

White Fragility in Nursing Education: An Evolutionary Concept Analysis

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Abstract

Background/Introduction

White fragility has not been explored in nursing education and warrants examination to address inequities experienced by faculty and students of color. Studies report students of color experience bias, discrimination, microaggressions, and racism from their peers and faculty. In a predominantly white female profession, white fragility likely contributes to these experiences because it limits nursing educators' awareness and acknowledgment of their power and privilege, further perpetuating the status quo.

Purpose

This project aimed to conduct an evolutionary concept analysis of white fragility in nursing education.

Methods or Processes/Procedures

Rodger's evolutionary concept analysis was used to clarify white fragility in nursing education. Literature from 2011-2023 was sought using CINAHL, PubMed, PsychInfo, and ERIC. Thirteen articles and one book were analyzed within the historical context of nursing as a white female-dominated profession.

Results

White fragility is a complex concept originating from social norms surrounding ideologies concerning race. White fragility attributes include withdrawal, defensiveness, control, and innocence. Antecedents include white supremacy ideology, structural racism, normalization of whiteness, colorblind racism, implicit bias, white privilege, and racialized stress and vulnerability. Consequences include microaggressions, psychological responses, segregation, and the inability to acknowledge racism in nursing.

Limitations

White fragility is used infrequently within nursing education literature. In this analysis, white fragility in nursing was derived from literature outside of nursing.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Nursing has been ranked the most trusted profession for over 20 years. Strong in-group pride in nursing may prevent nurse educators from acknowledging structural racism, white privilege, and white fragility within academia that may foster a culture of exclusion resulting in increased attrition of students of color. Nursing educators wishing to improve outcomes for students of color must acknowledge white privilege and white fragility to advance education equity. What is not named cannot be addressed. Defining white fragility in nursing education helps illuminate barriers to advancing equity for students, individuals, families, and populations.

Biography

Phyllis Pastwa, MSN is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. Mrs. Pastwa teaches Capstone: Transition to Professional Practice in the Undergraduate Program. Mrs. Pastwa is currently enrolled in the PhD Nursing Program at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Mrs. Pastwa's clinical experience includes cardiac, pain management, post-anesthesia care, home health, and pediatrics. She received her BSN and MSN from West Texas A & M University.

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