and hunger strikes. They called for change

because the same words, same actions are not working to combat racism and racialized incidents on campus. Most institutional responses are not proactive, but reactive. According to Subramaniam and Alcalde (2022),

Statements that condemn racial incidents rarely name the targets and may through diversity programs reinforce and legitimate racial hierarchies they are purportedly designed to undermine. Therefore, the lack of accountability within statements and the masquerading of People of Color, unconsciously or consciously, advance the “white institutional space” and cultivate a poor environment for transformative change. (p. 20)

The lack of accountability in institutional responses as well as lack of acknowledging those who were targeted contribute to perpetual racism and racialized incidents. Diversity training seems to be the main strategy in the handling of racialized incidents, but more must be done in the fight against racism.

Racism is Endemic

From these counter stories of participants in this study, we see the reality that racism is endemic. CRT describes how racism is a part of all sectors of society (Bell, 1995). Counter storytelling, as defined by CRT, is a way to magnify and attach value to the stories of Black voices and narratives (Bell, 1995, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). By bringing to light the stories of Black nursing students through counter storytelling, one can hear their voice and realize their experiences with racism. CRT provided the lens needed to truly see these experiences and understand the impression it can have on a Black person, in this case Black nursing students. CRT allowed for value to be assigned to the lives of those who experience racism and honor to their stories. The dominant narrative is that higher education is a place for all, but this is not the case (Patel, 2021).

Higher education has created and built its legacy on serving themselves, not underrepresented groups (Patel, 2021). Thus, racialized incidents continue to occur, and in recent years there has been an uptake in the number of incidents across the country. CRT helps to pinpoint the root issue which is the permanence of racism. CRT as the theoretical framework guides one to understand that systemic racism is present in higher education, and to understand its impact we must talk to People of Color (Taylor et al., 2023).

Isolation for Protection

One finding from the study, that was unique to this study, was the physical action of isolation while in training, particularly from day one. According to Means et al., (2022), “PWI institutions that have had continuous challenges creating supportive environments for Black students due to racism, specifically anti-Black racism - a form of oppression that systemically disadvantages and disregards Black people in everyday life and social institutions” (p. 153). The participants reported being proactive in isolating themselves to potentially guard against racism. Black students at PWIs must battle feelings of isolation and racial stereotypes. To cope, Black students use a variety of strategies, including isolation, “to help lessen the negative impact of racism, including anti-Black racism, at PWIs” (Means et al., 2022, p. 155). In this study, the participants isolated themselves in the beginning, almost immediately once in the nursing program. The physical action of isolation indicates the power of racism and how it can invade a person in a holistic manner. Racism permeates the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of a person. The permanence of racism causes some Black nursing students to take physical precautions to protect themselves. There is limited research on isolation among Black nursing students at PWI. According to Wilson (2007), “Black nurses used isolation and

distancing as a means of survival and preserving” (p. 147). Sadly, physical isolation is not a full-proof safeguard against racism, as seen in this study.

The Toll of Racism

The other findings speak to one’s personality and the emotional toll racism can have on a Black nursing student. This study highlighted the personality factors of determination and grit, describing what it took to endure the racism and persist to graduation. Determination was chosen as the descriptor because it was commonly used among the participants. Based on a study by Leath and Chavous (2018), “students with higher self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to interpret stressful situations as challenges versus threats, which may partially explain their motivation to persist in higher education despite barriers to success” (p. 125). The participants found something within themselves that propelled them forward despite the racism they experienced. In all they were able to excel academically and become the registered nurse they desired to be. As a Black nurse in practice, the findings in the study are also needed in a nurse’s daily practice in the profession. A Black nurse must contend with racism from co-workers and patients. The ability to stay focused on patient care, professionalism, and sustainability within the profession requires a Black nurse to have determination and grit. This has been and continues to be my experience in the nursing profession as a Black registered nurse.

This study revealed to me the depth and pervasiveness of racism within higher education and nursing education. Similar to higher education, nursing education was built on exclusion practices that were aimed at keeping Black people out of nursing training programs and the profession. Experiences with racism and racialized incidents begin while in higher education because there is a deep-rooted culture of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. If we in higher education, particularly Black scholars, can begin the work to rectify the inequities within the

system we can then start to produce nurses that are not traumatized by racial trauma and are able to have a healthy learning experience. This study contributes to the literature by bringing awareness to Black nursing students at a PWI, their experiences with racism and racialized incidents, and the strategies they use to deal with the experiences. Black nurses make up a small percentage of the total workforce and maybe if their experiences in higher education were less traumatic there would be more nurses to sustain the workforce.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings from the study, there are several implications for practice in higher education. Particularly, in the state of Colvin, these implications for practice are needed to aid and support the Black student community at PWIs. In the year 2024, even with the increasing number of racialized incidents against Black students, higher education has not admitted to the permanence of racism and systems that continue to marginalize Black students.

