ADVISING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: FROM THE ADVISOR'S VIEWPOINT

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation work to all the African American men in my personal life, both mentors, and students alike. Each of you have in some way deposited strength and motivation in my life at some point for me to achieve this goal. Because my dissertation speaks to African American males as the recipient of the services provided by academic advisors, it is only befitting that this dedication be given to every African American male that I have ever served as an academic advisor and higher education professional. I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to those advisors that took the time to invest in this research as well as their African American male students. Finally, I would like to dedicate my work to those advisors across the United States that have attended any presentation that I have conducted on African American males in the context of advising. Your attendance has encouraged me to be confident in what I believe and has shown me that people really do care about this topic. In addition, your attendance has birthed my dissertation through questions, comments, and continuous feedback. Thank you to each and every one that has played a role in my success. You have been my cheerleaders!

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ABSTRACT

Research acknowledges high quality advising as being linked to retention and student success. Training and professional development received by academic advisors is undoubtedly connected to the quality of advising and a significant amount of research has been carried out on this topic. Unfortunately, the current research related to advisor training and professional development is limited, in that differences in advising practices for ethnic minorities, especially African American males are scarcely considered. In addition, while current literature and research has identified variables related to African American males and advising, the perspectives of professional academic advisors is seldom represented in the literature.

The purpose of this study was to analyze workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors, utilizing adult learning theories (in particular, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning). Specifically, this study sought to understand how advisors learn to serve African American males more effectively. Workplace learning experiences as well as adult learning concepts were investigated as advisors entered the profession and as they continued to develop in their careers. This phenomenological study included analysis of interviews and critical incidents described by nine academic advisors from a predominately White public emerging research university, now designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS) in the southwest region of the United States.

Overall, the concepts of experiential learning, self-directed learning, and transformative learning were evident in the advisors' learning experiences. These experiences were also analyzed in terms of elements and concepts of workplace learning and the level of formality were used to facilitate learning. Results indicate that workplaces that presented opportunities for both nonformal and informal learning were the most impactful to advisors' learning for serving African American male students. The results of the study inform current advising practices regarding work with African American males and dispute notions that nonformal learning is ineffective to advisor continued education. Informal learning was also identified as significant in advisor education. The findings carry implications for training and development of advisors as well as alternative solutions to assisting African American males within the advising process should nonformal methods such as conferences not be available. Ideas for future research on advising African American males at community colleges, private universities, multiple four-year public universities, in addition to advising other diverse populations are also presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this study I investigate adult learning; exploring the ways adults seek knowledge and skills, learn through experience, and develop alternative perspectives. This particular investigation of adult learning is set within higher education. The study situates institutions of higher education as workplaces and focuses on the learning experiences of full-time academic advisors within that workplace. However, this study is unique in that it moves beyond the general investigation of workplace learning. Specifically, I concerned with the ways in which full-time advisors engage in workplace learning to serve African American males more effectively, both as they enter their profession and as they develop through their careers. This particular study was brought forth from my own curiosity in his professional experience and through exposure to adult learning theories and concepts in his pursuit of a doctoral degree in adult education. Thus, the following study will investigate the intersection between the fields of adult education and academic advising. Before delving into the research, it is appropriate to begin with a broad introduction to the rudimentary components of the study.

Why African American Males?

Before making preparation to study academic advisors who serve African American males, it is important to address why it is important to study those advising this population. In 2010, Strayhorn provided alarming statistics about African American males, in which he identified that less than five percent of African American males enrolled in higher education of the 19 million undergraduate students documented. Of those that enrolled, only one-third graduated within six-years, with the remaining two-thirds leaving the university (Strayhorn, 2010). While not all research on African

American males is negative, including studies that have explored critical factors that contribute to their academic success, both African American males and females continue to experience unwelcoming environments (Cuyjet, 2006; Satterfield, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012). To add, African American men also struggle to overcome negative stereotypes throughout their college tenure (Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

This population holds a great deal of complexity. As mentioned above, not all research on African American males is approached from a deficit perspective. More recent literature acknowledges African American men that have successfully navigated the higher education landscape despite challenges encountered at their given institution. Students who are high achieving have been successful by utilizing the following: actively engaging on campus in both same-race organizations and majority organizations, fostering relationships with their faculty and campus administrators, and challenging or educating their peers on their misconceptions of African American men and women (Bonner, 2010; Going, 2018; Harper, 2012; Harper & Wood, 2016). Finally, the literature addresses the diversity that exists amongst the African American male community, highlighting subgroups that exist within the group. Bonner (2010), in his study on African American male success, noted that despite the achievement of many African American males, they have often not been spared the unwelcoming atmosphere of environments on predominately White institutions and were described as uninviting and cold. With the status of African American male success challenged in higher education, this population along with those interventions found to impact their academic success can be considered worth studying.

Accordingly, a connection between academic advising and the plausible effects it has on African American males. Advising has been reported to have positive effects on African American male enrollment from semester-to-semester (Thompson, 2008). Means (2014) found that African American males were to be more likely to engage in discussions of personal development, interpersonal relationships, teaching personal skills, academic major courses, and exploring intuitional policies than other students, utilizing academic advising to connect to other resources to adjust to the campus environment. Research about African American males describes their preference for a closer connection with their advisors and favor a developmental style of advising (Means, 2014).

Why Professional Advisors?

Academic advising is important to college student success and is proven to help with persistence and graduation (Pascarella & Terenizi, 2005; Strayhorn, 2015). As literature reveals the critical role advisors play in the college experience, it becomes more prevalent to continue research on advisors as they could be the key to success for many students (Allen and Smith, 2008; Light, 2001). Advisors have the unique opportunity to serve as a connection to curricular and campus resources, being that advising is one of few campus structures that has a guaranteed interaction with students (Hunter & White, 2004). Advising is consistently cited amongst retention efforts within higher education. Therefore, research that is relevant to those who provide advising services is called for.

Within the advising field, there are several positions that exist, including faculty, professional staff, and student/peer advising (Higginson, 2000). This study focuses on the professional academic advisor, those that hold full-time responsibility for academic

advising, to provide more understanding of the advisor practitioner (Reinarz, 2000; Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010). Despite an increasing number of professional advisors, an exclusive focus on this population for empirical research has been limited. The lack of empirical research on academic advisors is problematic as professional advising has become the commonplace for large, public institutions (King & Kerr, 2005; Pardee, 2000).

In 2014, Means conducted a mixed-method study with 12 students to compare academic advising experiences and satisfaction of African American males to other undergraduates at a predominately White institution. He found that African American males used advising to help them persist and succeed in college. Means also found that African American males used the advisor to navigate the collegiate arena, confirming the importance of advising and its influence on persistence and student success (Pascarella & Terenizi, 2005; Strayhorn, 2015).

Accordingly, I not only narrow the context of higher education to large public institutions, but also focuses on those advisors that seek to serve African American males more effectively. Most related research has addressed concerns such as student preferences for types advising, and advising's role in student retention and persistence. For instance, Means' (2014) mixed-method study revealed that African American males prefer a developmental advising style as opposed to descriptive advising. Therefore, workplace learning of professional academic advisors is of paramount importance for study as the advisor becomes a variable in student success for African American males.

Why Workplace Learning?

Learning is often mentioned as taking place in a formalized, or institutionalized manner, occurring in a classroom setting, where there are students and a teacher/instructor. Within the past several years, workplace learning has become of interest in a variety of fields where the primary focus is learning related to work activities and experiences (Billet, 2002; Rowden, 2007). In many fields such as training and development or human resources, workplace learning is described as "planned" activities that have specific goals and learning objectives that include students and expert trainers (Rowden, 2007). However, workplace learning can be expanded to include the following: formal learning – those planned, structured, and institutionalized activities; informal learning--those planned, structured or unstructured activities; and incidental learning – those unplanned, unstructured, and not institutionalized activities (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Workplace learning can then be summarized as a combination of experiences, information, and daily activities that take place within the workplace context (Rowden, 2007).

The connection between workplace learning and Knowles' (1990) model of andragogy has been made, addressing the need to rely less on the previously utilized pedagogical model of "teacher" and "student," to embrace the ways in which adults learn as a source of understanding for today's knowledge-based workplaces (Fenwick, 2001; Knowles, 1990; Tokarczyk, 2012). For instance, self-directed learning, a core assumption of andragogy, highlights the ownership that adults take to improve their own learning without the assistance of a teacher/instructor (Tough, 1978). Similarly, transformative learning emphasizes individual change of habits of mind, meaning schemes, and mindsets

based on one's experience (Mezirow, 2000). Finally, experiential learning emphasizes adapting previous experiences to new situations (Dewey, 1963). Critical reflection is a key component in both transformative and experiential learning.

Prior research has focused on advisor participation in learning activities, addressing the lack of formal training and development opportunities in addition to the limited amount of research dedicated to the ways in which advisors acquire knowledge and skills (Brown, 2008; Creamer, 2000; Habley, 2000; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; McGillin, 2000; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). Tokarczyk (2012), conducted a qualitative research study with six academic advisors pursuing the same themes as mentioned above, as well as identify the workplace learning experiences of advisors, analyzing them through an adult learning lens. In this study I will follow this idea of advisor participation in learning but seeks specifically to identify the workplace learning experiences of advisors that attempt to better serve African American males, analyzing those experiences using the lens of adult learning theories.

Statement of the Problem

Academic advising is a complicated process in which advisors must guide students/advisees through an academic career by considering course selection, degree requirements, course combinations, campus involvement, physical and mental well-being, and multicultural understandings and nuances (Champlin-Scharff, 2010). Advising empowers students to successfully navigate the academic landscape (Larson, Johnson, Aiken-Wisniewski, and Barkemeyer, 2018). Researchers have affirmed that academic advisors and academic advising frequently serve as the link among students, curricula, and colleges (Astin, 1985; Crockett, 1985). Among the array of student

services offered on a college campus, academic advising is cited as a critical service based on research on and student success (Brown & Rivas, 1993). Moreover, advising also has the ability to provide "key sources of information guidance, and support for students (Brown & Rivas, 1993)." Academic advisors are able to impact students in profound ways (Light, 2001). Additionally, academic advisors serve on the front lines of a changing student population, where there is an increase in ethnic minorities, requiring advisors to be cognizant of the challenges they face (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Therefore, research relevant to those who provide this service to ethnic minorities as well as their preparation to do so is needed.

Professional academic advisors are those advisors that hold full-time responsibility for academic advising, in comparison to those advisors for whom advising is a partial component to their roles such as faculty and peer advisors (Higginson, 2000). Although professional academic advisors are becoming more commonplace on many campuses, their presence in empirical research is limited and therefore an underutilized source of understanding (Hunter & White, 2004; Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010). If professional academic advisors are among the few persons to have an on-going relationship with a student throughout his/her educational journey, then it is necessary to understand how advisors learn to become effective in their advising approach (Hunter & White, 2004). Moreover, more research is needed on how professional academic advisors engage in learning to understand and effectively work with diverse student populations, specifically ethnic minorities, despite limited resources, and training with this focus (Brown & Rivas, 1993).

Research on African American male students within the advising context has increased. A portion of current literature has discussed student participation in academic advising. This segment of research has focused thus far on student preferences of advising models, student retention, student perception of advising, and student satisfaction (Aaron, 2011; Means, 2014; Thompson, 2008). However, the learning experiences of the academic advisors working with African American males are absent from the literature.

Crookston's (1972) model of developmental advising has viewed advising as teaching, in many ways showing advisors as adult educators. Advisors as adult learners although not extensively researched, have not gone completely unexamined (Tokarczyk, 2012). Prior research has examined advisor participation in learning activities and the lack of resources and formal training and development for this role, in addition to the lack of research on the way's advisors acquire and maintain knowledge and skills to become effective advisors (Brown, 2008; Creamer, 2000; Habley, 2000; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; McGillin, 2000; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). For example, Tokarczyk (2012) examined workplace learning experiences of advisors, how advisors acquired and maintained critical competencies of their profession and analyzed them through the lens of adult learning. Questions still remain regarding how advisors learn and perform their roles (Brown, 2008), specifically with African American males. Moreover, this study will bridge the existing gap between various bodies of knowledge by connecting literature on academic advising and literature on African American males to adult and workplace learning literature.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore, through qualitative methodology, advisor participation in learning activities and the lack of resources regarding formal training and development for advising African American males. Beyond this, the study seeks specifically to identify the nature workplace learning experiences of advisors, whether successful or unsuccessful, and how they seek to become a more effective advisor for African American male students.

Research Questions

The specific questions that will guide this research are: 1) What is the nature and experience of advising African American males? 2) Given the limited focus on advising African American males in advising literature and advisor preparation programs, how have advisors gone about learning to better advise African American males?

Significance and Need for Study

This study is geared to make significant contributions to the field of academic advising. First and foremost, the application of adult learning theory and adult education practices has the potential to continue to build upon questions regarding advisor preparation. As academic advising continues to be a critical service for retention efforts (Brown & Rivas, 1993), understanding more about how advisors learn to become effective advisors is imperative. Moreover, this study has the potential to impact advising practices, understanding advisor preparation, and thereby improving student and institutional outcomes.

Secondly, it is useful to understand the advisor's experience in the advisor-advisee relationship when advising African American males, adding to the existing

literature on the African American male experience with academic advising. The status of African American males in higher education and their disproportion in enrollment and graduation to their White, Asian, and Latino male counterparts invites educators to understand this individual to serve them more effectively. Currently, research has been conducted to include the student perspective, effective advising models, and so forth in the advising relationship. Research on adult learning practices in advising is also growing, helping to expand advisor preparation in formal, planned activities, and informal learning. However, by expanding an understanding of adult learning as part of advisor preparation to effectively serve African American males, an opportunity is created to dispute the notion that African American males can be lumped into a general category of minority students, and that no specific attention for effective advising is required. Thus, this study may pose as a potential challenge to the *minority model* used as a blanket model for all students of color, disregarding the historical entrance and culture of each sub-group. Due to the specific focus of this study, advisor preparation specific for African American males, as well as preparation for other subgroups may be impacted.

Finally, it is expected that this study will create dialogue regarding best practices for academic advisors that work with African American males. As a result of the limited research that documents the advisor's experience with African American males, it is unlikely that advisors who are not connected with outside resources will be able to identify best practices that would prove effective when working with this student. Therefore, this study will provide the opportunity to expose practical implications for advising African American males.

Research Design

The design for this study used qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach for the purpose of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative method utilized for this study describes the lived experiences of professional academic advisors that seek to advise African American males more effectively through various learning processes, utilizing a semi-structured interview along with Flanagan's (1957) critical incident prompt as data collection strategies. In choosing a phenomenological approach, I want to understand how professional academic advisors learn to serve African American males more effectively. The study was viewed through the lens of adult learning theories, specifically self-directed learning, transformational learning, and experiential learning.

Data for the study were obtained using purposeful and snowball sampling of nine participants. Each participant will represent one of the seven colleges at the selected institution of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). Inclusion criteria targeted professional academic advisors who have (a) at least five years of advising experience, (b) have advised African American males, (c) work in a college that has at least 150 African American males, and (d) have a concern for African American male student success. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were utilized to elicit the experiences and learning processes of each advisors using an interview guide. Each interview began with a critical incident which promoted advisors to select a particular advising experience with an African American male upon entry into advising and continued development within the field. All interviewers will be audio-recorded.   Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes (Merriam & Bierema,

2014). A researcher's journal was used to record all initial reactions I had. Specific study

methods are discussed in more detail in Chapter three of the study.

Assumptions

I assumed that academic advisors, through various experiences with African

American males, realize these students have unique needs. As the researcher, I assumed

that the advisor has not received formal training for African American males in the

advising context. Therefore, an advisor would be likely to seek knowledge on how to

serve this population more effectively through articles, communities of practice and

professional development through the national organization. Being that I have an

advising background and is actively engaged in the advising community, it was assumed

that professional development is not adequately focused on an understanding of literature

on African American males to provide adequate training for advisors. I then assumed

that self-directed learning would occur as a result of limited training and the advisor's

desire to serve African American male students more effectively. In the advisor's search

for learning, they are likely to participate in cross-cultural training, thereby prompting

transformational learning as cross-cultural participation is inevitably transformative.

Finally, as the advisor participates in transformative learning experiences, I assume that

this will motivate advisors to continue to seek more knowledge through self-directed

learning practices.

Definition of Terms

To provide clarification to the reader, the following list of terms and operational

definitions is provided.

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Adult learning- term used to represent a variety of concepts, theories, and models that describe the characteristics and learning processes of adult learners (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

African American Males- a Black American male of African descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Formal learning – the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system, running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training. Formal education occurs when a teacher has the authority to determine that people designated as requiring knowledge effectively learn a curriculum taken from a pre-established body of knowledge (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973*;* Livingstone, 2001).

Informal learning – the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment – from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media. It is any activity involving the pursuit of understanding knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria…in any context outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Livingstone, 2001).

Incidental learning – is defined as learning that is unplanned, unorganized, that can occur at any time and in any place (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Nonformal learning – any organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity – that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives. It is education that occurs when learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill by studying voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests, by using an organized curriculum, as is the case in many adult education courses and workshops (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Livingstone, 2001).

Professional Academic Advisors – this term will be used to describe non-faculty professionals, in which advising is their full-time responsibility (Torkarczyk, 2000).

Workplace learning – includes various forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning in the advising context (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Workplace learning will be used to describe the ways in which professional academic advisors acquired their initial skills and how they maintain and develop their skills throughout their careers. Workplace learning will also be used to include both training and professional development.

Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

Chapter two contains a review of literature addressing the importance of research regarding the process by which academic advisors learn to effectively advise African American males. The chapter is organized into several sections covering topic such as the history and evolution of advising, African Americans and males in higher education, African American males in advising, training for advisors and the need for research on professional advisors, adult learning theories, workplace learning and, as well as a chapter summary. Chapter three discusses the research methodology and justification for the use of the chosen methodology. The findings are be presented in chapter four and

chapter five includes a summary and discussion of findings, recommendations for

practice, and recommendations for further research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stated most generally, this section discusses academic advising and its historical roots in higher education; its inception, evolution, advisor training and preparation programs, advisor inclusion within research, and ties to retention and persistence for student success. This literature also covers a particular population of student, African American males, that is a constituent of the services provided by academic advising. As such, the review of literature includes the historical entry of African Americans into higher education, the landscape of African American males, and African American males within advising. Finally, the literature will cover how adult learning and workplace learning can be viewed within the context of advising.

The History and Evolution of Academic Advising

The history of academic advising finds its roots within the history of higher education. Academic advising parallels higher education history as well as reflects decades of student personnel work (Cook, 2009). In the colonial period, during the age of *loco parentis*, college presidents tended to the academic and personal needs of the students. In 1636 the president and later faculty at Harvard College held responsibility for advising students regarding extracurricular activities, moral life, and intellectual habits (Cook, 2009). Charles W. Elliot, the forerunner of academic advising administrators, in 1870 created a system that required advisement for course selection (Tuttle, 2000). Despite historical events like World War I and II altering the dynamics of higher education, advising continued to be seen as an exclusive duty of faculty. However, as academic institutions continued to see an increase in the diversity of campuses, concerns about student retention grew, and faculty research became the focus,

a demand for professional advisors and comprehensive advising systems was created (Crook, 2009; Tuttle, 2000).

Pioneers, Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) wrote seminal articles on developmental advising and five-stage academic advising that changed the conceptual framework and approach to advising in higher education. Previously, advising was simplified in its approach that only told students which courses to take. O'Banion believed that advising was a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the students' concerns (Howell, 2010). Today, the role of an advisor is to "serve as a teacher and guide for the student through an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness" (NACADA, 2003, p. 1; O'Banion, 1994/1972). O'Banion and Crookston also opened the door for the professionalization of the advising field (Crook, 2009). Several years later the National Conference on Academic Advising was held in 1977 and established as the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979. The vision of NACADA seeks to develop and disseminate innovative theory, research, and practice of academic advising in higher education (NACADA, 2017b).

As time has passed, advising has been continuously highlighted as part of a common collegiate experience and a key predictor for college student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research has also proven that academic advising is associated with persistence and graduation for students that participate (Siedman, 1991; Tinto, 2006). In fact, academic advising has been reported as the second most important variable for student satisfaction in their college experience (Coll & Draves, 2009). Time and again advising has been identified as a critical activity in retention and persistence, raising

questions about its effect on ethnic minority student success (Hunter & White, 2004; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). College campuses are becoming increasingly more diverse, and therefore advisors need to become culturally competent because they serve on the front lines of higher education (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Dreasher, 2014). All advisors should become aware of various cultural experiences ethnic minorities bring and how advising relationships differ as a result (Arnsperger Selzer & Ellis Rouse, 2013). Ethnic minorities have different needs and barriers than their White counterparts and require adjustments or non-traditional strategies for advisors to develop meaningful relationships with his/her students (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Museus & Ravello, 2010). An understanding of cultural experiences of ethnic minorities provide key information about possible communication barriers that could arise as an effect of the students' previous encounter with racism and prejudice that may cause distrust of persons with different backgrounds (Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012). Cultural differences can cause students to feel misunderstood and to believe that advisors do not have their best interest in mind, diminishing the relationship between advisor and advisee (Arnsperger et al., 2013; Brown, 1993; Cunningham, 2016; Dreasher, 2014). The goal of an advisor should be for the ultimate success of the student regardless of the advisor's or student's race and/or ethnicity (Cunningham,2016; Dreasher, 2014). Given that the vast majority of advisors are White, in order to successfully advise in cross-cultural advising interactions, possessing the knowledge of how diversity is interwoven in advising and how cultural differences between advisor and student can diminish the advisor-advisee relationship is helpful (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Cuyjet 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). In response to growth in diversity, NACADA has also adopted equitable and inclusive environments as

part of its core competencies (NACADA, 2017). While Brown and Rivas (1993) discussed minorities in general, it is important to recognize the existence of group differences among racialized minorities (Sue & Sue, 2015).

Muesus and Revallo (2010) emphasized the gap in literature on how academic advising impacts minority students. Muesus and Revallo also stated that "although the quality of advising has been linked to persistence, a small and growing body of literature forces on positive faculty advisor influences on students of color (p. 48). Less research has been committed to the impact of academic advising with African American males. Additionally, few studies have focused on ways of learning advisors use to improve their practice with African American males.

The history of academic advising provides a context of the field and its purpose for the study. Academic advising is at the core of student success, which becomes of greater importance for minorities, as they have been documented as having low retention, persistence, and graduation rates nationwide (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Goings, 2017a; National Educational Statistics, 2016; U. S. Department of Education, 2010; Wood & Plamer, 2014). Because academic advising is a key service that touches almost every student, it is imperative that advising practices become more culturally sensitive. For this study, a focus is given to the advising dynamics of professional advisors and African American males.

African Americans in Higher Education

The history of African Americans in higher education is important to this study as it highlights the historical factors that have made African Americans, especially African American men, a topic worth studying. This section begins with major highlights in

history that have shaped the entry and access of African Americans in higher education. Then, a brief scope of the current landscape of African American males in higher education is provided. Finally, the connection between African American males and academic advising is discussed.

Historical Context

Historically, American institutions of higher education were not established for open and equal access of all people (Bracey, 2017). Distinctions based on social class, gender and race, excluding people like African Americans, often characterized access to education. While there were occasional pivotal points in history prior to the 1800s, the progress towards success did not propel forward until after the American Civil War. Three schools that came to play a major role in expanding access to African Americans through the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) include Cheyney State Training School (now Cheyney University), Ashmum Institute (now Lincoln University), and Wilberforce University (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Several well-known colleges and universities were established in the late 1800s for African American students such as Fisk, Morehouse, Hampton, Howard, and Spelman College.

Two of the biggest access-related policies for higher education were the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890 (Rudolph, 1990). These two acts not only extended access to African Americans, but they served as the catalyst for the agricultural and mechanical educational movement and led to the establishment of several private Black colleges and 17 Black state-supported institutions. Ironically, these acts also legalized segregation of Black and White public institutions and sanctioned

limited curriculum that promoted White superiority in education (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 1998). While the inequalities between White and Black schools were evident, such as HBCUs being forced to operate with inadequately trained faculty, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling of 1896 allowed states to continue in segregation as long as there were facilities and accommodations available (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). During this time, there were few African Americans that were able to matriculate through predominately White institutions (PWIs), and the overwhelming majority, 90%, were educated through HBCUs in the 1940s.

The U.S. Supreme court 1954 ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation was no longer legal including the "separate, but equal" facilities in public education (Brown, 2001). This act initiated a move towards equality, although it did not impact higher education until almost a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brown, 2001). Title VI of this act made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of race, color, or national origin of any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Malaney, 1987). Title II of the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided yet another chance for equal opportunity that favored HBCUs to support various administrative improvements, student services, as well as faculty and curriculum improvements (Harper, et al., 2009). Currently, about 75% of African American students are attending PWIs (Means, 2014).

Landscape of African American Males in Higher Education

African American student success is among the most pressing and complex issues represented in American higher education literature. Much of the literature has focused on the challenges that African American male students have encountered in the

educational pipeline and the alarming statistics that reflect their retention, persistence, and graduation rates. This section reviews relevant literature on African American male (a) success factors, (b) challenges, and (c) subgroups within the subpopulation. Also highlighted in this section of literature is a discussion of differences amongst community colleges and four-year sectors of higher education, providing a holistic perspective of the context for African American males in higher education.

Success factors. Recent literature has begun to move beyond the deficit approach on achievement of African American males. Much of the data that are magnified in literature on African American males reflect statistical and demographical information. However, there is a need to learn and understand those that have been successful and how they have overcome the challenges that plague African American males in higher education (Goings, 2017a; Fries-Britt, 1997; Palmer, Davis & Hilton, 2009). Scholars now highlight persons, policies, programs and resources that have promoted African American male success (Goings, 2017a; Harper, 2012; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2016; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Strayhorn, 2014). For instance, Harper (2012) conducted a national study of over 219 African American males at 42 campuses, with two-to-three hour-long, face-to-face interviews and with some follow-up interviews via telephone. The research took place across 20 states and aimed to provide an anti-deficit view of Black male college achievement. I chose not to focus on disengagement and underrepresentation of Black men, but rather to focus on gaining insight from Black men that have experienced college differently. These men were those that were actively engaged inside and outside of the classroom, were academically successful, graduated, and chose to pursue degrees beyond the baccalaureate. The current literature recognizes

positive outcomes of those that have been able to overcome the alarming challenges and statistics as well as provides resources that can not only inform practices and policies within higher education, but also academic advising. Success factors for African American males while similar and overlapping, differ slightly in comparing the community college sector and four-year institutions. This difference is a result of the types of institutions and their different histories.

   Community college success factors. Harper and Wood (2012) published a book, *Advancing Black male student success: From preschool through Ph.D.*, that discussed the lives, experiences, needs and outcomes of Black male students across all levels and sectors of education. In their chapter about Black male collegians at community colleges, they discussed factors affecting their persistence and academic success. Community college success factors include campus climate, academic factors, societal factors, psychological factors, and environmental factors. Wood and Williams (2013) also noted that things such as intramural sports, extracurricular activities, talking with faculty, study habits, hours worked per week, supporting others, and life stress were predictive of persistence (2013). Hiring campus personnel dedicated to fostering the diverse needs of students and being educated on cultural sensitivity is a way to address the campus climate. Implementing early alert systems for concerning behavior and faculty being trained to understand microaggressions provide environments for academic success for African American males. Another method suggested to address the academic factors for success sought to deemphasize social programming and focus more on academic-related activities. An example of this can be seen in Baber, Fletcher, and Graham (2015) examination of a program that sought to develop equity-inclusive environment. The

program mentioned in their study developed a learning community specific to African American men "where students enroll in the same set of courses and are supported by an adviser, mentor, and tutor" (p. 101). This program was established to addressed the gross disparity of these students that were in developmental educational. The results proved that Black men that participated in the program completed developmental education at a significantly higher rate than those that did not (57% versus 21%). To address the societal and psychological factors for success, instructors can provide affirmation and support in the classroom. Lastly, acknowledging outside influences that affect the student (e.g. supporting dependents, working and finances) addresses the environmental factor for advancing African American student success. The literature provides success factors for community colleges that provide specific efforts for underrepresented to create equity inclusive environments. These suggested are provided on a macro-level of community college education, but does not directly target academic advising. These success factors mentioned could provide insight to improving academic advising services to underrepresented populations, specifically African American males.

Four-year, higher education success factors. Just as success factors for Black male collegians at community colleges have been documented, the same is true for Black male collegians at four-year institutions**.** Studies whose primary focus is African American males that have been successful, meaning that they persist and graduate, often label them as *academically gifted and talented* (Bonner II, 2010; Fries-Britt, 1997; Goings, 2017b). Fries-Britt (1997) defined *gifted* as a "combination of interpersonal skills, academic prowess, high levels of engagement and creativity, and unusual leadership capabilities" (p. 66). Fries-Britt viewed Black collegians as diverse and

multifaceted and examined the factors that affect their academic experience, identifying important issues around retention for this group of students, and discussing a successful program that meets their needs. Bonner II (2010), in his book on gifted and talented African American males, addressed the limited research and underrepresentation of this group. He raised questions about the perception of gifted and talented males and the support that is being offered to them by their institutions. Bonner II listed six factors that are essential to gifted African American male development: relationships with faculty, peer relationships, family influence and support, college selection, self-perception, and institutional environment. Bonner's list does not include the relationship with professional staff, however, it is worth mentioning that a relationship with a faculty as well as a staff could be beneficial to this student's development. A study conducted by Harper (2012) addressed three of the elements in Bonner's six influential factors for Black male achievers: family influence and support, college selection, and faculty and peer relationships. This study revealed that a vast proportion of parents of successful African American males were advocates of higher education after high school. These parents established high expectations for their children and were involved in the student's life. This finding was in contrast to the deficit model presented in earlier literature. Much of the literature on African American males portrays them as fatherless and having little family support. The second element of influence addressed by Harper's study was college selection. Factors that influenced the student's decision to attend a four-year institution ranged from academic credentials for admission, financial assistance, and array of post-college career options. The final element of influence addressed by Harper's study was faculty and peer relationships. The factor was referred to as

engagement in Harper's research (2012). Active student engagement afforded these high achievers' relationships with faculty and campus administrators as well as with networks of peers within and beyond same-race. Additional benefits of engagement listed by the participants in Harper's (2012) study included: resolving masculine identity, negotiating peer support for achievement, developing political acumen of success in professional settings in which they are racially underrepresented, developing strong Black identities that incite productive activism on predominantly White campuses, acquiring social capital and access to resources, crafting productive responses to racist stereotypes, and overcoming previous educational or socioeconomic disadvantages (Harper, 2012).

Black male achievers, a term coined by Harper and Wood (2016) and defined by Fries-Britt (1997) describes those that have successfully navigated the college and university landscape. A defining factor that differentiates Black male achievers from their same-race peers who do not complete college is their ability to overcome the common challenges encountered on four-year campuses. Another study by Harper (2012) study also addressed how Black male achievers overcame challenges of racism, stereotyping, and racial insults. Students achieved this in a variety of ways such as being actively engaged on campus in both same-race organizations and majority organizations, fostering relationships with their faculty and campus administrators, and educating their peers on their misconceptions of African American men and women (Harper, 2012; Harper & Wood, 2016). Despite the numerous success stories from Black male achievers, they still reported finding their environments on predominately White institutions uninviting and cold (Bonner II, 2010). These claims are congruent with those of other African Americans males that have reported experiences with stereotyping and

generalizations at predominately White institutions. Growing thought has been given to high-achieving students through academic advising context. As previously noted in the success factors of community colleges, the success factors for four-year higher education is presented on a macro-level and are not targeted specifically to academic advising. However, these success factors can provide insight to improve advising practices at the four-year higher education level.

Challenges. African American males face many challenges in higher education. While discussing these challenges might seem to add to stereotypes, they have been identified in research and statistics to be real challenges for African American males and warrant mention . The first wave of literature on African American males focused on the extent to which African American males were disengaged, underrepresented, academically underperforming, educationally disadvantaged, insufficiently prepared, and their attrition (Harper, 2012). These inequities and problems, though true and alarming, were amplified in the literature and inevitably contributed to racial stereotypes. The following statements have circulated in reference to African American male student success and reflect statistical and demographical data:

- African American males are often less prepared than their counterparts in academic work (Bonner II & Rolanda, 2006; Loury, 2004; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2001; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009).

- There has been little to no increase of African American males in higher education from 1976 to 2002, comprising of only 4.3% of the student population (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010).

- African American males are overrepresented on revenue-generating intercollegiate sports teams (Harper, 2012; Whiting, 2009).

- African American male degree attainment across all levels of postsecondary education is low, especially in comparison to African American females (National Educational Statistics, 2016; U. S. Department of Education, 2010; Wood & Plamer, 2014).

In their books Cuyjet (2006) and Strayhorn (2012) explored experiences African American men have in-and-outside of the classroom and how these contribute to academic success. Both African American men and women have reported experiencing unwelcoming environments at PWI's (Cuyjet 2006; Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn reported, "Black men are often viewed as an at-risk population in education and tend to be described with words that have negative connotations such as uneducable, endangered, dysfunctional, dangerous, and lazy" (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 27). Academic advisors have a unique opportunity to reach students of color overall and specifically African American males. Having an understanding of possible issues African American males encounter in higher education can assist academic advisors in (1) realizing why this student is important to study, (2) understanding what he may encounter, (3) understanding how and why he communicates in a particular fashion, and (4) understanding "how to engage in a series of intentional interactions for the purpose of facilitating student-learning outcomes" (Hughey, 2011, p. 22).

Challenges at the community college level. The challenges listed above represent broad challenges encountered by African American men in higher education; however, there are unique challenges that exist in the community college sector and four-year

public sector. According to national data, African American men in community colleges have the lowest completion rates among all male groups (Harper & Wood, 2016). Nearly 72% of Black men that make community colleges as their first choice for postsecondary education (Wood, Palmer, & Harris, 2015). Harper and Wood (2012) have raised concerns about African American male experiences in the community college sector. The first is that African American men overwhelmingly choose community colleges as their point of entry and are sold "wolf tickets" with a promise of a fruitful life as a result of their education but realize that this is not so. The second concern is that community colleges operate from a cultural-deficit model that places blame on the student, their families, and their communities for their underachievement. Baber, Fletcher, and Graham (2015) also notes that an overemphasis on psychological paradigms to address disparate outcomes is often given rather than giving attention to the structural practices that shape individual actions. The third concern is consistent with the general challenges of African American men in that media portrays them in a negative light; viewing them as gangsters, rapists, womanizers, thugs, and more. This often leads to limited engagement of Black men with faculty, staff and peers due to institutional climates and cultures that are a result of the negative light that Black men are shown in (Wood and Newman, 2017). The fourth and final concern addresses the assumption that research and strategies at four-year institutions on African American males are assumed to be applicable to African American males at community colleges when that may not be the case. Harper and Wood noted institutional climate, academic factors, social variables, psychological variables, and environmental barriers as reoccurring themes in literature on success of African American males in community colleges. The literature presented

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makes effort to highlight the institutional and historical structures that create barriers for our students. academic advising should also be examined. While presented on a macro-level, the field of academic advising could gleam from these challenges for improved services for African American males.

