

# Reckoning With Racism in Nursing

**Melissa Mokol Transcript**

**Duration: 13:07**

We're addressing

racism in nursing

So I identify

I like the term AfricanAmerican because of my I really

I really feel close to my African roots, even though I'm not

African, but my husband is.

So I think I've been to West Africa.

And when I go there, there's a familiarity with people there.

They feel like they're my people,

even though they don't see me that way, anyway.

They don't see me that way.

But I also am proud of my Caribbean heritage.

So I guess I identify as AfricanAmerican with Caribbean roots.

I took a very nontraditional path to nursing,

and I feel very different when I listen to other

nurses talk about nursing

because there were no nurses in my family that I knew of.

I wasn't inspired by

a nurse that I saw in action

because I was never in the hospital.

You know, I didn't really have experience with nurses

So what happened to me was I was a biology major in college,

and I graduated college and I started working at a clinic

not really knowing exactly where I was going to go,

because with a biology major, what do you do?

But anyway, I was at a clinic

and I, I started working with nurse practitioners

and I really something about their role was,

was what I thought I would really like to do

because I thought, you know,

I do like that they are providing care

while also seeming to be somewhat holistic.

I liked talking to people

and learning their stories.

So so that's what I did.

I worked,

I worked there, I became exposed

and then I applied to a program and became an advanced  
practice nurse.

I started my doctorate.

I, so I'm, I think I had questions about how to improve health care  
especially for AfricanAmericans.

So that's when I began thinking about race.

So I'm a nurse faculty person.

Really, the very first time this this era in

my life is like the first time

that I've ever really thought about race.

And, like, when we grew up,

we never my my parents, my grandparents

we never had that.

I don't want to say baggage,

but it's not something we we talked about,

you know, if it came up,

but it was never something that we saw as a barrier.

Working in

academia is probably the first time that I've ever felt

or thought about race.

I think in academia.

So academia, it's

another it's another place

where you have a very autonomous role

It's wonderful.

I do love that about academia, but at the same time,  
it's also somewhere where you work very closely with other  
other people, your colleagues,  
and you really understand how they feel about  
students, how they feel about their philosophies,  
how they feel about you as someone who is at the table.

And then,

you know, so I've never been treated harshly, but I've often  
either felt completely invisible or  
highly scrutinized,

either me or I've noticed that in people who

I don't know if you want to call it underrepresented

people of color. I see. It's either one of those.

So I just see so there's like discrimination,

obvious discrimination.

And I

often think that it's some it's

just like a lack of awareness about that.

But I do notice that

Invisibility comes in when you come

with all of these experiences you're, you do very well.

You're teaching like I spend a lot of time

studying.

I do scholarship of teaching and learning.

That's my scholarship.

I read a lot about best practices in pedagogy.

That's my thing.

I get really good ratings from students.

I never have student issues,

but it's like, you know,

when

you're never noticed,

like you're it's always

maybe someone started three years later, they come in.

It's like, oh, yeah,

they're the one that does the research

and they're the one that they're known for something

and they just got there

and they don't have to do anything just by default.



Um, they're the one in, it's like, but I'm here,

we do a report, you know,

and you'll see everyone else's scholarship new people,

and it's like, But where's mine?

I do.

I have to, like, ring a bell to show you, you know, I don't.

I think I have a good

selfesteem, but I just sometimes you want to be noticed,

so that's what I mean.

Invisibility

Someone else's ideas are always fantastic.

And yours, you know, maybe, you know,

let me think about that.

So I would say

this is probably the first time that I'm like, OK, yeah,

I do see.

I just see that going on.

I don't think I've ever noticed that before.

Or if it was relevant before in my different roles,

you know, as an APRN, who cares?

Everyone's doing their thing.

As long as you see the patients you're supposed to see.

But I think when it comes to

getting recognition and

that's really that's a little more important in academia.

So so you do see differences

It's not even just how people regard you.

It's also you

you yourself see differences in how people think about

education, like what

what our role is as educators, as a department.

So there's always those philosophical differences

where it's like,

why are they so different?

Consistently, there's a difference.

So the invisibility is becoming a little less

because we talk about it.

We began talking about things and we began like we debrief.

And I think that helped us,

you know,

unpack some of what we were experiencing

and then it helped us to be more articulate

and more participatory in meetings

because I think we always just felt so different

there was groupthink.

I'd think these people are horrible.

These are horrible women.

But

so then you started speaking up,

and I think that has caused people to speak,

say horrible things a little less often.

I think I mentor all the time,

especially with

like I see a lot of I am drawn to people of color

I'm thinking back now because I look at them and I think, gee,

they probably were like how I was in college.

I did struggle I, I,

I was a,

you know, I was a really good student and I studied,

but I didn't know how to study.

I would read and, you know, I saw my

I learned how to become a better student.

Even though I was a motivated student.

I learned how to become better at being a student.

So when I my advisees

advisees, I

mentor them all the time about how to become a better student.

Someone who studies better

and someone who can make it.

Because I do think that a lot of,

you know, nursing is opening up.

It's become more diverse in terms of students,

but our faculty are not.

And I do think they,

you know, maybe have difficult seeing all these

this diversity.

So if I can help students

be more, be more, be a better student,

then they'll stand a chance of graduating

I think the big thing now is, is

maybe it's it's a big thing for me, but it's it's teaching.

It's how you design your courses so that they're accessible

to everyone.

I would make it such that each one of our faculty

took the time to design their courses so that

our students, all of them,

whatever their background,

have a fighting chance of making it through the program.

You know, and I think teaching design has to be creative.

So everyone's not going to come into the program

and ace four exams and pass your class.

They may need some more formative work.

They may need you to draw on other areas of  
of knowledge.

You need to make the course more accessible.

So

so if I were the dean or someone

who can make a difference, I would

I would hope that nursing faculty would make their courses

such that more students can be successful

so courses

also policies so that we,

you know, once our students start our programs, they succeed.

Our policies are so punitive. If we could



just want our students to succeed,

I want them to us to admit them.

And then they graduate

the I want us to care about our students

and I want them to all succeed.

And then in the end, we have a diverse

caring nursing workforce.

And I think that makes the difference.

In the end. I think people of color are more comfortable

when there's diversity,

and it doesn't always have to be AfricanAmerican, just not

you're the only black and everyone else is white.

So, you know, just color, color

differences, maybe even gender identity differences,

just diversity.

I think that makes minority students,

underrepresented students, feel like they belong.