Assist Black Students with Determination and Grit

Higher education administration must first believe the narratives of experiences with racism and racialized incidents by Black students. Often when stories are shared, they are not believed or validated. According to Tatum (2019), “the frustration of feeling unheard again and again can be a significant source of stress for an already vulnerable population” (p. 86). Regarding Black nursing students, they remain underrepresented despite the critical need for nurses. According to Houlahan et al. (2022), “nursing education in the United States was built upon a foundation of exclusion and racism” (p. 5). Barriers continue to exist that withing nursing education to “maintain an inequitable status quo” (Houlahan et al., 2022, p. 5). The status quo of maintaining enrollment that favors white students, a curriculum that continues to operate systemic racism ideology, and not validating or believing the experiences with racism of Black

nursing students. Despite the underrepresentation of Blacks in nursing programs, the continued use of discriminatory administrative protocols limits the ability to make a change.

Typically, the response to experiences with racism and racialized incidents lasts a short time immediately following the incident. This response and outreach in most cases falls off and the institution's routine practices resume. Acknowledging the effects of experiences with racism and racialized incidents is vital in supporting Black students and understanding that these effects can be longstanding (Griffith et al., 2019). Support resources and focus should not only last in the immediate days following but on a more extended course (Griffith et al., 2019). I recommend that resources should be available on a continuous basis. This would allow Black students to have access to resources when needed. Racial trauma and its symptoms are not confined to a specific time or duration. There is always a great need for resources to all students who seek them. Attention and focus should not be limited to a period. The lack of value attached to experiences with racism and racialized incidents is a major factor in why these experiences continue to occur on PWI campuses (Davis & Harris, 2016). The absence of support resources also contributes to Black nursing students relying on personal determination to achieve their educational goals.

Addressing Issues of Isolation for Black Nursing Students

In this study, all the participants had previous experiences with racism prior to entering the nursing program. The act of isolation stemmed from these previous experiences to safeguard against any future experiences with racism. Higher education must acknowledge that the experiences of Black students is different from white students attending a PWI. The differences include experiences with racism, racialized incidents, discrimination, and exclusion (Grier-Reed et al., 2009). Among these differences, there are also emotions and decisions made on how best

to endure while continuing to progress through a degree program. Inclusivity, making someone feel welcome and wanted, is key in higher education and for Black nursing students (White & Fulton, 2015). In most cases, as in the case of Robinson University, Black nursing students are an underrepresented group. Inclusivity practices can help Black nursing students feel they are not alone even when they are the minority (White & Fulton, 2015).

Counter spaces, also known as sanctuaries, have been identified as useful spaces of Black students attending a PWI. A counter space is defined “as sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be maintained” (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). These counter spaces serve as a refuge for Black students where they can find community with others who may share similar experiences and interests. Black students face numerous challenges while attending a PWI. These challenges often include “stress related to acceptance or fitting in, cultural conflict, help seeking, coping, lack of resources, mistrust of the institution, racism, social support, and stigma” (Grier-Reed, 2010, p. 181). Providing spaces on campus for Black students, especially Black nursing students who are often the only or few in their programs, can be key in their success and completion of their educational goals. Black nursing students should have a place of their own that could serve as a place of refuge and sharing with other Black nursing students. This community commonly works as a personal and academic support system for Black students during their time in nursing programs (Ackerman-Barger & Hummel, 2015). The support they receive from counter spaces is vital when dealing with the challenges of attending a PWI and being an underrepresented group.

Addressing the Feelings Fear and Worry when Dealing with Experiences with Racism

Over the past few years, the recognition of the role of mental health challenges has been on the rise. Particularly in healthcare, mental health resources are vital. This was even more

evident during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This awareness should also be given to role of mental health challenges related to experiences with racism and racialized incidents (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Whether experiences with racism or racialized incident happen directly or indirectly, it has an effect of Black students. The need for proper mental health resources is essential for their well-being and longevity with healthcare (Bradford et al., 2023).

Higher education, specifically PWIs, must recognize the need for appropriate mental health care services and ensure that they are accessible to all students who may be in need. Racial trauma from continuous exposure to racism and racialized incidents can have a multiplicity of implications in the life of a Black student (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Mental health resources should be available on all campuses of the institution, not only on the main campus. Off-site locations should have the same access to mental health resources as the main campus. These off-site locations should not be excluded from campus interventions or resources for students.