  Challenges at four-year institutions. The challenges experienced by African American males at four-year institutions while similar to their community college same-race male peers, represent slightly different obstacles. Racism is a huge challenge amongst African American males as they often suffer from *onlyness* defined by Harper (2012) as "having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role modules, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group (p. 190)." As mentioned above, an overwhelming majority of African American males choose to attend community colleges, leaving the latter half disbursed between other types of institutions such as public four-year, private not-for-profit four-year, private for-profit four-year, and others (Harper & Wood, 2016). While African American males at community colleges are more likely to see a same-race male peer, this is not the case at four-year institutions where they are more likely to be pressured to be the spokesperson of their race and people of color (Harper, 2012). Another challenge that is closely related to racism experienced on four-year colleges by African American males includes stereotypes and racial insults. African American men at both community college and four-year institutions experience stereotypes and racism; however, this is magnified at the four-year institution where there are fewer students visible in this subpopulation. For example, in a study conducted by (Harper, 2012), students reported that despite being actively engaged on campus, they were nonetheless subjected to stereotypes that presumed they were

academically underprepared, and experienced professors' being surprised if they did well on test and assignments, as well as being picked last (if at all) by their White peers for group projects or team assignments. The sum of these experiences threatened the participants' achievement and sense of belonging (Harper, 2012). Additional stereotypes experienced by African American males at four-year institutions include but are not limited to being accused of being admitted to the university only because of affirmative action, being consistently praised for athletic achievements by the basketball or football team that they are not members of, being presumed to be rap and hip-hop connoisseurs, understanding slang, and that they grew up in high-poverty and fatherless homes (Bonner II, 2010; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2009). These negative stereotypes can be internalized and ultimately affects academic performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These challenges listed can provide insight to academic advising programs when working with African American males. These insights are not only institutional concerns, but also concerns for advising given that advisors are usually the first point of contact for a student. Research also informs us that African American males utilize their academic advisor as a guide through their academic journey more so than their female and White counterparts. It is therefore imperative that academic advising programs consider these challenges faced by African American males at four-year institutions previously presented.

Black male subgroups at four-year colleges and universities. Since the surge of literature and programming of African American males from 1997 and 2012, there have been new concerns about well-intentioned efforts to support these students. Several authors and scholars have challenged the idea of homogeneity and lack of recognition of

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within-group diversity (Harper, 2014; Harper & Nichols, 2012; McGuire, Berhanu, Davis & Harper, 2014). Harper and Wood (2016) identified six distinct subpopulations: (1) Black gay and bisexual men; (2) Black men in historically Black fraternities; (3) Black male student-athletes, (4) Black undergraduate men at historically Black colleges and universities, (5) Black underprepared, disengaged low performers, and (6) Black male college high-achievers and student leaders. These populations do not represent a comprehensive list of within-group diversity that exists among African American men, but these groups have been explored more in education research and practice. Other groups worth mentioning include first-generation African American males, African American males with disabilities, African American male adult learners, African American veterans, bi-racial or multi-racial men that express African American or Black identity along with other identities and many more (Harper & Wood, 2016). Acknowledging the diversity that exists within the African American male subpopulation contradicts the notion that all African American males are the same. Within this subpopulation exist subgroups that have specific needs and challenges. In order for educators, specifically advisors, to address the diverse student population that they will encounter, they must dig deeper into their understanding of the needs of students within these diverse subgroups of African American males (Harper, 2014; Harper & Wood, 2014; NACADA, 2017).

It is important that the literature reviewed in this section provide a broad overview of African American males in the context of higher education. This helps the reader to understand the importance this student has in the research and why they are worth studying. While this student is the end-user of the service provided by academic

advisors, having a background of the challenges experienced shows why the advisor/professional is critical to his success. As mentioned previously, the recent literature also moves away from a deficit model that presents African American males as hypersexual, hypermasculine, criminals, underachievers, irresponsible fathers, and products of dysfunctional families (Harper, 2008, 2009, 2012, Harper et.al 2011). These have been the general descriptions presented on African American men in literature, higher education, and society, providing a one-sided view of African American males. Alternatively, the reviewed literature examined both challenges faced by African American males (including stereotyping and overt and covert racism) along with the numerous factors influencing their success (relationships with faculty, peer relationships, family influence and support, college selection, self-perception, and institutional environment). In addition to African American male achievement being viewed from a limited perspective, there is a "misperception of homogeneity that sustains a one-sided narrative" (Harper & Wood, 2016, p. 102). Not all African American men are the same nor can a cookie cutter response be applied to all. They are complex individuals that have specific needs and challenges. Finally, this literature addressed the differences that occur in higher education between African American males that attend community colleges in relation to those that attend four-year institutions. As previously stated, there are no cookie cutter approaches to all African American men. Just as one should not assume that research and strategies of two-year institutions directly fit into the four-year institutional context, the same extends to African American males that attend community colleges in relation to those that attend four-year institutions.

African American Males in Advising

Much of the current literature on African American males in the advising setting has been addressed at the community college level. While the data presented from these studies provide helpful information to guide advisors at four-year institutions, the challenges, success,' and social climate call for different strategies. Herndon, Kaiser and Creamer (1996) conducted a quantitative study with 424 Black and White students enrolled in regular and remedial math classes at a two-year commuter college. The research assessed advising preferences (developmental vs. prescriptive advising) at the community college level and determined that developmental advising was preferred. Prescriptive advising allows the advisor to be seen as the expert of knowledge, focusing solely on academic concerns and is void of a relationship with the student. Developmental advising is a process that considers human growth and seeks to establish a caring relationship while simultaneously establishing goals *with* the student (Crookston, 1972; Grites, 2013; Tuttle, 1991). In a study conducted by Means (2014), he came to a similar conclusion for African American male advising preference, while admittedly from a small sample of African American males. The study used a mixed-methodology to study 12 students (two White females, one White male, two Hispanic females, one Hispanic male, two African American females, three African American males, and one Chinese male) to compare academic advising experiences and satisfaction of African American males and others at a predominately White institution. Developmental advising is defined by Crookston (1972) as being concerned with the student's personal and vocational decision inclusive of the student's processing, interpersonal interactions, problem-solving, and evaluation skills.

Academic advisors are at the front lines in the higher education setting, working with a diverse background of students with limited time, resources, and training for advising (Brown & Rivas, 1993; NACADA, 2009). With the growing student diversity in colleges, advisors are confronted with new challenges and must be prepared to address them (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Cuyjet, 2006: Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Developing an awareness of the cultural experiences ethnic minorities bring is key to being effective in the advising relationship and establishing rapport; this can be accomplished by adopting a developmental approach to advising (Cuyjet 2006; Enger, Winston, Miller, 1984; Strayhorn, 2012). Advisors must also become aware of the role diversity and cultural differences between the advisor and the student play in the advisor-advisee relationship (Brown & Rivas, 1993; NACADA, 2017).

Limited literature exists which highlights the academic advisors' experience when advising African American males and the various forms of learning they undergo to serve this population more effectively. The history of academic advising is provided for context of the study, along with its place in higher education and its potential for higher/greater student success. Because academic advising is core to student success and has shown to improve students' persistence, it becomes paramount that an understanding of how advisors learn to improve their practice with African American males through various forms of adult learning is needed (Aune, 2000; NACADA, 2017b Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

Theories that Influence the Practice of Academic Advising

Academic advising cannot be performed without theory because theory provides one with the lens that we are able to see advising more clearly (Hagen & Jordane, 2008).

Theories provide explanation, descriptions, and help to predict student behaviors and have the potential to guide advisors on interactions with students (Roufs, 2015). There is an array of foundational theories utilized in advising that consist of student development, cognitive development, career development, learning, decision-making, multiculturalism, retention, personality, moral development, and adult development (Creamer, 2000). In the advising profession, it is helpful that advisors obtain a broad understanding of an array of theories as "any theory alone has its limitations" Hagen & Jordan, 2008, p. 17 (as cited in Spright, 2015, para. 6).

As mentioned in previous sections, the diversity in the student population has greatly increased, and many of the established theories find limitations in explaining development in marginalized populations such as people of color, gay and lesbian persons, and women (Creamer, 2000, p. 31). Therefore, it is helpful that advisors also understand theories of identity development related to race, class, gender, sexuality and special populations (King, 2005; McKewen, 2003). For the purposes of this study, it may be helpful that advisors understand ethnic identity development as well as Black identity development, as presented by Cross & Fhagen-Smith (1996) when advising African American males. Ethnicity identity is inclusive of the culture, religion, geography, language, and practices shared by individuals connected by loyalty and kinship (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Ethnic identity development may describe, predict, and explain African American male behavior. This theory also provides flexibility for the diversity within the subgroup population as mentioned in the previous section, highlighting differences within African American males that may vary from

region-to-region, religion, language, and practices. This theory also explains the extent to which an individual absorbs the dominant culture.

However, this theory is limited in that there is limited research across wide ranges of ages and groups. Cross's (1991) Black identity development theory describes the "process of becoming black" (p. 147), a re-socialization of Black Americans that transforms a pre-existing identity to a more Afrocentric one. The theory also illustrates the process of consciousness for Black Americans as they define their Black identity. Black Identity development refers to three patterns (personal identity, reference group orientation, and race salience) as to how individuals discover their Blackness. Personal identity refers to the characteristics and traits that and individual possesses. The reference group orientation considers the lens or filter that describes the individual's personal values, philosophical and political views, and how the individuals sees the world. Race salience discusses the significance of race in the way the person approaches life. Black identity development is limited in the following ways: (1) presents itself as linear, (2) generalizes the stages to a broad range of Black individuals, (3) does not always capture other worldviews (e.g., Afro-centricity and African axiology), and (4) tends to conceptualize Black culture as reacting to oppression rather than an enduring system of African and Black American cultural practices (Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, & Wilson, 1998). Despite the limitations, Black identity development theory offers a great deal of understanding of the impact of oppression for people of African descent.

The Need for Additional Research on Academic Advising

Academic advising has encountered a number of challenges to establishing itself as a profession in the academic community (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015; Gordon, 1988). In a phenomenological study conducted by Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015, a sample group of 47 conference attendees participated in a focus-group to describe how advisors describe the occupation and how they describe a profession. The study found that advisors questioned whether "faculty recognized advising as a legitimate occupation which practitioners contribute more to the educational experience than as helpers to students completing a checklist of courses" (p. 65). Advisors in this study also expressed the lack of recognition from stakeholders (e.g. department chairs, deans, and faculty members) of academic advising as a profession and the contribution it could have when making decisions and forming policy. Of the many challenges faced by the profession, the role of advising is divided amongst professional advisors and faculty advisors, who hold different perspectives of themselves as practitioners or researchers, respectively (Kuhn & Padak, 2008). Another challenge encountered by the profession is the limitation of research in the higher education context. Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith and Troxel (2010) address the absence of the advising practitioner in research and offer a rationale for expanding the scholarship of advising. Much of the research in higher education is conducted by faculty that place their focus on students, leaving the advisor displaced from this research and thereby limiting the number of topics, daily practices and professional development of the academic advisor addressed in the literature (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010). The inattention to professional academic advisors in research literature is also

problematic, leaving the advisor to be an "underutilized source of understanding" (p.4). Research about the professional academic advisors is also limited due to the minimal involvement of academic advisors as authors in publication of NACADA Journals, representing only 10% of authors (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010).

Another challenge encountered by the field includes the narrowed scope of methodology in research. Much of the research presented in academic advising has relied heavily on single-source survey data that has "delayed the introduction of qualitative and contextualized analysis, the missing link in theory-building both for advising and for higher education (McGillin, 2000, p. 366). Additional critiques have commented on the limited scope of advising, focusing on satisfaction or number and length of appointments (Shields, 1994). Finally, Tuttle (2000) has critiqued research in the field of advising, highlighting the saturation of articles that focus on general advising topics, administrative structures, developmental advising, and student populations.

Additional research efforts are needed to provide fresh topics in advising, including the education and training of professional advisors. Research that focuses on training, professional development, and best practices for advising of African American males by professional advisors presents an opportunity to enrich the current literature. The following section will discuss what is known about training for academic advisors.

Training for Academic Advising

Academic advisors are not only required to understand the curricular and co-curricular options, but also to be competent as they serve a diverse population of students (Brown & Rivas, 1993). As academic advising has evolved, it has moved beyond the "simplistic, routine, perfunctory course-scheduling activity to a complex process of

student development requiring comprehensive knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors" (King, 2000, p. 289). To ensure that advisors are competent in their advising practices, they should possess knowledge of multicultural theory, learning theory, decision-making theory, student development theory, retention theory, moral development theory, adult development theory, sociological theory, organizational theory, and career development theory (Creamer, 2000).

While effective advising and effective advisors emerge as the result of intentional planning and development, in general, training and development through institutions is offered at a minimal level (Brown, 2008). Over 80% of the advisor's time is directly connected to contact with advisees, which leaves minimal time for learning efforts (McGillin, 2000). In addition, many institutions do not provide even rudimentary training for academic advisors (King, 2000).

Despite the lack of training provided by many institutions, training and development opportunities do exist through NACADA, whose mission is to provide professional development, networking and leadership to academic advisors (NACADA, 2017a). Although the efforts of NACADA are genuine, the organization does not require licensing or certifications like professional organizations of other professions, leaving it to be a "forum for discussion, debate, and exchange of ideas regarding academic advising" (Beatty, 1991, p. 5). Although its national and regional conferences seek to provide advisor training and professional development in the form of conferences, webinars, and peer-reviewed journals, NACADA has been critiqued by some who contend that it does not resolve the on-going issues of advisor training and professional development (McGillin, 2000).

NACADA offers advisor training and professional development in the form of professional readings, workshops, conferences, online courses, and more (NACADA, 2017). While some literature is available on multicultural issues, there are few resources available relating to specific subpopulations. Not only are the resources available through the website on specific subpopulations limited, but even of these, few are directly related to African American males. Although well-developed literature has been introduced and discussed in sectors such as college student affairs, research focusing on the African American male college student advising experience or the experiences of academic advisors advising African American males has not been given high priority within advising circles (Means, 2014). Therefore, the remainder of this review of literature will focus on the framework of adult learning in the workplace, focusing specifically on how adult learning is utilized to enable practicing academic advisors to serve African American males more effectively. This will also examine advisor preparation.

Context Where Adult Learning Occurs

Learning can occur in a variety of settings; however, learning is most often thought to take place in formal, nonformal, and informal settings (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973). The type of learning that academic advisors who seek to better serve African American male students could vary from formal, nonformal, and/or informal learning. The three setting are thus described in detail in the following sections.

Formal Learning

Formal learning can be described as learning that is sponsored by an educational institution. Educational sites that are included in formal learning are preschool to post-

graduate studies (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For instance, Kansas State University, home of the professional organization for advising, NACADA, offers two options for academic advising: (1) Certificate program for Academic Advising, and Master of Science in Academic Advising (Kansas State University, 2018, "Master's Degree Programs," para. 2). The certificate program "prepares professionals who are entering the field of academic advising to expand their knowledge of topics relevant to academic advising including learning theory, student development theory, multicultural issues, career development and foundations of academic advising" (Kansas State University, 2018, "Academic Advising Graduate Certificate," para. 1). The master's degree is "designed to prepare academic advising professionals to work more effectively with postsecondary students in their academic and career planning (Kansas State University, 2018, "Master of Science in Academic Advising," para. 1). This degree is also "intended for practicing advisors and administrators desiring more formal education relating to academic advising, for faculty seeking advising knowledge beyond their discipline, and for students anticipating academic advising roles (Kansas State University, 2018, "Master of Science in Academic Advising," para. 1). The master's degree is inclusive of the courses listed in the certificate program but also includes research methods in education, learning principles, interpersonal relations for academic advising, college student athletes, and college students with special needs. The degree is also offered online to serve students both in Kansas as well as the country and outside the country, being that a degree specifically in academic advising are rare. While the degree does address multicultural issues, it does not have a course focused on advising students of color (Kansas State University, 2018, "Master of Science in Academic Advising,"

para. 1). In addition, these types of programs are uncommon as most advisors in the field have obtained degrees that are related to the field (e.g. student affairs, higher education, adult education, etc.)

Nonformal Learning

Nonformal learning differs from formal learning in that it is sponsored by agencies, organizations and institutions whose primary goal is not education, although education may serve as a secondary objective (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Nonformal learning can be defined as an "intermediate, flexible concept of learning that is taking place in an organized manner and follows learning objectives" (Pantea, 2016, p. 87). Nonformal activities may include but are not limited to training sessions, study groups, two-hour clinics, conference style seminars, and/or workshops with mentoring/coaching programs. Nonformal training is also inclusive of all structured workplace training and education because these trainings are in service of the business and education is the secondary concern. Religious, cultural, health, and even recreational organizations sponsor education programs that can be considered nonformal.

Informal Learning

Informal learning was proposed by Coombs (1985) as the "the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media" (p. 22). Activities involving informal learning can include:

> Reading books or magazine; watching videos; attending conferences; sharing in groups or organizations; watching television; using software to gain the

knowledge; learning things from the internet that are related to personal interests or helps develop personal skills (Smith & Smith, 2008).

In a Canadian study Livingstone (2002) found that around 90% of adult learners were engaged in some form of informal learning activity. In the workplace, it has been estimated that 70% of learning happens informally (Kim, Hagedorn, Williamson, & Chapman, 2004; Kleiner, Carer, Hagedorn, & Chapman, 2005). It is closely related to life experiences and can take place at anytime and anywhere. Because informal learning is so embedded within the lives of individuals, it is sometimes hard to recognize without having to stop and think about it as learning. Informal learning has no boundaries and is endless. For example, informal learning strategies can also be viewed in "observation of others, working in teams, reflection, action learning, mentoring, seeking information from co-workers, use of past learning and experiences, intuition, reading, research, and informal trial and error to name a few" (Wong, 2015, p. 31).

Informal learning can also include other types of learning such as self-directed learning and incidental learning. Self-directed learning is viewed as largely informal although one can choose to take a class as part of self-directed learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Incidental learning occurs naturally through experience. Incidental learning occurs by accident when doing something and is often outside of the learner's consciousness, at least initially (Merriam &Bierema, 2014; Taylor, 2012). Learning that takes place is recognized after the experience has occurred (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Since a great proportion of learning in the workplace and learning in general occurs informally, it makes sense that most learning related to African American males in the advising context occurs informally.

