

# Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

**Elias Provencio Vasquez Transcript**

**Duration: 11:55**

We're addressing

racism in nursing

My name is Elias

Provenzia Vasquez, and I am a Hispanic male.

Nurse.

I've been a nurse for years.

I first entered nursing school in .

My parents are from Mexico,

grew up in El Paso, Texas, till I was six.

And then as a family, we moved to Phenix, Arizona.

I remember going to elementary school

and there was very few white students,

maybe one or two in the entire college

or entire high school

because the majority

were AfricanAmerican and Hispanic.

When I was growing up,

all of the teachers, all of the policemen,

all of the people in power

and in authority back then were white people.

Spanish was my first language.

I didn't learn English till I went to kindergarten.

And in my home

we spoke Spanish because my parents didn't

Speak English.

And I remember

speaking Spanish in class

one day, and the kindergarten teacher

came and hit me

in the back of my head

and said to me,

We don't speak Spanish in this classroom.

And I remember that.

And so I struggled with then

learning to speak English

So what brought me to nursing was

when I was

still in high school,

I worked in a cafeteria of a hospital

and or in the kitchen of a hospital.

I worked in the kitchen of a hospital.

And my job

was to take the food trays out

to the floors of the hospital

so that then the nurses

could pass them out to the patients.

So after I

worked in the kitchen, at the hospital,

then I became a transporter.

So I would

I would move patients around the hospital,

take specimens to the lab, those types of things.

So that really gave me a lot more exposure to nurses

and other health

care providers within a county hospital

in Phenix, Arizona.

All of the providers, all of the nurses,

all of the physicians were white.

But I really got to engage with them

even more since I was part of the team.

So I really got a lot of exposure to nurses,

and that's when the nurses

started really encouraging

me to go to nursing school

I was years old.

I was an older student.

I did go to a community college

to start my higher education.

If I would have not had that opportunity,

I would have never gone to college.

And I remember three white faculty

that were probably well, I know they were the

the mentors who really pushed me and supported me.

One was Miss Baker.

I remember her. She was an ob gyn faculty member.

The other faculty member that I remember

and really made a difference in my nursing career

was Miss Berkley.

She was a military, exmilitary nurse.

She was a med surg faculty member.

The third faculty member at this community

college was Miss Collins.

Miss Collins was way ahead of her time.

She was very, very stylish.

She was one courageous

woman, very she was an ex ICU nurse.

She's the one that encouraged me to go get my BSN.

So these three faculty member who were white women

back in the late seventies, early

eighties, really made a difference in my career.

I think I was the one that sometimes

challenged myself. Do I really belong here?

I remember when I was a doctoral student

at the University of Arizona,

I questioned myself in the hallway

sometimes walking to my professor's office saying,

Do I really belong here?

So it was me more than anyone else that challenged

the belongingness of

of being

and being part of a group or of an organization.

Am I smart enough

I think the smart enough piece always came up

in my selfdoubts of the of the Do I belong here?

And I'll share a personal experience with you

that probably didn't make that any better.

So I remember since I'm my mother's only son,

I have six sisters.

I remember when I was in the my doctoral program

at the University of Arizona,

I came home one weekend for the holiday

and I remember that part of the conversation

that was going on in my family was that

I thought I was better than anyone else

because I was the only one that went to college.

You don't know how that hurt so bad

because I was one of them.

I've always been one of them.

And just because I read two or three more books

than anyone else didn't make me any better.

And it was a conversation that my mother and I had.

And she was just sharing with me

that some of the conversations

my sisters and their husbands were having about me.

Oh, he's coming home this weekend.

And I remember that so clearly how hurt

how hurt I was.

And that really, again, challenged

my mind is do I really belong

at the University of Arizona

in the doctoral program?

If my own family is doubting who I am,

you know, do I do I really belong?

Where do I belong?

Do I belong with my family

or do I belong in higher education in the Ph.D.

program?

And I remember I struggled for about a month,

really very emotional about that.

And I realized that I belonged in both places.

So that was an

experience that I will always remember as well.

And I remember those moments

when we talk about inclusion and belonging

and making someone part of your team

and who you are.

And that's very powerful to me.

It felt like I had to make a choice. Absolutely.

And then I had to question myself,

So what am I doing

while with while

I'm with my family that makes them think

I'm better than them?

It's not like I came home and talked

about all these theories and and all these

that all these concepts that I was learning

and in my doctoral program, it's

not like I came home

and had that conversation with them,

but I wondered

what was I doing or how was I acting

that made them feel that way?

And come to realize

that there was nothing that I really was doing

other than I was a doctoral program

doctoral student at the University of Arizona.

I do remember sharing with my family

the the long hours that I studied the,

you know, the exams

that I took,

the oral dissertation exam that I was preparing for.

I shared my experiences

of how hard it was to be a Ph.D.

student with them, but not what I've learned.

So there was a short time that I really felt

I needed to make a decision

where I really belong

and then realized that

I could belong in both places.

And I think that was my tipping point,

that I could belong in both places and be successful

My first

experience with,

I would say discrimination

and racism was in academia.

I remember my first academic appointment

in Texas.

I was a faculty member,

and I remember where it happened and who said it.

And there was a faculty member

in front of other faculty members

who said that

the only reason I was hired

was because I was a token.

And by the way,

I didn't even know what that token word meant.

And I remember kind of giggling nervously

because I didn't know

what do you say to something like that?

Is that a positive comment

or is that a negative comment?

I've come to realize now

that it was a very negative comment,

and I was one of the very few.

Even now in that university,

there's very few faculty of color.

Back then, I was one of maybe two.

And so I remember that clearly or

or making comments that the only you know,

you didn't

get to this level because of working hard.

You got to this level because you're male

and because you're Hispanic.

And I think I've always carried that with me,

even now that I hope

that people that faculty that staff,

that my colleagues

appreciate and acknowledge that I've worked hard,

worked hard to get to where I'm at

and not because I'm male or because I'm Hispanic.

So that that experience

has always been very close to me.

When I walk the hall

or when I meet a new faculty member,

that I hope that they can appreciate

that I've worked hard

to get to the level that I'm at

It's called ganas, ganas in Spanish.

When I was the dean

at the University of Texas

in El Paso prior to my arrival

here at University of Colorado,

the % of those students

were Mexican, MexicanAmerican.

And we talked about Ganas having Ganas

and I

I've always wanted to see what that word was

in English.

And it isn't selfdrive, it isn't motivation,

it isn't it's what,

what I finally realized

it was and I asked a lot of people,

what is a translation of ganas?

It's grit. Grit

that's the

that's the thing that has always kept me moving on.

When I faced many, many challenges in my career

and in my education

is that ganas is you pick yourself up

and you keep moving.

No matter how difficult it is.

I will never forget where I came from.

And I think that's

what makes me the person,

the leader, the nurse that I am today.

I am I am very humbled and I will never forget my

my childhood

or the many mentors

that I've had throughout my career.

And I so I bring it with me that's who I am.

I have to share with you.

I've been criticized

or given feedback that I'm too nice

either as a leader

or as a nurse practitioner or as a dean.

But that's who I am.

I can't change that.

And, and

I get concerned that people who say that to me

are confusing

being weak with being just a nice human being.

But I have to share with you also

that being a nice human being has taken me far

and has really made a difference.

Of the people that I surround myself with.