Examine and Remove Racist Policies and Practices

Recognizing the permanence of racism, PWIs need to work to create policies and practices that are equitable and inclusive. The foundation of higher education is built on exclusion and systemic racist policies and practices (White, 2016, Patel, 2021). To truly make advancements in equity, higher education needs to reconstruct policies and practices that involve Black student leaders and the Black student community. The literature is full of details regarding Black student experiences at PWIs and how their experiences are vastly different from those of white students (Davis et al., 2004). These experiences can include racialized incidents, discrimination, and access inequity (Swim et al., 2003). One recommendation is for higher education to examine these racist practices and protocols that continue to marginalize Black

students. Upon examination, work to revise these practices and protocols that would now involve diversity, inclusivity, and an understanding of a Black students in a PWI setting.

The actions or inaction of higher education has a significant influence in the relationship between administration and Black students. According to Solórzano et al., (2001) “analyzing the collegiate racial climate is an important part of examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and through graduate and professional school for African American students” (p. 62). Black students look at these actions or inactions, along with the treatment of their counter stories, to then determine their worth within higher education. Higher education can seize the opportunity, by acknowledging permanence of racism, accept the counter stories as true, and provide a genuine action to combat racialized incidents and experiences with racism. Recommended actions would include intentional conversations with Black students as to what the institutional response would be or entail, prioritize racialized incident response, and follow up with Black students following the incidents in the months to years to continue the work of fostering a more inclusive campus culture. The conversations should focus on ways to take actions such as a forum where Black students could express their concerns with administrators, developing interventions that includes dates of implementation, detailing the steps and resources that need to occur for the intervention to be implemented, and a complete review of the interventions to determine outcomes and efficacy.

In the case of Robinson University, Black student leaders and administrators should evaluate the newest diversity training, determine what elements need to be added, and evaluate its effectiveness by tracking racialized incidents. Robinson University could expand its current diversity efforts on the off-campus sites such as the nursing college. Diversity training plus the

addition of support and mental health resources and incorporating Black student leaders at university off-site locations to collaborate in revising systemic racist policies and practices.

Institutional Responses Strategies

The institutional response or lack thereof is very important to the Black undergraduate nursing student community. Most participants in this study felt that the response following the 2020 racialized incidents were disingenuous and an afterthought. They described how the response seemed to be the same thing that happens every time. A campus statement is released and then life just goes on. Institutional responses should involve actions plan that are fully executed (Cole & Harper, 2017). Higher education administrators should seek input in the actions plans from all sectors of the institution. In reference to the 2020 racialized incidents, Black student leaders and communities should be involved in the response and in future actions items to continue the fight against racism. Nonperformative support against racism and racialized incidents should be exchanged for actions that would bring about change within the current inequitable power system (Briscoe & Jones, 2024). The fight against racism does not have an end date, this is a continual fight that requires stamina and actions.

Higher education leaders can review the literature on Black student experiences at PWIs, seek to understand Black students in a more comprehensive way, and review the findings of this study to gain insight into Black students' experiences with racism. This information can be used in the development of an effective action plan that considers Black students experiences and case study findings. An action plan that has specific outcome goals that target improving institutional responses. Students have expressed their frustration with previous responses. The institutional response should be genuine and unique pertaining to the specific incident and targeted population. Standardized, automatic responses lack authenticity and empathy. Institutional

responses should be formed by denouncing racism, provide specific details on a resolution and recovery efforts, while staying focused on a cultivating a better campus culture. Prioritizing Black students means acknowledging and understanding their experiences with racism, the physical and psychological consequences, and demonstrating through actions the work needed to aid Black students feel a part of the institution, not just another name on the roster (Griffith et al., 2019).

Higher education must take an active stance against racism and racialized incidents because this is a present-day issue (Swim et al., 2003). Taking a public, unflinching stance entails the courage to call out racism for what it is. Racism is hurtful, destructive, and traumatic. Letting it be known that racism and racialized incidents will no longer be the norm. Also, providing the mental health resources needed to combat racialized incidents, not just in the aftermath but the continual process of tackling the issue of racism (Bryand-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). Even though racism is endemic, there is a way forward that requires transparency, authenticity, and dedication to the cause of combating racism and racialized incidents.