Adult Learning Theories

Years of study have been dedicated to how adults learn differently from children and even traditional age college students. Adult learning theories explain adults' experiences and needs. This study seeks to understand the learning experiences of academic advisors in addition to examining learning that takes place in the workplace. With the shift towards adult learning in the professional sphere, it is imperative to understand how adults learn within the workplace as they serve African American males. The remainder of this section will discuss prominent adult learning theories that include andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning.

Academic Advisors as Adult Educators

The previous section discussed ways in which adult learning literature and theories have informed workplace learning. These assumptions coupled with adult learning literature have impacted the academic advising community that now include practitioner-based articles through *Academic Advising Today*, an interest group, as well literature produced through the NACADA journal. As demographics in higher education shift, including more participation by adult learners, the crossover of academic advising and adult education is inevitable (Bitterman, 1985; Ishler, 2005). The typical age used to refer to college learners as adult learners in common statistical sources on higher education participation and in scholarly literature from the field of adult education is age 25 or 24, beyond the age when graduation would typically be expected (Kasworm, 2012). However, age is not the sole factor for determining if a student is an adult learner, or nontraditional student within higher education. While certainly age and part-time status are common characteristics, there are several others that describe nontraditional students,

including delayed enrollment, working full-time while enrolled financially independent, having dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, and not having a high school diploma (Choy, 2002). Thus, academic advisors can also be seen as adult educators. To address the needs and concerns of adult learners, academic advisors must be competent in their methods of advising (Hardin, 2008). In addition, advisors serve as facilitators of learning and use advising as a way of teaching (Crookston, 1972). In fact, NACADA (2017) provides its core competencies with the sole purpose of informing advisors how to "guide" learning. Lowenstein (2014), in his *Theory of Advising as Integrative Learning* to the academic advising community, alludes to advisors as educators in two of his six points that describe the essence of academic advising:

1. Advising *enhances learning* and at its core is a locus of learning and merely a signpost to learning.

2. The *learning* that happens is integrative and helps students make meaning out of their education as a whole.

NACADA's concept of Academic Advising provides six outcomes of academic advising:

1. Craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities aspirations, interests, and values;

2. Use complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals;

3. Assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements;

4. Articulate the meaning of higher education and the intent of the institution's curriculum

5. Cultivate the intellectual habits that lead to a lifetime of learning; and

6. Behave as citizens who engage in the wider world around them

Each of the previous list of statements imply that learning is taking place and that this learning is facilitated by the academic advisor. Academic advising is a teaching profession that educates its students. Academic advising helps students do what a "teacher does for a course: helps them order the pieces, put them together to make a coherent whole, so that a student experiences the curriculum not as a checklist of discrete, isolated pieces but instead as a unity, a composition of interrelated parts with multiple connection and relationships" (Lowenstein, 2007). The academic advisor as an educator helps the student understand the logic of their entire education. Tokarczyk (2012) concluded that "although the literature related to academic advising and adult learning does indeed intersect, it does so only with an emphasis on academic advisors as the teachers of adults. What is still needed, therefore, is a focus on academic advisors as adult learners" (p. 50).

Academic Advisors as Adult Learners

Adult learning theories and concepts have entered the field of advising as a result of changing demographics in the higher education context. In the evolution of advising as previously noted, the advising profession has emphasized advising as teaching. This notion began with Crookston (1972) introducing developmental advising, a concept in the advising community that is highly researched and discussed, as a form of teaching. With the changing demographics of adult learners or nontraditional students in higher education, the intersectionality of adult education and academic advising has placed the advisor as the teacher of adults (Hardin, 2008). However, the developmental model of

advising by Crookston (1972) also asserts that academic advisors engage in adult

learning. He believed that in order for academic advisors to remain abreast with an ever-

changing world, an academic advisor must recognize the need for change in himself or

herself (Crookston, 1972).

Therefore, it is imperative that academic advisors involve themselves in learning

so that they may be able to be competent not only in the profession itself, but also their

responses to a diverse student population (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Crookston, 1972). It is

imperative that academic advisors not only stay up-to-date with current literature that

informs practice, but also to use proper judgment for implementation of strategies for a

given situation and student need (NACADA, 2017). Unfortunately, the learning that

takes place on the part of the academic advisor is not well represented in current research

literature, which increases the importance of the current study.

A few efforts to explain learning that take place in the context of advising have

surfaced in the course of the literature review for this study. Lewis (2000) explored the

existence of communities of practice amongst the professional advisors that served as his

participants. His findings revealed that communities of practice in its traditional forms

did not exist but that the academic advisors did participate in forms of self-directed

learning by seeking out individualized readings and review to obtain knowledge on how

to perform their job more effectively. The findings of Lewis, while touching on other

forms of adult learning, focus specifically on communities of practice and self-directed

learning. Waters (2002) investigated the faculty advisor role socialization and concluded

that "role learning may be significantly influenced by the communication exchanges

taking place between advisors and advisees" (p. 23). This form of learning reflects that

of experiential learning. The study by Waters focused solely on the role of faculty advisors, rather than the learning that takes place across the career span or among professional advisors who are not faculty, thereby providing limitations. On the other hand, Tokarczyk (2012) sought to analyze the workplace learning experiences of *professiona*l advisors through the lens of adult learning, hoping to understand how advisors learn to perform their roles, both upon entering the profession and as they develop in the career. The study's findings revealed that hands-on learning experiences and prior workplace learning experiences had an impact on advisor training and professional development (Tokarczyk, 2012). Evident in the advisors' learning experiences were self-directed learning, experiential learning, and andragogy. Additionally, Tokarczyk found that informal learning was relied upon by advisors and recommended that rather than the lack of training and development opportunities, the content and design of workplace learning experiences for advisors should be investigated. Tokarczyk's findings, however are limited in that she focused on workplace learning experiences in general of professional advisors, as opposed to workplace learning experiences of professional advisors for effective practice with specific subpopulations. The current study takes Tokarczyk's research a step further to investigate adult learning in the workplace to understand how professional academic advisors learn to serve African American males more effectively, given limited training and professional development in the field with this focus.

Adult and Workplace Learning in the Advising Profession

Adults spend much of their time in the workplace which thereby becomes a major context for formal and informal/incidental learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Related

fields, such as the K-12 teaching profession have investigated adult learning frameworks in the workplace (Burns & Schaefer, 2003; Jurasaite-Harbison & Rex, 2010; Sandholtz, 2002: Terehoff, 2002; Turner, 2006; Williams, 2005; Wilson & Demetriou, 2007). Studies on the professional development of higher education have also made use of adult learning theories and frameworks (Brancato, 2003; Lawler, 2003). Applying adult learning theories and frameworks to higher education allows educators to foster their development and make connections to their teaching. Providing opportunities to learn about students, curriculum, and teaching strategies is critical. While Brancato (2003) made direct connections to faculty, staff and student personnel that work in higher education can also be viewed as educators such as academic advisors. Utilizing adult and workplace learning becomes necessary to discover how professions such as academic advising learn to serve their students as an adult educator. The comparison of academic advisors, faculty, and teachers has been made to expand on Crookston's (1972) point that advising is teaching and advisors can be seen as educators. Moreover, the learning that occurs with academic advisors is just as important as the teaching that takes place with the advisor's students (Tokarczyk, 2012).

A recent investigation on the learning experiences specific to professional advisors through the lens of adult learning was conducted by Tokarczyk (2012). The findings indicated that hands-on learning experiences have an impact on the advisor training and development. The findings also revealed that advisors regularly participate in adult and workplace learning, primarily informal, to enhance their professional knowledge and skills. The current study expands the definition of professional development from conferences or workshops, allowing consideration of informal learning

activities. Adult learning theories and concepts give readers a clear picture of workplace learning for advisors and answers the questions of how advisors learn their craft. Adult and workplace learning will thus be the focus of this study to gain a deeper understanding of how advisors learn their craft when working with African American males.

Theoretical Framework for Study

Theoretical frameworks serve as a "lens" to explain some phenomena (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). This study utilizes a basic qualitative approach to examine how professional academic advisors learn to serve their African American males' students more effectively. I will obtain meanings and develop interpretive explanations to gain an understanding of the professional advisors' experiences (Creswell, 2007). The goal of the study is to employ multiple frameworks from the field of adult learning in order to understand the experiences of professional academic advisors advising African American males. The theories included in the theoretical framework for examining experiences of professional academic adviser's experience seeking to better serve African American male leaners include self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformational learning.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning theory has been applied to a variety of contexts for a variety of reasons to include but not limited to, one's personal life, continuing professional education, business and organizational settings, higher education, and online.

Only a few have been able to define self-directed learning with clarity, being viewed as both a personal attribute and process (Grow, 1991). As a personal attribute, self-directed learning describes individuals that seek out knowledge and are comfortable

with autonomy in their process of learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Self-directed

learning has also been viewed as situational, highlighting the various factors that

potentially motivate an individual to learn a particular subject with limited or no educator

support (Grow, 1991). As a process, self-directed learning is described in reference to in

terms of organization of learning that is controlled by the learner. Knowles (1975)

defined the process of self-directed learning as "individuals taking the initiative, with or

without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating the learning

goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing

appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (p. 18).

Therefore, learners must take initiative and determine their own learning needs, develop

goals, and implement strategies to achieve these goals (Tough, 1971).

Six components of self-directed learning were described by Hiemstra (1994):

1. Individual learners can become empowered to take increasingly more

   responsibility for various decisions associated with the learning process.

2. Self-directed learning can be viewed as a continuum or characteristic that

   exists in every person in ever learning situation to some degree.

3. Self-direction does not necessarily constitute that all learning takes place

   in isolation from others.

4. In terms of both knowledge and skill from previous situations, self-

   directed learners appear to be able to apply/transfer learning.

5. Self-directed learning can involve self-guided reading, participating in

   study groups, internships, and reflective writing activities.

6. Teachers in self-directed learning can participate in dialogue with learners, securing resources, evaluating outcomes, and promoting critical thinking. (pp. 1)

There are motivators that inspire self-directed learners to engage in the learning process (Caffarella, 2000). The first motivator suggested by Caffarella (2000) is the aspiration to gain knowledge. An example of this could be an academic advisor seeking knowledge on how to effectively advise African American males. The second motivator is to become more self-directed in learning. This might mean that after the academic advisor has conducted some research by finding articles, speaking with others that have similar interest, and reflecting, that the individual is ready to implement this knowledge in an academic advising appointment. The third motivator is to inspire transformational learning. This could entail the academic advisor speaking to an African American male about his experiences with academic advising, challenges, concerns, and the like. This insight could change how the academic advisor views this student, or how he/she thinks about advising African American males more generally. The final motivator is to become emancipatory, supporting social justice and political action. This could entail the academic advisor conducting presentations at local, state, regional, and/or national conferences, publishing research through the NACADA Journal, or joining political action groups to provide awareness of the needs of African American males.

According to Garrison (1977), self-directed learning can be affected by self-management, self-monitoring of the knowledge construction process, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Self-management situates the learner and provides the degree in which the learner assumes control to meet his/her goals. Self-monitoring, a cognitive

aspect of the model, describes the individual's ability to gauge the cognitive and metacognitive process such as reflecting on assumptions and the learning itself (Garrison, 1997). Reflective practice and critical thinking are both closely related to self-monitoring.

Self-directed learning, as defined by Tough (1971), describes the process by which adults take ownership of their learning needs and develop goals and strategies to meet those needs. Individuals must be able to take the initiative without the assistance of others to build knowledge and develop skills. Self-directed learning is illustrated as both an attribute (involving the individual being self-directed and autonomous in their learning), or as a process (an approach to learning that is regulated by the learner). Pioneers in the area of self-directed learning in adult education include Houle (1961), Tough (1966, 1967, & 1971), and Knowles (1970 & 1975).

Self-directed learning has mostly focused on external control and facilitation, spending less time on internal cognitive processing and learning. To address this concern, Garrison (1997) developed a model that integrated external management, internal monitoring and motivational factors. In addition to what has been discussed on Self-directed learning as noted in this section, self-directed learning is also affected by self-management, self-monitoring and motivation, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (See Table 1 for summary). Self-management represents the amount of control the learner takes within the social environment to accomplish their goals. Self-monitoring is the process a learner takes to construct personal meaning with previous knowledge. The metacognitive component of this element facilitates reflective learning. Finally,

motivation addresses what drives the learner to engage in self-directed learning. This includes commitment and persistence to a particular goal.

Table 1.1

Garrison's (1997) Model of Self-directed Learning

Component	Description
Self-management	The enactment of learning goals and the management of learning resources and support
Self-monitoring	Monitoring the repertoire of learning strategies as well as the ability to think about thinking
Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation	What helps to initiate and maintain effort towards learning and the achievement of cognitive goals.

Self-directed learning is important to this study because it provides a conceptualization of how academic advisors seek knowledge to become more effective academic advisors to African American males. It also helps me to understand what avenues are being utilized by advisors to obtain this knowledge. The theory may provide insight to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of those that seek to improve their practice for effective advising for African American males.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is another adult learning theory that is useful for this study. Experiential learning is also addressed in Knowles' (1980) assumptions about adult

learners. Introduced by the philosopher and educator John Dewey, the concept of

experiential learning is often accredited to his research. Dewey (1938/1963) in his book,

Experience and Education, stated "What [one] has learned in the way of knowledge and

skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively

with the situations which follow" (p. 44). Dewey believed that learning is a lifelong

process that is continuous, meaning that what one learns in the present is connected to

past experiences and has potential for future application (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Kolb has also contributed substantially to the body of literature on experiential learning,

believing that learning "is the process whereby knowledge is created through the

transformation of experience" and developing a model of the cycle of experiential

learning (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Experience alone does not constitute learning, which

involves the learner connecting current experiences to past ones, and looking for future

implications (Merriam, 2007). Learners must also be engaged in the learning process,

reflecting on their experiences and then developing methods for future application

(O'Bannon & McFadden, 2008).

　　　As previously noted, reflection is critical to experiential learning. Merriam and

Bierema (2014) highlight a difference between reflection-on-action, which involves

consciously thinking about an experience after it has happened, and reflection-in-practice

which is described as reflecting "as you are engaged in the experience- it is simultaneous

with practice" (Schön, 1987, p.26). While the former indicates reflection after an

experience has taken place, the latter can be understood as reflection taking place in the

midst of the experience. Arguably, reflection-in-action separates the experienced from

the novice practitioners because they are able to "think on their feet" and adjust their practice while in the experience (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Learning can also take place within a situated context, acknowledging where learning takes place and how the context shapes what we learn. Situated cognition moves learning from only occurring in a person's mind and calls attention to the context and social interactions that interact with the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Situated cognition is another model focused on adult learning and life experience. Situated cognition is also referred to as contextual learning and acknowledges *where* learning takes place and that the context itself shapes learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Situated cognition highlights the context and social interactions that act as determinants of the learning that takes place. Social and historical components shape the context in situated cognition (Seel, 2001). Within the context of advising, learning may differ depending on the academic context (e.g. education, business, science and engineering as fields of study). The ways in which learning is facilitated may vary from college-to-college, as may the social practices common to the field of study and practice.

Experiential learning theorists also believe that learning is manifested in context, through use of tools and in social interaction of learners, viewed through communities of practice, or learning communities. Communities of practice is a manifestation of situated cognition, encompassing a "group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 3). A community of practice can be as simple as a family or include our workplace, professional association or even social media sites like Facebook where individuals engage mutually in learning about a

common interest or goal (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Wenger et. al (2002) describe communities of practice as having the following characteristics: (a) they are defined by their domain, or the area of interest, (b) they are defined by their sense of community, shown in discussions, information sharing, mutual assistance, and joint activities, and (c) they are defined by their practice outcomes that include shared experiences, stories, and tools. Embedded learning experiences, reflective practice, and communities of practice are essential to workplace learning because it provides "authentic learning experiences that are highly applicable to the circumstances in which they are learned" (Billet, 2002, p. 30). As academic advisors engage in learning through their experience, they will be able to reinforce, refine, and extend what was learned (Billet, 2002).

Experiential learning also involves making meaning of previous experience to the degree that learning derived from experience can be applied to new situations (Dewey, 1938/1963). The knowledge that is learned currently is connected to past experiences and is potentially useful for future application. Experiential learning has many contributors, although Kolb was instrumental in the development of one key branch of experiential learning theory. Kolb (1984) has defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p. 38). Kolb's experiential learning cycle and basic learning styles consist of four stages: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). The first stage, Concrete Experience (CE), means that learners must allow themselves to be fully engaged without bias. The second stage, Reflective Observation (RO), requires learners to constantly be reflective and to observe their experiences from many perspectives. The third stage, Abstract Conceptualization

(AC), states that learners must be able to develop concepts and integrate observations into sound theories. The final stage, Active Experimentation (AE), simply requires learners to use the developed theories from stage three to make decisions and solve problems.

The Learning Style Inventory developed in 1971 by Kolb identified four prevalent learning styles: Diverging, Assimilating, Convergent, and Accommodating. Each learning style emphasizes two of the basic learning stages. The Divergent style draws from the Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO). People with this learning style are best at viewing a concrete situation from various points of view and prefer working groups and listening with an open mind. Assimilating learner's dominant abilities are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO). These individuals like exploring analytical models and are focused on ideas and abstract concepts. Convergent learners draw from Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and active experimentation (EC). This learning style enjoy finding practical uses for theories and has the ability to solve problems and make decisions. Accommodating style's dominant learning abilities are Concrete Experience (CE) and Active Experimentation (AE). These individuals are hands-on and are effective in action-oriented careers.