How to Handle the Same Words and Same Actions

Robinson University has been plagued with racialized incidents for decades. Despite its history, the handling of racialized incidents has been subpar in most cases. In recent years, students have protested, marched, held sit-ins, and hunger strikes to prove the need for a more inclusive environment for Black students. In 2020 Black students at Robinson University intensified their strategies with hopes that administration would see the need to prioritize racialized incident response, experiences with racism, and providing an actionable plan to move forward. Similar demands were presented in 2019 and 2020. In the end, it was determined that diversity training would be re-vamped and mandatory for all faculty, staff, and students. The

remainder of the demands were not approved by the administration. Higher education administrators must realize that even if they can't meet all the demands, there should be some compromise. Examine the list of demands to then determine what can be done. The examination should not only include the demand or request but the rationale behind the demand to better understand why the demand was made. The rationale will often reveal the purpose and meaning to Black students. For example, providing spaces on campus for Black students would serve as a counterspace, a place to gather with people who share similar experiences. Black students can find community and support for the common struggles. In this case, having a dedicated space on campus would serve a greater purpose.

Protests and other displays of activism challenge the administration to respond, the response can potentially affect Black students now and to come (Mahler-Rogers, 2017). The prioritization of racialized incidents and the response is key in showing Black students that they are valued within the institution. Prioritization also works to prove that institutions take racialized incidents seriously and are taking actions against racism. Non-performative language does not have a place in the fight against racism (Briscoe & Jones, 2024). The Black student community in this study expressed frustration with the repeated press conferences, town halls, and statements because it has now been shown to be ineffective. Higher education must develop an authentic and tangible action plan truly aims to target the real issue which is racism (White, 2016). The plan should entail collaborating with Black student leaders and the community as well as faculty and staff. The action plans should not be made by administrators alone, which in most cases are predominantly white (Subramaniam & Alcalde, 2022). Racism and racialized incidents can affect multiple groups of people thus the working to find the solution should not

only involved one sector within the institution. Until this issue of racism is prioritized and taken seriously, experiences with racism and racialized incidents will continue to occur.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study contribute to several implications for future research. First, within this study, I focused on Black undergraduate nursing students. Future studies can explore the experiences of with racism and racialized incidents among other Black healthcare profession students such as those in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech pathologist, ultrasound sonography, pharmacy, medicine, and dentistry. The number of Black students in healthcare profession programs are consistently lower than white students (Chen et al., 2021). Since Black students are often overlooked, one can explore other healthcare profession students to determine if they had experiences with racism during training on the undergraduate level. This could potentially reveal if there are similarities and or differences among Black healthcare profession students regarding experiences with racism or racialized incidents.

Second, future research should explore experiences with racism among graduate nursing students. This study focused on Black undergraduate nursing experiences and did not explicitly ask whether experiences with racism were a deterrent against pursuing graduate degrees at a PWI. Black nurses are an underrepresented in undergraduate programs as well as graduate programs (Mingo, 2008). According to Hassouneh-Phillips and Beckett (2003), the study of Black graduate nursing students “revealed that racism was a pervasive and harmful influence and that this influence was largely invisible to Euro-American faculty and students” (p. 258). Their work points to the lack of research on experiences with racism of Black doctoral-level nursing. Although Black people continue to attain higher levels of education through masters and doctoral programs, the numbers remains low compared to white people (Mingo, 2008). For this reason, a

Black graduate nurse may have even fewer Black peers, thus increase the likelihood they may have experiences with racism.

Third, future research could be expanded to include additional PWIs, not just one institution. A future study could provide a national view of Black undergraduate nursing students experiences with racism and racialized incidents. A future study on a national level has the potential to provide higher education with a greater view of the permanence of racism and the prevalence of experiences by Black nursing students with racism and racialized incidents. Lastly, future research should examine Black undergraduate nursing students who are in closer proximity to racialized incidents. The effect of racialized incidents can be direct and/or indirect on Black students. In this study, the nursing school was located in another city, while the racialized events occurred at the institutions' main campus. In future studies, selecting a site that is located on the main campus can provide a more in-depth view of racialized incidents and the toll it has on Black undergraduate students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative case study explored the experiences with racism and racialized incidents of Black undergraduate nursing students attending a PWI. Their personal stories have never been shared until this study. The goal of this dissertation was to produce a study that contained empathy and safety to bring awareness to the experiences of undergraduate Black nursing students. Racism is still a constant struggle for not only Black nursing students, but for Black students attending a PWI. The number of stories still out there is probably plentiful and some of which will never be shared. I am grateful that these participants were willing to share their stories for this study and contribute to making a change within higher education. Within the data presented in this study, we see the permanence of racism in higher education, the

entrenched policies and practices that work to perpetuate racism, and the continued marginalization of Black nursing students. In 2024, Black nursing students remain underrepresented. Legislation passed in 2020 and 2021 is working to eliminate teachings on race and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education. These pieces of legislation have directly affected the Black student community at PWIs. Black students are currently a marginalized population and continue to remain oppressed at the hands of state and federal leaders and legislation.