Experience and learning go hand-in-hand and are so intertwined with one another that it is difficult to isolate them (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In addition to Kolb's model of experiential learning as well as other models from adult educators, reflective practice, situated cognition, and communities of practice are important concepts when using experiential adult learning as a theoretical lens. Donald Schön (1987) popularized reflection as a dimension of learning, which can be done through *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action*. Reflection-on-action includes reflective thought that takes place

after the experience has taken place. Reflection-in-action is reflection that takes place

during the experience and is simultaneous with practice. Finally, reflective practice can

also be implemented by analyzing one's espoused theories with theories-in-use. Simply

put, an individual critically analyzes what he/she believes against what he/she actually

does.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning has become the prominent theory in the field of adult

education, and has been studied widely in adult learning scholarship. Mezirow serves as

the forerunner for this theory, introducing the concept of transformative learning in the

late 1970s. Transformative learning is about changes in perspective and one's place in

the larger social context (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In its most simple definition, it is

an inward change in reality that yields an outward manifestation (Clark, 1993). Part of

transformative learning is the process of shifting meaning perspectives. Previously held

assumptions are often recognized and revised upon experiences, that led to

transformation of perspectives, learning, and growth. For transformational learning to

occur, reflection and discourse must be present. Mezirow (2000) proposed 10 steps for

the perspective transformation to occurs:

> (a) a disorienting dilemma, (b) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guild
>
> or shame, (c) a critical assessment of assumptions, (d) recognition that one's
>
> discontent and the process of transformation are shared, (e) exploration of
>
> options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (f) planning a course of
>
> action, (g) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (h)
>
> provisional trying of new roles, (i) building competence and self-confident in

new roles and relationships, (j) a reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 22).

In order to obtain a more inclusive understanding, Mezirow (2002) claimed that "formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justifications, and making decisions on the resulting insights are central to the adult learning process" (p. 4). One view of transformative learning is that is occurs in response to a single and major disorienting dilemma. Another view of transformative learning is that it is incremental, consisting of reflection and discourse that examines, questions, validates, and revises one's perspective in response to a series of related catalysts (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000).

Critical reflection and discourse: Process of transformative learning. Critical reflection is essential to transformative learning and allows an individual to compare prior learning with established meaning schemes under present circumstances (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow (1990) made a distinction between the beliefs or habits that govern us (meaning schemes), and the uncritically assimilated structures of cultural and psychological assumptions that we hold (meaning perspectives) that may shift through reflection (Garson, 2007. An individual's beliefs and assumptions order and limit what we learn and our perception. However, changes in meaning perspectives drive transformational learning. Cranton (2002) stressed that critical reflection is the means by which we "work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences and knowledge" (p. 65). As individuals ask "why" questions, rather than what or how, he/she engages in revision of broader perspectives (Cranton, 1994).

Discourse is another feature of transformative learning theory. Discourse allows learners to make their learning process explicit and to test the validity of claims (Garson, 2007; Scott, 2001). Although the work of transformative learning is personal, it requires conversation and interaction to become effective. Discourse allows the learners to explore perspectives, exchange opinions, and receive support (Cranton, 2002). Communication provides a diversity of opinions that challenge assumptions and encourages consideration of other viewpoints (Brookfield & Reskill, 1999). Discourse is a tool to foster transformative learning that test or validates one's perspectives. For advisors, discourse may take place in many forms that include but are not limited to discussion with colleagues, formal training that incorporates discourse, communities of practice, professional development, and more.

Because academic advisors serve on the front lines of colleges and universities, they must interact with a diverse group of students. As a result, much of this advising will include cross-cultural interactions that may have transformative components, requiring reflection and discourse as advisors examine, question, validate, and revise their perspectives.

Transformative learning and cross-cultural education. The nature of cross-cultural education promotes elements of change cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally in the participant (Bennett, 1993; Bhagat & Landis, 1996; Kushner & Brislin, 1997; Gudykunst, Guzly, & Hammer, 1996; Paige, 1993). Participation in cross-cultural activities necessitates cultural awareness that is transformative in nature (Garson, 2007). Cross-cultural education and transition inevitably involve a challenge to one's personal meanings and beliefs (Arthur, 2001). The process of cross-cultural education and

participation is inherently transformative and confronts personal and emotional perspectives in participants (Paige, 1993).

NACADA discusses cross-cultural dynamics within the advising relationship in its core competencies guide. Creating and maintaining an equitable and inclusive environment is listed as the sixth core competency in NACADA's conceptual component. The organization embraces multicultural awareness and understands that culture influences an advisor's behaviors as well as the advisor's interpretation of others' behavior (Dreasher, 2014). NACADA emphasizes the learning of the advisor to understand how his/her identities, biases, privileges, and stereotypes impact engagement with students and how this engagement affects students' success (Arnsperger Selzer & Ellis Rouse, 2013). Lack of understanding can ultimately inhibit development of advisor-advisee relationships (Cunningham, 2016; Dreasher, 2014).

Advisors should also seek to be inclusive in their approaches with students by understanding that students have multiple identities (i.e. ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, family structure, religious beliefs, etc.) and the intersectionality of those identities. Application of theories should be based upon the student's salient identities rather than the advisor's belief about the student (Archambault, 2016). Academic advisors can create inclusive and equitable environments "through intentional reflection, continual review of relevant literature, and contributions to new knowledge in this area" (NACADA, 2017, p. 12).

As previously mentioned in the literature, professional advisors can be considered adult learners and must continuously educate themselves to remain effective in their advising practices. With changing college demographics, advisors will inevitably

confront students from differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds. For advisors to

succeed in cross-cultural advising interactions, Brown and Rivas (1993) state,

> …advisors must become knowledgeable about how diversity is expressed in
>
> advising how cultural differences between the advisor and the student can
>
> undermine the advising encounter.

Given that most advisors are White and the students of interest in this dissertation

are African American, it is important to be cognizant of how cultural differences play a

role in the advising relationship (Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). As advisors

engage in cross-cultural advising, it necessitates cultural awareness and thereby opens up

the opportunity for transformative learning (Garson, 2007). Advisors must be able to

develop a sense of awareness to create equitable and inclusive environments that foster

rapport with students, in this case African American males, to assist in student success

and persistence (Arnsperger Selzer & Ellis Rouse, 2013). By participating in cross-

culture advising, advisors will inevitably experience transformative learning as they

interact with a diverse subgroup that may challenge their personal beliefs and meanings.

 As the advisor acquires additional experience with African American males,

he/she may notice how culture influences his/her behaviors, the interpretation of African

American male's behavior, and how this affects the advisor-advisee relationship (Arthur,

2001). Those advisors that seek to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for

African American males may participate in various activities to acquire knowledge about

diversity within the subgroups and the intersectionality of multiple identities that occur.

Education in any form, be it formal, informal, professional development, or the like, can

facilitate transformative learning in the academic advisor, as it may confront emotional

and personal perspectives. Challenges to personal and emotional perspectives must go through intentional reflection and discourse to create new knowledge in this area that leads to real transformational learning (Cranton, 1994).

There have been others that have moved beyond Mezirow's rational theory of transformational learning. For example, Charaniya (2012) has explored cultural-spiritual transformation. The process is three-fold and is triggered when an individual's culture is challenged by either an experience or a contradiction arises between beliefs and practice. As the individual engages in experiences that are intellectual, relational, and reflective, the result is a more expanded identity of self or cultural being. This process of cultural transformation differs from Mezirow's in both process and outcome, relying on a rational type of discourse (sharing stories, dialogue, exploring symbols, and learning from others) and producing an expanded view of the world and one's role in the world. NACADA's (2017) conceptual component of its Core Competencies area seeks to create and maintain equitable and inclusive environments by encouraging advisors to understand that culture colors our interpretation of the behaviors of others (Dreasher, 2014). As advisors understand their own identities, biases, privilege, and stereotypes, they participate in ongoing opportunities for discourse as they: (a) apply theories and approaches based on the identities the student embraces, (b) engage in intentional reflection, (c) continually reviews relevant literature, and (d) contributes new knowledge to the field of advising (Archambault, 2016; Arnesperger Selzer & Ellis Rouse, 2013; NACADA, 2017).

Interrelationship of Theories

Central to the notion of adult learning is the learner's experience (Dewey, 1963). Experience serves as the catalyst for learning and thereby provides the foundation of both

self-directed learning and transformative learning. It is the learner's experiences that

becomes the stimuli for what someone wishes to learn, and how they seek this knowledge

(Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Transformative learning is also connected to experience

because it is the experience that causes us to question our assumptions and preconceived

notions. Reflection, as is a major element of experience is also key in transformative

learning. Reflecting on the experience can lead to transformation. A connection also

exists between self-directed learning and transformative learning. Self-directed learning

is a cognitive process in which individuals make deliberate efforts to make changes, build

knowledge or develop skill. The acquisition of this knowledge expands meaning

schemes, habits of mind, and mindsets to make them more inclusive. As part of the self-

directed learning process, individuals evaluate their learning outcomes creating an

enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's belief, critique of assumptions, and

an assessment of alternative perspectives (Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Bierema, 2014;

Mezirow, 1991).

     In the context of advising, it was suspected that as advisors collected experiences

that challenge their preconceived notions, they would seek knowledge to make changes,

build knowledge or develop skill to effectively serve African American males. The

success or failure of the applied knowledge would prompt additional self-directed

learning. The anticipated relationship between the three theories is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.1. Interrelationship between Self-directed, Transformative, and Experiential
         Learning

Self-directed learning
(How advisors seek knowledge)

Transformative learning
(Advisors engaging in cross-cultural

Experiential Learning
(What advisors encounter)
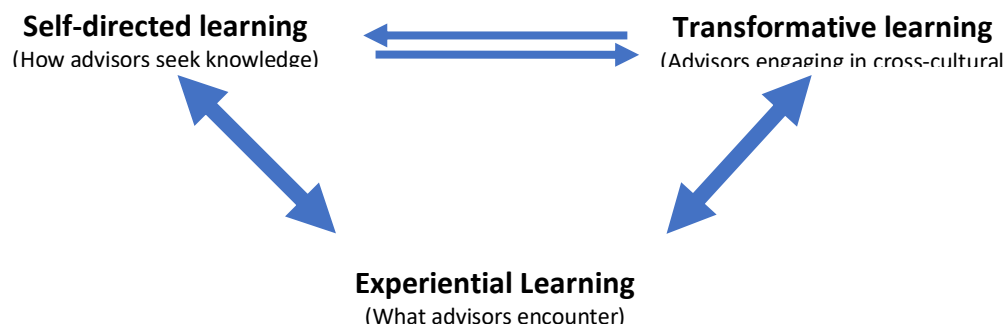
Figure 1.1. Interrelationship between Self-directed, Transformative, and Experiential

Learning shows the relationship between the three theories as a theoretical lens: self-

directed learning, transformative learning, and experiential learning. The double arrows

represent a simultaneous relationship, identifying that they are interrelated. The single

arrows represent a relationship that can lead to another, however, they may still exist

apart from one another.

Conceptual Framework

The research problem cannot be meaningfully researched in reference to only

three theories, but rather must be viewed through existing views both theoretical and

from empirical findings. A conceptual framework represents an integrated way of

viewing the problem and brings together a number of related concepts to explain the

given phenomenon (Imenda, 2014; Liehr & Smith, 1999). The framework listed in

Figure 2.1 guided the study. The model begins with a critical incident that occurs when

advising African American males. This incident may prompt the academic advisor to

participate in some form of learning related to work activities and experiences; seeking

how to better advise African American males (Billet, 2002; Rowden, 2007). Workplace

learning as mentioned in prior sections, is a combination of experiences, information and daily activities that take place within the workplace that include formal, nonformal, and informal learning (Rowden, 2007). The study sought to embrace the ways adults learn as a source of understanding knowledge-based practices within the context of academic advising for African American males (Fenwick, 2001; Knowles, 1990; Tokarczyk, 2012). The critical incident(s) were integrated into the interview questions and were provided to participants upon electing to participate in the study. The interview questions asked participants to identify specific instances that prompted learning for them as academic advisors working with African American males.

Based on theoretical and empirical findings reviewed prior to the study, three components of workplace learning are identified: (a) types of learning, (b) elements of workplace learning, and (c) the level of formality. The study also sought to analyze workplace activities through an adult learning theory lens, specifically self-directed, experiential, and transformative learning which are listed as the *types of learning* mentioned above. These types of learning were also integrated into a few interview questions as participants were asked how they have sought to learn how to better serve African American males. Elements of workplace learning included situated cognition and communities of practice, both components of experiential learning. Situated cognition was used during data analysis to discover if there are differences that exist amongst academic colleges when advising African American males. For example, are there differences when advising African American males in business versus engineering? Finally, communities of practice were incorporated into the interview questions when exploring ways in which learning takes place with others.

The conceptual framework explains how academic advisors seek to advise African American males. Critical incidents prompt advisors to participate in some form of workplace learning. Advisors may learn through either self-directed, experiential, or transformative learning. Each type of adult learning could be connected to other components within the framework. For example, an advisor could be prompted by a critical incident and be self-directed to enroll in the certificate program for academic advising, which is considered formal learning. Within the certification program, during the multicultural component, the advisor may come across information, though minimal, about advising African American males. The advisors may also be self-directed to also join communities of practice such as online groups via social media to enhance learning about advising African American males.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework for Learning to Advise African American Males
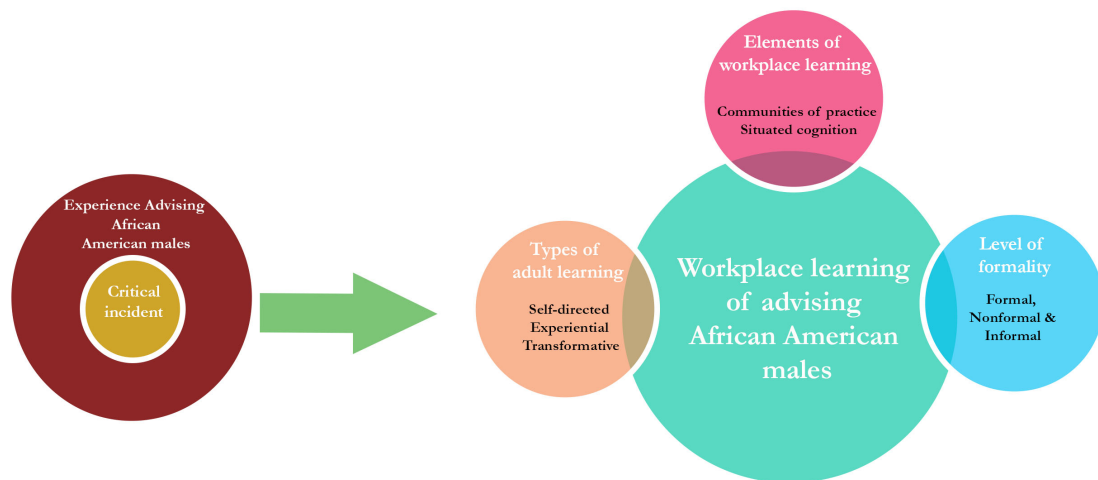
Figure 2.1 shows how all theories and empirical research informs the study.

Conclusion

While the literature in academic advising has seen potential growth in linking adult learning theory and practices with academic advising, a thorough review revealed that there is a significant need for further study. For instance, not only are the viewpoints of those who advise students scarcely represented in the research literature, but the viewpoints of those that advise subpopulations, in this case African American males are, are negligible in current literature. In summary, there is a need for research to conduct more research best practices and empirical research for subpopulations to address the changing student demographics in higher education. Not only is there is a shortage of literature specific to training and development for professional academic advisors in general (Tokarczyk, 2012), but there is insufficient literature and research specific to advising African American males. As discussed above, the literature that has linked adult learning with academic advising is limited in that it does not explore adult learning activities of advisors who advise African American males. The history of African American males in higher education and student advising specifically, provides a useful knowledge base as to why this subpopulation is being considered and the need for more research regarding this student. The theories of adult learning, focusing on self-directed, experiential, and transformative learning provide a framework for expanding the research of academic advising and promotes empirical and theoretically-based contributions to advising African American males. Research documenting experiences of academic advisors who work with African American males also has the potential to promote social change within the advising community, to encourage more culturally specific best practices and empirical research.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study sought to determine how professional academic advisors at four-year public universities learn to effectively serve African American males. Specifically, this study sought to determine (1) what the nature of the advisor's experience has been working with African American males, (2) Given the limited focus on advising African American males in advising literature and advisor preparation programs, how have advisors gone about learning to better advise African American males? Although a quantitative approach could have been utilized to elicit data from advisors regarding their experiences with African American males, it would only paint the broad outlines of a portrait (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Quantitative research does not capture the lived experiences of advisors, requiring qualitative research to render the "tone, tint, texture and nuances of that portrait" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 637). Qualitative research is used to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 6).

Moreover, this study sought to give voice to professional academic advisors that are typically absent from advising literature. Although much research has been conducted in the academic advising profession, "the voice and lived experience of the frontline advisor as an active participant within research" has not been actively visible (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010).   Qualitative research methods will ensure that the story of professional academic advisors is represented in literature and is the most appropriate research method to do so. By making use of qualitative methodology, the study examined workplace learning experiences with African American males from the perspective of the advisors, rather than that of myself. Instead of utilizing a pre-

determined questionnaire with limited responses as typically seen in quantitative

research, I served as the primary instrument for data collection, producing data that is

more complex and comprehensive. Finally, the use of a qualitative methodology allowed

for rich descriptions of learning methods academic advisors employ to serve African

American males more effectively by allowing participants to discuss their experiences in

detail and in their own words.

Phenomenological Research

According to Merriam (2009), phenomenology is both a philosophy and a type of

qualitative research with its own methodological strategies. Phenomenology not only

focuses on the experience itself and the interpretation thereof, as does all qualitative

research, it is also based on the assumption that there is an essence of shared experience.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), founder of phenomenology, based his philosophical

movement on the meaning of the individual's experience, suspending or bracketing all

preconceived opinions (Reiners, 2012), although more recent approaches to

phenomenology such as that of Van Manen do acknowledge that researchers also make

meaning of data, and favor a more constructivist approach to phenomenology (Van

Manen, 2014). Phenomenology is viewed as "meaning giving" rather than "meaning

discovery" according to Van Manen. He also writes that, "phenomenology gravitates to

meaning and reflectivity. The latter is caught up in a self-reflective pathos of reflecting,

discerning meaning in sensing the world of things, others and self" (p. 18). As such, the

findings will describe the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors that seek

to improve their services with African American males while analyzing these experiences

using adult learning theories and concepts. The goal of this study, thereof, was to

develop an understanding of the shared experiences professional academic advisors encounter, working with African American males, a phenomenon that has not previously been researched in this way. Therefore, this research sought to explore an area in order to develop a deeper understanding about the phenomenon and to develop practice. Phenomenological studies are "well suited for studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (p. 28). That is to say, that the immediate aims of this study included extending knowledge regarding adult and workplace learning for serving academic advisors that work with African American males, and the training and professional development of advisors available to them. Therefore, the research sought to explore the lived experiences of professional academic advisors working with African American males and the learning methods employed to help serve their African American males advisees more effectively given the limited training and professional development.

Research Setting

The selected institution is a predominately White public emerging research university in the southwest region of the United States, now designated as an HSI. The institution offers nearly 100 bachelor's degrees and 100 master's, specialist, and doctoral programs. There is a high commuter attendance because the institution is near two major cities. The university has an enrollment of over 38,000 students, making it the fourth-largest public university in the state. In the fall of 2017, the institutions total enrollment was 38,694 students; 16,120 self-identified as male. Of that male population, 1,725 students were Black, non-Hispanic males. African American students have the highest representation in Science and Engineering (361) and Business (260), with the lowest representation in Health Professions (75).

The selected university has lower rates of both retention and graduation for Black males than the national averages. The University's Office of Institutional Research (2017) reports one-year retention rates in the academic year 2016-2017 to have been 72.3% for African American males; the national retention rates being 81% (United States Department of Education, 2017). The University's Office of Institutional Research also reports six-year completion African American males to be 37.9%; the national average for six-year completion from a four-year institution to be 59%.

In terms of academic advising services, the university utilizes a shared model of advising, meaning that both faculty and professional staff are used in some fashion (Pardee, 2004). The undergraduate level has professional academic advisors at the fore-front of student services. The institution has a first-year advising center, that is to say that there is a center for all first-year students with 15 or fewer college credit hours post high school that provides generalist advising (advisors that have general knowledge of all majors). Then, there are central advising centers for each college (such as Business, Health Professions, or Applied Arts) that service sophomore through senior students. Faculty advising takes place for pre-professional majors that include but not limited to pre-med, pre-dental, or law school. However, all final advising must go through the professional advisors in the advising centers. Graduate level advising utilizes faculty for course selection and guidance in degree completion, with a single member of the program faculty designated as the "graduate advisor" for all students in the program being the individual who is the primary point of contact for the Graduate College. Thus, the institution does not use a true centralized model, where there is a single unit on campus that provides advising services.

Selection of Research Participants

This study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy which aimed to "discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore selected a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). With purposeful sampling, I established a selection criterion to choose the participants to be studied. For this study, the participants had to have at least five years of professional advising experience, have advised some African American males, and work in an academic college that has at least 150 African American males. The selected institution has a total of ten colleges. Of that ten, only seven colleges have at least 150 African American male students. I decided that all participants would be selected from these higher-incidence colleges. Selected advisors were those that primarily advised undergraduate students. Finally, I did not limit the advisor-participant to a particular gender or ethnic background, yielding greater variation of advisors for the study. I interviewed nine participants for the study.

To start, I selected five participants that fit the criteria indicated above, with whom he/she is familiar. To recruit additional participants, I used snowball sampling to "locate a few key participants who easily meet the criteria established for participation in the study" from colleges within the university that have the most African American male students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98). Advisors participate in cross-campus advising teams, campus conferences, and network at state/regional/national conference, providing the opportunity for advisors to become familiar with other advisors in various colleges who share common interest in particular topics in the field of advising. Hence, the use of snowball sampling was used to point I to other advisors who shared an interest in advising African American males. Once I interviewed the early key participants, each

participant was asked to refer myself to another participant in a college, not interviewed, that had at least 150 African American male students in the college. A list of these colleges was provided to the participant so that they had a better idea from which colleges to make referrals. In the event that the selected advisors did not know other advisors in different colleges from their own, I also did a thorough search on the colleges advising websites and compiled a list of individuals. No other criteria for choosing the individuals was used except their status as a full-time professional academic advisor. An introductory email was sent, specifying the additional criteria needed for this study. If a referral was made, then an email was sent to the advisor indicating that they had been listed as a potential participant of the study. Whether the advisor was an initial participant known by myself, or recruited by referral or solicitation, a consent form was attached to the introductory email. Should the recipient be interested in participating, he/she was asked to complete the form and return it to me during the interview. When expressions of interest were received, I then emailed a basic demographic questionnaire. Participants were invited as part of the questionnaire to provide a pseudonym of their choosing to protect their confidentiality. I also discussed the consent form in-person at the initial meeting, at which point the signed consent form was collected.

Data Collection

Data collection is key to all research and is "nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 105). Qualitative data can be conveyed through words and provide direct quotations from people about their experiences, knowledge, opinions, and feelings. Qualitative data can be collected through interviews, observation, and documents. However, in education and

most applied fields, interviewing is the most common form of data collection utilized in qualitative studies. For the purposes of the study, I utilized a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and an adaptation of critical incident technique.

Demographic Questionnaire

As consent forms were received by participants, I also sent a basic demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire was used to not only ensure that the participants met the criteria established by myself for the study, but to also ensure diversity amongst the colleges from which participants were selected. A diverse group of advisors from various colleges was desired because the African American males from different colleges could possess distinct characteristics relative to understanding the broad phenomenon of advising African American males (Harper and Wood, 2016). Additionally, the questionnaire also allowed me to become familiar with the participants prior to the in-person interview. Once the first interview was conducted, the interviewer provided the participants with the second critical incident questions (Appendix D) and discussed them in the follow-up interview.

Semi-structured Interviews

The primary mode of data collection for this study was open-ended, semi-structured interviews. In order to understand past events as well as the experiences of others when we cannot "observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them," interviewing is necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). I conducted one semi-structured, 60-90-minute, face-to-face interview with each participant, that included the first-round interview questions in addition to the first set of critical incident questions. Critical incident technique will be discussed further in the following section.

The initial semi-structured interview was followed by a 30-45-minute follow-up interview to discuss the second set of critical incident questions, as well as to follow-up as may be needed following preliminary analysis of the first interview. For instance, this was an occasion to ask questions that arose as important during interviews with different participants. A semi-structured interview provides structured interview questions or issues to be explored but leaves room for flexibility in order to allow participants to define their world in unique ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). Therefore, when studying the lived experiences of advising interactions with African American males by Academic Advisors, a semi-structured interview provided the amount of structure needed to discuss the relevant issues to be explored with reasonable consistency, thus facilitating the search during data analysis for cross-cutting themes, while also providing sufficient flexibility to allow each advisor to relate their experiences.

In qualitative research, most data are collected through interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviewing has many purposes and becomes necessary when I am not able to observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world. Retrieving the most data depends heavily on the types of questions asked. I am challenged to create the best questions to yield the most useful information for the study. Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sashin's (1981) identified four major categories of questions that influenced my formation of questions for interviewing. These categories include hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions. Each type of question was considered when developing the interview questions. In addition, I formulated questions that asked general language as opposed to terminology specific to adult and workplace learning to prevent leading the participants towards specific answers as well as reducing

the risk of using terminology unfamiliar to the participants. As noted above, the semi-structured interview used the questions flexibly in guiding the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure comfort for the participant, I ensured that the interview took place at a date, time, and location mutually convenient for both parties, allowing for sufficient privacy. I audio-recorded all interviews to ensure preservation for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once the interviews were completed, I had an outside party to transcribe the audio recording verbatim, then read through the transcript while listening to the recording to catch errors and fill in gaps. Hiring an outside party to do transcription provided me with additional time for data analysis.

Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique is a research approach that provides a set of procedures for collecting human activities that are useful for solving practical problems (Flanagan, 1954). Occupational psychologist John Flanagan, published an article to describe the critical incident technique methodology after using it for job selection and classification for aviators in World War II. The purpose of the methodology was to collect information about an incident (observable behavior) that was critical (purposeful act in a situation). The critical incident technique has been used in workplace research in a number of occupations and as a means of providing practical aims for developing training programs and/or job evaluation. More currently, use of the critical incident technique for research purposes has been seen in the education and social sciences (Asselin, 2012; Kain, 2004).

While Flanagan's early research focused on the observation of human activities, more recent research has applied self-reporting as a source of data collection for critical

incident technique. Critical incident technique is extremely useful for providing real-world examples, minimizing any subjectivity, and understanding a phenomenon (Kain, 2004). However, critical incident technique can be critiqued for its reliance on self-reports.

The following steps in Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique are as follows:

1. Establish the aim

2. Establish plans and specifications

3. Collecting data

4. Analyzing the data

5. Interpreting and reporting

The first step in Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique is to define and establish the aims of the "activity" to be studied. In this case, I studied the workplace learning, defined by me as all training and professional development activities, both formal and informal, of advisers serving African American male students. The aim of the activity was defined as the evolution of understanding and the obtainment of knowledge needed to serve African males more effectively in advising settings.

According to Flanagan (1954) the second phase of the critical incident technique defines the plans and specifications using four considerations: (1) situation, (2) relevance, (3) extent, (4) observers. The situation involves the specification about the place, person, conditions, and the activities under investigation. As mentioned above, the location was specified as a predominately White public emerging research university, now designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution, in the southwest region of the United States. The

conditions and participants in the activity included academic advisors with at least five years of advising experience that work in an academic college that has a relatively high number of African American male students, as well as advisors who have advised a student from this population. Relevance to the general aim requires that I specified the type of critical incident and the nature of the critical behaviors. For this study, the critical incidents were defined as instances in the advisors' early professional life in which they felt they needed additional information or skills to better serve African American males, as well as incidents in which they felt that they acquired new skills and/or knowledge regarding how to effectively serve this student. The critical behaviors were defined as the actions the participants reported taking after recognizing any deficit in their knowledge or skills, including the action the participants attributed to identifying their need for new knowledge and skills.

Flanagan (1954) suggested that I define the effects the observed incident will have on the general aim, noting their positive or negative contributions. While my primary purpose was to discover behaviors that contributed to the advisor's knowledge and skills, the discussion of any behaviors that the advisor's felt was not helpful to their knowledge and skills was also included in the study. As a result, both positive and negative instances of workplace learning were included.

Finally, it is recommended that my collection data be familiar with the activity being studied (Flanagan, 1954). In this case, the focus of this study is within the profession in which I have several years of professional experience as well as active involvement in both the state and national organizations. I have also presented conference papers and been involved in issues that affect African American people and

college males specifically. Therefore, my familiarity with the activity under investigation is adequate. In addition, I served as the sole instrument of data collection, eliminating the concern of training for additional data collectors.

Flanagan (1954) also provided a list of detailed instructions for implementing the critical incident technique, the first instruction being that individual interviews or direct observation are the preferred means for data collection. For this study, individual interviews afforded me the opportunity to ask about critical incidents that occurred at any point in the career of the advisor as they served African American males, rather than only those that took place under direct observation. Richer data was extracted as participants had the choice to include those incidents that they viewed as significant in their professional career working with African American males. Interviews were also important to the study under investigation as I determined that observation was not a realistic method of data collection. It is difficult to predict exactly when informal workplace learning will occur, especially since most adult learning theorists view such learning as a result on key experiences situated in practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Therefore, in order to extract contextualized examples, I asked a set of questions to identify a critical incident of workplace learning to: (a) describe the relevant circumstances, (b) to describe their actions, and (c) to reflect on their feelings and actions. Once participants expressed interest, the questions for the critical incident were emailed and later discussed during the in-person interview. Questions about a critical incident of workplace learning were part of the larger semi-structured interview with each participant.

Transparency is an important element of Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique. He emphasized the necessity to ensure that participants are fully informed of the purpose of the research. The recruitment strategy as mentioned above provided participants with full disclosure of the study's aim.

Finally, data analysis and data collection in Flanagan's steps are consistent with qualitative research. Flanagan (1954) suggested that data collection and analysis be conducted simultaneously. Flanagan does not place strict guidelines on the format of the final report. Given the final two steps in the process recommended for Flanagan's critical incident report are not unique but applicable to any qualitative study, they were discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Flanagan's model reflects only a component of the study and not the overall framework.

Application of Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique Process and Research Steps

Step	Component	Application to the study	
1. Establishing the Aim	Activity	Workplace learning	
	Aim	Knowledge acquisition/understanding	
2. Establishing plans and specifications	Situation	Location	Southwest region
		Conditions	≤ 150 African American males in college
		Participants	8-10 professional academic advisors
	Relevance	Critical Incidents	Instance(s) of construction of knowledge or skill acquisition
		Critical Behaviors	Actions which led to construction of

	Extent	knowledge or skill acquisition
	Observer(s)	Positive and/or negative experience on the construction of knowledge and skills
		Researcher that has relevant professional experience in advising serving as primary instrument of data collection

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on the Husserl philosophy of descriptive phenomenology and data analysis, as described by Colaizzi. The following steps in Colaizzi's (1978) process for phenomenological data analysis were utilized in the study:

1. Read all protocols to acquire a feeling for them.

2. Review each protocol and extract significant statements.

3. Spell out the meaning of each significant statement (e.g., formulate meanings).

4. Organize the formulated meanings into cluster of themes. Refer these clusters back to the original protocols to validate them. Note discrepancies among or between the various clusters, avoiding the temptation of ignoring data that do not fit.

5. Integrate results into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.

6. Formulate an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study in an unequivocal statement of identification as possible.

7. Ask the participants about the findings thus far as a final validating step.

Step one of Colaizzi's method included reading the transcript several times and gaining an understanding of the entire content. I wrote down any thoughts, ideas, and feelings and add bracketed them in his diary to help explore the phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves. In step two, I highlighted significant statements, that is, phrases pertaining to adult and workplace learning literature to ensure that the final themes address the research questions. I highlighted and coded based on adult and workplace learning literature. I then utilized MAXQDA, a qualitative and mixed methods data analysis software that, assists me in organizing, coding, categorizing, and retrieving data in a systematic way.

During the third step, meanings were formulated from the significant statements and each formulated meaning was coded in one category as they reflected a description. In the fourth step, I then grouped the formulated meanings into categories that reflected a unique cluster group of themes. Each cluster of themes included formulated meanings that aligned with the group of meanings. After, I grouped theme clusters to come under an umbrella theme that reflected a specific vision that is distinct from any other theme. Step five, I defined all emergent themes into an exhaustive description. After this step I sought an expert researcher, the Research Chair of the study, to review the data for richness and completeness. Step six, I then reduced all redundant, misused or overestimated descriptions from the overall structure to generate clear relationships between clusters of themes and extracted themes. Finally, in step seven, I returned

findings to the participants by email and discussing the results with them via telephone to ensure accuracy of their feelings and experiences as reflected from the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, my IRB application was submitted to my institution for approval. After approval was received, the data collection took place. Participants were also asked as part of the questionnaire to provide a pseudonym of their choosing to protect their confidentiality. If the participant did not choose a pseudonym, I chose one for them. I also discussed the consent form in-person at the initial meeting. In addition, I was sure to not provide so many details so that the advisors could be easily identified.

Trustworthiness

While quantitative research is evaluated by internal and external validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability, qualitative research is evaluated based on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). First, credibility was enriched by using prolonged or adequate engagement in data collection. The purpose of adequate or prolonged engagement is to better understand the contextual meaning of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Repeated encounters can provide clarity and a greater degree of what is spoken and unspoken. I was able to obtain adequate/prolonged engagement through multiple contacts with each participant. I had a minimum of five interactions with each participant:

1. The email of the questionnaire.

2. The email of questions for the critical incident.

3. In-person interview including the discussion of the training critical incident as well as providing the participants with the questions for the professional development critical incident.

4. Follow-up, in-person interview that includes the discussion of the professional development critical incident.

5. Telephone meeting for member-checking purposes.

To ensure transferability, I used "rich, thick deception" to enhance the possibility of the reader transferring the study findings to another setting. While the study may provide a small relatively sample size of nine participants, it yields a detailed description of the findings and provided evidence through direct quotes from participant interviews. To supplement, I sought to provide additional transferability by incorporating maximum variation. Maximum variation was sought by selection of advisors from different colleges to offer the possibility for a greater range of application by readers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Maximum variation was also sought by selecting advisors from various ethnic/cultural backgrounds and gender. I used triangulation as a method to ensure dependability. In the final mode of contact, I employed member checks to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations and validity according to Colaizzi's (1978) seventh step. As previously mentioned, I returned the individual coding from their interviews to the participants. To do so, I compiled summaries of each theme that included a brief description of that theme and excerpts from the individual's transcripts that supported the theme. Once this task was completed, I emailed participants to schedule a telephone call to review the interpretation and accuracy of their professional experiences learning to advise African American males and provided feedback on these preliminary

interpretations. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the triangulation of using multiple data collection methods, member checks or respondent validation, and labeling my position are strategies for ensuring dependable data.

In effort to ensure that the data was confirmable, I maintained a detailed audit trail that described data collection and analysis to authenticate the findings of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I used a researcher's journal to record reflections immediately following the interview to include descriptive notes that included but were not limited to verbal and nonverbal behavior, parenthetical thoughts of me and so on. To construct this trail, I kept a research journal during the process as the research is was conducted. Finally, to enhance the transferability of the study, I utilized a rich, thick description which provided a description of the setting and participants of the study, in addition to providing detailed descriptions of the findings supplemented with evidence in the form of quotes from participant interviews. In addition, the inclusion of participants from the various colleges that have the highest enrollment of African American male students provides a greater range of application by the reader and consumer through the use of maximum variation sampling strategy, increasing transferability.