All the Black undergraduate nursing students in this study had experiences with racism and racialized incidents. The strategies they shared provide insight into the daily life of a Black nursing student and how they handle racialized interactions. This study showed that undergraduate nursing students use isolation, rely on determination and grit, and deal with feelings of fear and worry. These strategies help us to better understand the totality of the struggles with racism and racialized incidents of Black undergraduate nursing students. These insights can help higher education leaders realize the permanence of racism and inform actions to improve their responses to racism and racialized incidents.

As a practicing nurse and an educator, this work was fulfilling in that it comprises who I am and how I hope to contribute to and advance the nursing profession and higher education. This work was intended to create a more equitable learning environment for not only Black nursing students but for all Black students attending a PWI. There is much work to be done to make higher education a better place for Black students, not just now but also for those in the future. Higher education, including nursing programs, have room to expand its efforts in inclusivity not just on campus but also in curriculum and campus culture. Given the history of

higher education, being built on exclusion and racism, the roots of these run deep and must be broken down to provide a healthier path forward for Black students.

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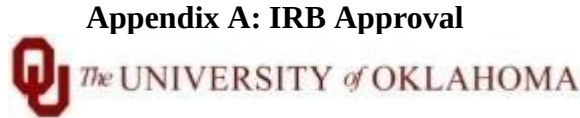
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Study Modification – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: September 26, 2023

IRB#: 16099

Principal Investigator: Adria Chappel

Reference No: 753803

Study Title: Exploring Black, undergraduate nursing students experiences with institutional racism at a PWI

Approval Date: 09/26/2023

Modification Description: Adding follow-up interview

The review and approval of this submission is based on the determination that the study, as amended, will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46.

To view the approved documents for this submission, open this study from the My Studies option, go to Submission History, go to Completed Submissions tab and then click the Details icon.

If the consent form(s) were revised as a part of this modification, discontinue use of all previous versions of the consent form.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. The HRPP Administrator assigned for this submission: Kat L Braswell.

Cordially,

Ioana Cionea, Ph.D.

Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email Template

Did you attend the OUHSC College of Nursing between 2020-2023? You may qualify for this study.

I am looking for participants for a study that examines experiences with racism. You may qualify if you are:

- African American
- Willing to participate in one virtual interview
- Were an undergraduate student at the OUHSC College of Nursing

between 2020-2023 For more information, please contact Adria Chappel at

adria-chappel@ouhsc.edu.



IRB NUMBER: 16099

IRB APPROVAL

DATE: 07/19/2023

Appendix C: Demographic Survey and Interview Protocol

Please introduce yourself as you feel comfortable; I will introduce myself as well with an opening statement.

Demographic Survey

Do you identify as Black/African American?

Did you attend nursing school between 2020-2023?

How do you identify? Male, female, non-binary, transgender or prefer not to answer.

How old are you?

What type of nursing degree did you obtain?

Please provide a pseudonym to be used in this study.

Interview Protocol

[Personal experiences with racism]

1. How would you define racism and/or racist experiences?
2. Can you tell me about a racial/racist experience you had on campus during your undergraduate years in nursing school?
3. Can you tell me about a racial/racist experience during your time in healthcare training (i.e., clinicals, classroom)
4. Can you tell me about a racial/racist experience during your time working in a healthcare setting?
5. How many experiences of racism have you experience while at the college?
6. How did your experiences with racial experiences affect your involvement on campus?
7. Did you report the experience to administration?
 - a. If not, why?

8. How did your experiences with racial experiences affect your academic progress?
9. Do racial incidents that occur on campus (or to you personally) affect your well-being?
 - a. If so, how?

[Intro/racial incidents 2020]

10. What year in school were you in during spring 2020?
11. What did you know about the 2 racial incidents in spring 2020?
12. Based on what you know, how did/does that impact your perspective of how Black students are welcomed and treated on campus?
13. What is your perception of how the incidents were handled by the administration?
14. Are you aware of any other more recent racial incidents on campus (OU or OUSHC)?

[The aftermath/admin response/moving forward]

15. Do you feel that the administration takes Black student's requests seriously? What made you think that way?
16. Do you feel your educational experience was any different following racial incidents?
 - a. If so, how?
17. Given the past racial incidents, what does a genuine response look like to you?
18. How do you feel the current outcomes are working to make a more inclusive community for Black students on campus?
19. What is your perspective regarding if administration is proactively working to combat racism/racial incidents on campus?
20. Is there anything else you might want to add about this topic?