Delimitations

Delimitations represent factors that I had chosen to use as parameters in order to allow the study to be manageable and to focus data collection in a way that is most appropriate for the study's purpose. This study was delimited to professional academic advisors that have had at least five years of advising experience serving African American males at one large public institution in the southwest region of the United States. This study also sought to understand workplace learning, which included all

training and development for advisors serving African American males including formal and informal training. As a result, the study utilized workplace learning theories (self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformational learning) as its theoretical framework.

The first delimitation was to study only professional academic advisors. As mentioned in the literature review, most research conducted has been from faculty advisors, generally leaving the professional advisor displaced from the picture. There has also been limited research on the experience of professional advisors, undermining the professional value to the profession as well as limiting the number of topics, daily practices, and professional development of the academic advisor (Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, & Troxel, 2010). I also thought it was important to include the professional advisor to provide guidance and implications for the field. The professional advisor was also delimited by selection of those with at least five years of advising experience.

The population chosen also serves as delimitation of the study. To begin, I was passionate about this group of students and has a connection to them in the advising context. The population was narrowed to advisers serving African American males rather than both male and females because the graduation and retention rates of males in comparison to their female counterpart are significantly less (United States Department of Education, 2017). In addition, as mentioned in the literature review, African American males struggle to overcome the negative stereotypes placed on them that classify them as dangerous, threatening, and dysfunctional.

Another delimitation that I have chosen is the context of workplace learning. While there is a fair amount of research conducted on African American males and

advising, much has been from the viewpoint of the student. This included the effects

advising has on student retention and graduation, preferences of advising styles, and the

like. However, the goal of the research under investigation is to understand the

knowledge and acquisition of advisors that work with African American males and how

they have learned to serve this population more effectively. This was to encompass all

forms of training and development including formal and informal learning.

Limitations

This chapter began with an overview of the methodology, which included rational

for qualitative research, phenomenology, researcher setting, selection of research

participants, and data collection and analysis procedures. My goal for including this

above section was to prove that the decisions for this selection are sound. However, all

research must acknowledge and examine the limitations of its study. Examining the

limitations of a study does not diminish the research, but rather ensure that the study is

interpret and applied appropriately. A discussion of the study's limitations is mentioned

below.

For those individuals who prefer quantitative data, the external validity or

generalizability of a small-sample phenomenological study may be in question. While

statistically, generalizability cannot occur, it does not mean that what was learned

through the study cannot be transferable (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative

research in the social sciences can provide practitioners with working hypotheses that

reflect situation-specific conditions that yield guidance for decision-making. The

participant sampling strategy utilized a snowball technique. This was done to ensure

diversity amongst participants and to identify individuals that were also passionate about

serving African American males. The idea is that those who express a desire for this population would know others that are as well. Given that the study took place at one institution with certain characteristics and student population, this study is not intended to be generalizable.

The use of self-report through the critical incident technique could be considered a limitation. Gathering information about the participant's workplace learning experiences may prove challenging as this exercise could be new for participants that are not accustomed to recalling specific learning experiences, thereby, making it difficult for participants to recall those experiences. As mentioned above, the self-reports rely heavily on the participant's perception rather than a measurable system. But this is inherent to the choice of phenomenology as a methodology, given the interest in understanding the meaning participants make of their experiences.

The study also might be seen as limited in that it was not able to utilize direct observation by me as proposed in Flanagan's (1954) original method for data collection. Because the study focusing on workplace learning, as opposed to a formal classroom setting with specific learning goals and objectives, it was difficult to predict when learning might occur in order to schedule observations. Finally, despite efforts to achieve maximum variation only one of the participant's was an African American male, limiting my ability to speculate on comparisons between adult learning of those advisers with the same sex and race/ethnicity versus those not sharing those features of identity.

The recognition of potential limitations does not diminish a study's findings or its contributions to current literature. Rather, acknowledgement of the study's possible limitations prevents the research from being misguided and provides me with the

opportunity to be transparent in the practice used to reduce error in my design. The following section of the chapter will provide insight to my delimitations. My perspective is discussed in the following section of the chapter.

Acknowledgement of Researcher's Perspective

Throughout this study, I, as the researcher have identified myself as having professional experience related to the study. From a professional standpoint, I recall noticing a difference in rapport building with my African American male students in comparison to other students. I also observed that there were no formal training experiences for multicultural competence or advising diverse student populations. Rather, my training included technical skills for schedule building and advisor duties. I then took it upon myself to research and find information about advising African American males and found minimal research. I have a Student Affairs background and was accustomed to a plethora of research on African American males. In addition, I have presented at the region level, winning the best of Region 7, as well as the national conference on advising African American males and even being published on this topic through NACADA's *Academic Advising Today*. Moreover, during my presentations, I noticed through discussion that many advisors expressed interest in this student population, yet reported struggled with building rapport with African American males regardless of their own race, gender, and ethnicity. As such, I am tremendously interested in understanding how advisors learn to effectively serve their African American male students given the limited amount of advisor preparation. It is my hope that the information gained from this study will be useful to advisors that seek to become

more effective when serving African American males in times where social activism for Black males and Black people have resurfaced for a more equitable and inclusive society.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an overview of the study's research methodology. In order to describe and provide meaning to the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors that seek to improve their services with African American males while analyzing these experiences using adult learning theories and concepts, a phenomenological approach was chosen. The selected institution is a predominately White public emerging research university in the southwest region of the United States, designated as an HSI, and has lower-than-national-average retention and graduation rates for African American males. To provide a diverse group of professional advisors that have worked with African American males, I established a criterion that would represent various colleges across the university that had a significant amount of African American males and that have been an advisor for at least five years. This chapter also discussed the use of semi-structured interviews and critical incident for data collection with the intent of solving practical problems (Flanagan, 1954). Colaizzi's method for data analysis is also highlighted in this chapter. Finally, the chapter reviewed strategies used to ensure trustworthiness, identified delimitations for the study and features that might be seen as limitations, and acknowledged of my perspective.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The aim of this research study was to explore, through phenomenological methodology, the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors as they advise African American males. This study sought to answer the overall question of how professional academic advisors seek to improve their advising practices when advising African American males by (1) understanding the nature and experience of advising African American males, and (2) identifying how advisors have gone about learning to better advise African American males. A total of nine professional academic advisors from six of the seven academic colleges at a predominately White public emerging research university, now designated as an HSI, in the southwest region of the United States were included in this study. The previous chapter included descriptions of each participant and the research design utilized in this study. From the data, many statements regarding the experience when advising African American males and the learning that takes place were clustered into general topics. In reading statements by participants, I generated codes in the form of words and phrases, which were then clustered or categorized into themes. These themes were examined relative to the research questions. From the first research questions, four distinct themes emerged. From the second research question, two distinct themes emerged.

The following four themes emerged during the analysis of the nature and experience when advising African American males: (1) positive experiences when working with African American males; (2) challenges advisors have encountered when working with African American male (3) expressing a sense of care; and (4) understanding the effects of institutional barriers. In the analysis of the learning that

advisors have used to better advise African American males, the following two themes

emerged: (1) the benefits of conference attendance; (2) and the importance of educating

yourself.

Participant Profiles

Table 3.1

Participant Profiles

Advisor	Gender	Race	Years as an Advisor	Years in Higher Education
Stacie	F	Caucasian	22	22
Alyceia	F	Hispanic/White	6	10
Rolanda	F	Caucasian	6	11
Tabitha	F	Hispanic	10	10
Ashton	M	African-American	15	15
Mary	F	Caucasian	16	21
Judy	F	Hispanic	21	24
Shonta	F	Caucasian	12	12
Valerie	F	Asian	18	19

Stacie is a Caucasian female advisor. She also serves as the supervisor of her

center. At 22 years, Stacie has the second longest tenure in both higher education and

professional academic advisor. She was unable to think about the number of African-

American males on her current caseload. Due to her extensive tenure, she was unsure of

the amount of African American males that she has advised throughout the years but gave

an estimate of 100. She has both her bachelor and master's degree in English.

Alyceia is a bi-racial Hispanic/Caucasian female that serves underneath her

supervisor for the center. She has at least 6 years as a professional academic advisor. She

currently advises a caseload of about 10 African American students. that Like many of

the participants, she was not exactly sure of the number of African-American students

that she has seen over the years but guessed around 100 students. Her formal education includes both a bachelor and master degree in History.

Rolanda is a Caucasian female advisor. She has served as a professional academic advisor for a total of six years and in higher education for 11 years. Of the group of advisors, Rolanda was able to provide an exact number without hesitation of the number of African-American males that she has advised during her years as an academic advisor. Rolanda estimates that she currently serves at least 10 African-American males and has advised about 50 during her years as an academic advisor.   She has a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in Public Administration.

Ashton is an African-American male advisor. He not only works at his university but was also a graduate of the college. He was the only African-American and the only male of the participants. He has been a professional academic advisor for 15 years. The advisor was not able to provide a count on his caseload because they do not operate on a caseload basis but estimates that he has seen at least 2,500 African-American males. He has a bachelor's degree in business.

Mary is a Caucasian female advisor in the college of science and engineering. She had the second longest tenure as an academic advisor and in higher education. She was unable to recall the number of African-American males on her caseload because she does not have an assigned caseload, students are allowed to choose their advisor. She was also not able to recall how many African-American students she has seen over the years of advising. Her formal education includes a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Anthropology.

Judy is a Hispanic advisor that has both experience as a supervisor and currently occupies a position academic advisor. She worked both in the college of liberal arts and now resides in the college of science and engineering. She has a total of 21 years of professional advising experience and 24 years of experience in higher education. The participant estimated advising at least 100 African American males in her current caseload and possibly 300 in her total years of professional advising experience.

Tabitha is a Hispanic female advisor. She has worked in higher education for 10 years and primarily works with first-year students. In conversation with Tabitha, she was not able to identify exactly how many African-American males that she currently advises or have advised over her course of advising. However, she did appear to mention quite frequently her interest in African-American males that were student athletes. She connected with these individuals the most partly because her undergraduate degree was in Exercise and Sports Science. She is also the only advisor that has a degree that is specific to higher education.

Valerie is an Asian female advisor. She has worked at several institutions before her role at her current institution. Tina has also worked in programs that serve underrepresented populations where she was able to work with a diverse group of students and underrepresent as well as student with low socio-economic status. Her background is in Theatre and Literature. She estimated serving 600-800 African American males.

Shonta is a White female advisor. She has worked in higher education and as an academic advisor for 12 years. Shonta was unsure of exactly how many African-American males that she had advised but provided an estimate of at least 20 on her

current caseload and about 30% of her students that she has advised during her years as an advisor. Her educational background is in public relations and Communication.

The Nature and Experience of Advising with African American Males

The first research question of this study focused on the overall experience that advisors have when working with African American males. Participants discussed a variety of experiences that included characteristics that they have noticed about African American males, challenges that arise due to the complexity of this student, and their approach to advising. The themes listed below provide insight into the experiences and the role that they played in the academic advisor's approach when working with African American males and provides information regarding methods that are used to appropriately advise this student.

This is Me

This is me, emerged for advisors' response to what they enjoyed most about advising African American males. This theme represents positive attributes that arose from the data. As a result, the experiences that academic advisors have enjoyed when advising African American males are twofold. Many advisors indicated observations that they mentally noted when working with the advisee, and why this characteristic stood out to the advisor and how they utilize this in their advising approach. The academic advisors revealed that family involvement and resiliency as positive characteristic that were strengths that surfaced in their advising appointments. The following subthemes explain in detail their significance and why this is helpful for their advising approach.

It's a family affair. This subtheme reflects the advisor's observation of family involvement when working with African American males. As presented in the literature review, it is a common myth that African American males lack family involvement, however, several academic advisors have mentioned otherwise. This factor expressed by advisors provided them with additional opportunities to work with the students and their families. Advisors mentioned the strength of the familial ties and how these ties can be utilized to strengthen the advising relationship. For example, Valerie, when describing a critical incident with her first African American male student during an advising appointment mentioned that family was an aspect that extremely important to him. She stated, "From this individual, it was family, of course, was very, very important, following in his father's footsteps. That was very important to him." (Valerie).

Advisors that recognized the importance of the family in the life of their African American males, collaborated with their families as a way to support the student. Judy, former supervisor and advising veteran mentioned that she does not "want to disconnect them from their family. I want to utilize that to pair up as a component that you have a cheering squad from the parents' side and our side, too, to help." These advisors have recognized the importance of support for the student, especially those that come from first-generation backgrounds.

Advisors that discussed familial involvement also recognized that for many of the students they encountered, obtaining their degree changed the family dynamics. Stacie, mentioned her experience working with a student:

They have parents who are involved in how much they want this education. And this last person that I was just telling you about too, both he and his girlfriend

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talked about how much it meant to their families for what they had done. That they've changed the family dynamic, because they were the first ones who got degrees from their family. And the fact that their mother's going to hang this diploma on the wall was particularly meaningful in that family. And it has changed the family dynamic. Not that African American males were the only ones who can do that, by any means. But it seemed common with some of those that I saw that this was a happening, and that it did create a new dynamic in the family.

Academic advisors who recognized and valued what is important to the student viewed family connections as a strength rather than a weakness to encourage student success. Thus, *it's a family affair*, speaks to the role of family involvement and how in many ways the entire family is on this journey for degree obtainment with the student. Family members are the students' motivational and cheering squad.

He who believes is strong. The second subtheme that surfaced was the resilient attitude that African American males possessed. Advisors provided several examples outlining instances in which their African American male students were challenged to continue with their studies. Challenges discussed ranged from campus climate to academic preparedness. Though the range of examples of why this student was challenged to continue in his success varied, the central theme was that the student chose not to give up. The academic advisors that noted this acknowledged that knowing the circumstances of the student, giving up was an option. The resilience of the advisor's African American male student was also important because a few advisors recognized areas of deficit thinking they had become victim to when working with African American males. For example, Tabitha, an advisor in a first-year advising center provided a critical

incident with an African American male that she met with on academic probation. She noted that the student had made all F's from the previous semester and was an engineering major. The advisor expressed her desire to have the student explore different options as a result of his transcript. She shared the result of asking the student to change his major:

> You know, I don't remember exactly what was said, but I just remember at the end, he said that, "Well, I'm going to go ahead and stay in my major. I'm going to stay in engineering. I'm not going to give up my dream." In my head, I'm like, wow, what I said probably definitely, if anything, it gave him more power to go. Definitely what I said wasn't said the right way. I can say that now, hearing that.

For this advisor, this was an important experience because it allowed her to see areas of improvement when advising students and areas where deficit thinking took root. Academic advisors realized that the persistence of their African American male students was a strength and was an opportunity to capitalize on encouraging and supporting student. Judy, mentioned this when she stated:

> I said, "You should be very proud of what you've accomplished because it would have been very easy to give up, and you didn't," and I think that persistence, that resilience of, "I don't want to be beat down by this, this is not going to overcome me, I want this," and when they tell me that's what they want, then I tell them back, "I want this for you because you want this for you."

As advisors uncovered the student's desire to not give up, they appeared to be very invested in helping the student succeed. The advisor's investment in the student's

success provided additional benefits to the advising relationship that are mentioned in the following themes.

The Key to Life is Accepting Challenges

The section of this dissertation on African American males highlights the positive aspects of literature that was published as a rebuttal to the amplified discussion on the alarming statistics of African American males in higher education. Many researchers believed that prior literature approached African American males from a deficit perspective that produced a variety of negative stereotypes (Harper, 2012). While focusing on the negative stereotypes of African American males is not the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge that these stereotypes do exist and that African American males have reported time and time again that this is a common experience in their journey through academia. I sought to understand the challenges, if any, advisors experienced when working with African American males. Academic advisors revealed that they are challenged with overcoming preconceived notions from their African American male students when entering the advising relationship. Advisors also discussed challenges when helping the students to overcome his own academic and personal challenges while trying to be successful in college. Therefore, the participants' challenges will be further categorized into one of two related subthemes in the discussion below.

Preconceived notions. Academic advisors noticed that many of their African American male students entered the advising relationship with preconceived notions. Racism, stereotypes, and the lack of understanding for the diversity that exist within this group have long haunted predominately White campuses in which African American

males have been the minority (Harper, 2012). Several studies have indicated that African American males, despite engagement and involvement, nonetheless report feelings of *onlyness* (Harper, 2012). Therefore, it is of no surprise that academic advisors have felt the effects of this as they seek to establish rapport with the student. The first preconceived notion that African American male students exhibited was the expectation that they would not be helped. The student's thought typically was expressed by advisors as students assumed that they would be talked at, not heard and that people were not listening to them. Mary, stated a thought that she has experienced when working with African American males that they may think, "I'm expecting not to be helped because uh, I think I'm pretty sure there's probably people on campus that would prefer not to help." While the advisor realized this may have been a mis-perception for the students, she is also aware that there are instances where the student may have experienced this from other faculty or staff on campus.

The data also suggested that African American males appear more reserved and quieter in advising sessions, not asking many questions, and thus it takes a little more effort on the part of the advisor for them to open up. A few advisors recognized that the campus climate and the climate of the nation may contribute to their reservation and feelings of students believing that they will not be heard. Joy recognized that the campus climate became less welcoming as she began to hear about the "recent events in the last few years that we hear in the news."

The second preconceived notion was that they would be judged. Academic advisors were mindful to understand that students on academic probation typically could be experiencing these thoughts. For example, Stacie noted that:

Some come in not knowing what to expect, assuming they're going to be judged for how life is happening in their academic world. Are sometimes surprised that we don't approach them in a judgmental fashion. And that we recognize that they're not defined by their transcript in front of them. That they're more than that. And, I think that advisors have to learn to say those things. They have to be willing to have an honest conversation with another person.

Many advisors, like Stacie, were intentional about their advising approach, especially when the students were on any type of academic probation, to encourage the student rather than prod them. Rolanda, was also another academic advisor that sought to be intentional in understanding her African American male students and why perhaps they may enter an advising session with preconceived notions. To do so, she mentioned the following:

I mean, well, I have my book lists, so I go check out books from the library and read those, I try and check out the news every day. I keep an idea of what's going on campus. And I know that lately on campus, it hasn't felt like the most warm and welcoming environment, but I try and make that ... I try to make my office a welcoming space, because I know what's going on, and that students of color in particular, might not feel welcomed or heard on campus sometimes, because they feel ...I could understandably see how they would feel that people aren't listening. So, I try and make my appointments a place where I can ... they can be heard, and I can listen and help them address, you know, what's going on. So, I try and be an ally in that way, just by keeping myself knowledgeable of what's happening, but also in the state and in our nation.

Academic advisors that mentioned students entering appointments with preconceived notions did not stop at the observation, however, they sought to understand why the student would possibly feel this way. This curiosity led to the advisors finding methods to counteract what the student could possibly be feeling. After several years of experience many advisors began to be proactive in their approach, understanding they that cannot always change the student when initially entering an advising appointment, but they could change themselves to create a welcoming environment for students that would lead to an ongoing relationship.

Overcoming challenges. Academic advisors experienced some challenges when working with African American males. For some advisors, the challenges experienced were related to academics, aligning with the underprepared, low-performing Black male subgroup identified in the literature review. A number of advisors expressed the challenge when working with a student that does not meet general admissions requirements for a particular degree plan. For example, Joy discussed her conversations with students around many discussions of meeting general admissions requirements to enter the student's degree of choice. Joy, provided the following:

> But then, I have some who are in that same boat of still not getting into their classes, not getting into the college but they know this isn't going to be easy for me. It's going to be rough. So, they want to know, "What should I do? Should I change my major if I'm still wanting to graduate?" Those are the students who are more realistic because they're knowing, I'm not going to make all A's but I still want to go to school. What can I do for a degree? And we look at what programs they do meet admission requirements for.

Like Joy, Mary also has found that sometimes students struggle when trying to pursue a major for which they do not meet the academic requirements to complete the degree plan. However, Mary mentioned a method that she uses to overcome this challenge with African American male students. She prefers to give students options that they may not have considered. This provides the student with several ways he can accomplish the same goal. Mary provided an example in which a student did not have the grades to complete a teaching certification and was discouraged about how he could accomplish his goals in his current situation. In her words:

He'd wanted to do a teacher's certification and he didn't have the grades and I said, well, you know, you just need to become a substitute teacher. Finish your degree out, enjoy the classes that you're taking. You'll do better in them. Then do your alternative certification. And that just seemed like it opened up a whole new world for him.

For other advisors, the challenges they encountered were focused on personal concerns that their African American males experienced. Academic advisors mentioned elements outside of academia that posed challenges to the student. Among that challenges that African American males faced that was not previously mentioned, were prioritizing work and academics, as well familial issues. For example, Stacie discussed how she was working with a student that worked for a family business. Because he was in a situation where he had to work, it became difficult for the student to make school his first priority. Stacie provided the following explanation:

One of them is one of those interesting kinds of case studies because he has some family support, but he also has a job and the job drains him. It's his source of

income. It's a success in his life. But it causes him not to focus so much on the academic life. And he's just an average academic student, who is not going to skate through to graduation. So, I'm glad that she's taken an interest in him. Even taking an interest is not sufficient because at their last meeting, he became angry.

Advisors have also noticed that finances play an important role in the student's success. Rolanda discussed that she constantly seeks opportunities to find ways to help students, especially when it comes to student success and how students that work to support their educational expenses are becoming more common. This challenge is also related to the first, in which students are sometimes not able to complete particular degree plans because the department has certain requirements that prevent the student from working. She provides the following explanation:

So, the student successes I'm thinking of that made it through graduation, they had to overcome all of that, and that's something I've shared too with my supervisor and with our departments, like, can we eliminate these barriers, or can we talk about how to help students succeed. If you're going to require this, how can we help students be successful in those things. So that's, I think that's the biggest part is, it's not really student-facing, it's more our program-facing. And that, I think that encompasses a lot of, when you talk about student diversity, it's not just diversity in ethnicity, it's diversity in student experience. They're having to ... students that have to work, students that have families. So, that makes it really tough.

On the other hand, academic advisors also noted pressures from student's families. This pressure is not necessarily created by the families themselves; on the

contrary, many students have noted to have internal pressure to succeed because they want to make their families and those that have made sacrifices for them proud. So, this pressure is escalated when their measure of success, often defined by GPAs is not met. At times, students may be reluctant to speak to family or lean on them because of the fear of disappointment. Ashton, mentioned the following:

It's just facing ... Like it's a lot of things that some of the students are facing that you wouldn't even think of, most people wouldn't even think about all that, but I kind of have that in my head too and I understand that and how much pressure it is, I guess, on some of them. They get to this level and they don't want to let anybody down and they are dealing with all that stress too because could be the first in their family situation, or they know so many people paved the way for them to be here, amount of money it cost, and knowing that hey, this is my opportunity, I don't want to blow it. And have that pressure from family that's like I want to make sure you're doing all right because a lot of money is being spent, but I just notice a lot of, it's a lot that goes on behind the scenes with some of those type students as well from the stress and pressures that they're feeling and all.

Stacie, comments again with reference to a student that has familial support, however has a family business he is to help support because he is unsure of how much longer they will be able to assist him financially. She mentioned the following about a student interaction:

And he's told me that his family cares a lot about his degree also, but that he's always been an average kind of student. And that his father sees that. He talks

more about his father than ...others have talked more about mothers or grandmothers. But his father says that he recognized that he's always just been an average student. He averages around a C in a class, and then a final exam can be a killer. Because he doesn't have a good enough basis built up for it to be otherwise. And he is now meeting with the Associate Dean frequently as a kind of mentoring experience for him. I think that's very interesting that I've observed.

In analyzing the comments of the participants, it is important to note that the challenges listed create additional pressures for African American males. In addition to being in a marginalized population, many of the African American males have challenges that range from academic underprepardness to department-specific barriers. Finances play a huge role in their success as many needs works to supplement their education. While these are specific characteristics of the student, it is worthy of noting that these advisors have been intentional in recognizing these challenges and have sought methods to overcome these challenges by providing options and alternative views of how they have been looking at things. Additionally, they have sought partnerships with others, such as administrators.

I Don't Care How Much You Know, Until I Know How Much You Care

The third theme to emerge from the data was the need to express care. Each participant expressed the need for care when working with African American males because it provided a platform for a fruitful advising relationship. Rapport was important to each advisor in any contact with students, but building a relationship took on a greater sense of importance when working with African American males. Advisors showed recognition that in order to build a rapport to eventually establish relationship, they first

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needed to show the student that they cared about him. For example, Stacie, a veteran

advisor and supervisor within her advising center, found that care must be expressed.

She stated the need for care and the risk that accompanies it:

> Sometimes you have to be vulnerable to do that. You have to care about the other
>
> person. You have to reveal that you care. Sometimes people would prefer to keep
>
> everything on a professional level and are afraid to show that they care because
>
> you get hurt when you care. And you become vulnerable when you care. But you
>
> have to risk caring.

When advisors revealed that they cared about their African American male

students, advisors found that the student requested to see the advisor when coming into

advising appointments, sought out the advisor for job references, referred other students

to the advisor, and even included the advisor in their success such as graduation.

Advisors expressed a variety of ways in which they were able to reveal that they cared

about the student, that included (1) individualizing the appointment, (2) listening, (3)

mentorship, (4) affirmation, and (5) asking questions.

Individualizing the appointment. From the commentary provided by the

participants, academic advisors have been able to express care by individualizing the

appointments. Several, if not all, academic advisors noted individualizing the

appointment as a strategy when working with African American males. Individualizing

the appointment was an approach used by advisors to ensure that a connection was made

and that each student was taken on a case-by-case basis. These advisors understood that

"each student is unique, with their own unique combination of experiences, of

intersectionality of identities" (Spight, 2015, para. 6). Although the focus of this study

was directed at the specific student population of African American males, advisors continued to recognize that despite the student identifying with a subgroup, there was still diversity that existed within this group and that each student should be recognized as an individual. Advisors saw it as necessary to balance this idea of acknowledging the characteristics that exist for African American males while continuing to view them as an individual. Alyceia, an advisor that is second in command at her center says the following:

> So that is one of the most challenging things and then because I didn't grow up adjacent to Black culture in the way that maybe some other academic advisors did, it's always I think with any diverse set of students, a struggle to find some balance between "I need to understand your background" and like what your demographics mean in the larger scheme of the university… Then at the same time I need to understand you as a person, because some of those things will maybe help me know you better and some of those things won't be applicable to you. So, finding some balance between understanding the research about what it means to work with African American males, but also taking the time to know them beyond that research and know them as individuals.

Advisors realized that the best way to reach their African American males was to individualize the appointment so that the student knows that they are not an assembly line of students. For example, Judy, provided an example of exactly how she individualizes appointments. She stated:

> I'll give you an example. I had a student who told me, and he said his grandpa, who he's very close to, was frail, and he fell ill, and he was very visibly upset

when he was telling me, and I felt very privileged that he was telling me about his grandfather, and he said, "I'm not telling you this, I want you to feel sorry for me." He says, "I just ... It's impacting me because I'm very sad," and I said, "As you should be. I understand. You're very close to your grandfather," and we talked, and then he came back to see me a few months later, and I asked about his grandfather, and he was surprised, and he said, "Oh, you remembered." I said, "Why wouldn't I remember? This is a very important person in your life, and I wanna know how he's doing because, of course, I wanna know how he's doing, but because it affects you, and you're my student and I wanna know how you are."

Advisors also liked individualizing the appointment to assist them in building a relationship with the student. For example, Ashton stated:

You're gonna do that anyway. Every student that comes through, you're gonna learn something different about. The worst thing you can do as an advisor, for sure, is you kind of lump everybody together so when they're coming in talking to you, you already have an answer before you hear what they're saying because you're like, "Here's another same old situation" like "This is what the book says to do, so this is what you're supposed to do" instead of like they come in and you're like, "Okay, I kind of have an idea of what you're coming in for, but just let me know what's going on with you." Let them open up about whatever it is so they can be heard. Then, from there, try to come with what you're trying to do as far as trying to help.

Individualizing appointments by remembering and making specific references to their personal lives and situations was the most reported method for expressing care for

African American males by the advisor. Individualizing the appointment sent a message to their African American male students that someone at the institution had their best interest in mind. This was as simple as remembering things indicated by students in their appointments, learning about who they are, what they are interested in, and making connection with things that affect students. Individualizing the appointment leads to building relationships.

Listening. The art of listening was the second most reported form of communicating care to the student. Many advisors stressed the importance of listening and the benefits each of them has noticed throughout their advising career. Advisors that mentioned listening as a strategy when working with African American males found that it allowed them to better match the student's goals, form relationships, and make connections with the student. Listening to the student rather than being prescriptive in their advising approach enabled the advisor to match their advising appointment with the goals of the student. Rolanda, mentioned, "really trying to do my best in listening to what a student has to say, and matching what options I know of, to what the student is telling you they need." Listening also permitted the advisor to establish a relationship with the student because they were able to learn about the student's needs, background, and how their situation fit into the world of academia. Advisors expressed the need for students to be heard. Ashton, an African American male advisor spoke to the importance of listening:

> In this field of work is that listening is so important, and sometimes people have
> to work on being better listeners. A lot of times people like more just say a lot of
> things, but you're not really generally listening to the student and letting the

student speak and open up. You can't really have any type of dialogue or connection, because you telling the student about certain things. But what does the student really want? So, you got to a lot of times hear them out and all.

Judy, another veteran advisor and previous supervisor stated that "with different needs, and wants, and desires, they deserved to be heard, and they deserve to have a goal." Listening to the student provided academic advisors with the opportunity to understand how to better serve the student. It also opened doors to being intuitive to the student's needs as many times the goals that students initially expressed were not what the student really wanted to discuss.

Finally, listening allows for connection. Judy revisited the idea of listening once again when discussing a critical incident that occurred with her first African American male that was on academic probation. She confessed that she entered in with preconceived notions based on his academic transcript. The student was unhappy and expressed his concern that she did not understand his situation and that he did not need her. Her initial response was to be combative as a student. After becoming extremely frustrated, she expressed to the student that she truly did not understand his situation and she asked if he could help her to understand. As the advisor listened to the student, the tone of the advising appointment changed. Judy stated:

But I said, "I don't understand. You're right. So, help me to understand." That's what changed, I think… But I share my fault in that both ways. Because as frustrated as he was coming in, I was frustrated because he was frustrated wanting to come in. But the tone changed again when I said, well help…I don't understand

and help me to understand. Then, once we kind of got beyond that, I started

asking questions.

As a result of listening the advisor was later able to make a connection with the

student. This connection then allowed for flow in communication regarding the student's

academic performance. Several advisors shared that listening to the student was not

something they initially participated in at the novice stage of advising. However, as time

has passed, and they have experienced different African American males, they realize

that this as an effective method to working with students.

Affirmation. In this study affirmation was described as advisors showing

emotional support or encouragement. This was another theme that was profoundly stated

amongst those advisors that appeared to have more insight or a greater interest in African

American males, although it was not a common thread amongst all nine participants. The

power of words from the advisors to their African American males' students appeared to

make a significant impact in the lives of their students. Judy mentioned her desire to

make the student aware that she cares for him and that he is not just another number in

the many students that she advises. She also recognized outside influences like the

campus climate that would affect the student's perception of whether they mattered and

that she has a genuine interest in their success. She also noted that she does not see this

as a challenge but rather an opportunity to win the student. To do so, she uses the power

of affirmation in the lives of her African American males. As an example, she mentioned

a conversation that she had with a student:

And I looked at him and I said, "You should be so proud of yourself for what

you've accomplished here. We're count down, we're counting down. We've got

three months and in August you're gonna be a college grad. This is fantastic." And I said, " And I am over the moon proud of you. I imagine your family's just as proud." And he started crying. And I'm like, "Oh my God I'm gonna cry now. I'm gonna cry. He's crying, I'm gonna cry." So, we're ... oh my God you made him cry.

This conversation then yielded more insight as to the power of what was said by the academic advisor. The advisor continued to talk about how these words affected the student in his response to her. She stated:

And he started crying and he says to me, "I'm sorry." And I said, "No, don't apologize." And he says ... and I'm just like, "Well I didn't mean to make you cry." He goes, "No." He says, "No one's ever told me that I mattered, or that what I'm doing that I should be proud of what I've done. I've just sort of just kind of been going through the motions and just the acknowledgement that this is a big deal." And I said, "This is a big deal." I said, "Because this is the ... if you're gonna be a statistic this is the statistic you want to be" I said, "If we're gonna put a number on you this is the number I want you to be." And he said, "This means so much."

Another advisor, Tabitha, mentioned her experience in her discussion about critical incidents where she worked with a student on academic probation and suggested that he change his major. However, the student's resiliency made the advisor shift her discussion when she saw the student's determination. She stated that "I remember one of the things I wanted to say, I told him before he left was, " That's okay." I was like, "You're going to be an engineer, if that's what you want to do."

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Ashton expressed similar thoughts relating to affirmation. He mentioned how student have provided him feedback on what his words meant. Affirmation in this case translated to showing students that he believed in them as an advisor. This belief gave students an additional sense of motivation, because they felt the advisor was amongst their supporters. He mentioned:

> That's just kind of how I was when I was in school. Someone that really showed that interest and believed in me really inspired me to do more and be better. I've had students that say, since you're talking about African American students, who've actually said that, that you believed in me and that made me want to push a little harder and that fuels me to continue to do what I do as well because I know that.

The advisor used his personal experiences to fuel his passion for affirming students in their journey through education. The final thought that was suggested specifically by one advisor and subtly discussed by other advisors was the power of "we" statements. Using "we" while it may appear small on its surface, was a major indicated that the advisor was in the student's corner. When the student recognized that the advisor was in his corner, he felt that the advisor cared about the student. In the example that Judy provided, it is evident that using language such as "we," is powerful. She mentioned:

> So being able to say look, we're in this together. And I had one student one time who said to me, and he was an African-American male and he said I like the idea that you use the word we. Instead of just you. And I said what do you mean and he says well, when you're talking to me you say, "And we're gonna enroll in these

classes" and "We're gonna work on this together" and it's we, like we're on this journey together. And I said well, we are. I said I want you to graduate. That's what I want for you. Is that what you want and he says of course. I say well then yes, we're ... And he liked that. And that was important to me and I remember that.

There is something to be said about the power of words that affirm our African American male advisees. As reported by several advisors in their responses, the socio-political climate and many of the backgrounds of the students do not always speak to individuals that have invested interest in their success. Shown in this subtheme is a simple, but powerful way to show students that you care about their success. Words of affirmation gave students fuel to do better and allowed them to feel supported by a staff member, that being an academic advisor. Additionally, using "we" statements also allows the student to ultimately feel supported as they matriculate through college. Affirmation was another method to show care to students.

Asking questions. This subtheme represents data that advisors used to dig deeper into the lives of the student. This was yet another method advisor discussed that allowed them to show that they genuinely cared about the student's success. Asking questions did not allow the advisors to remain at a surface level with their African American students, but rather challenged the advisor. On its surface, asking questions allowed the advisor to be tuned in to the specific needs of the student. Asking questions also allowed the student to set the agenda for the appointment and how the advisor could specifically help their African American male student. Judy, stated that her approach is "talking with them and

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getting a little information from them, from what's on your mind today or letting them set the agenda for the appointment."

In other ways, asking questions challenged the advisor to dig deeper into the challenges or needs of their African American males' students. In one of the interviews, Joy indicated her hesitation about asking questions because she is never sure how much to ask without being offensive to the student. However, Alyceia, provides a different perspective on asking questions in her statement:

 It takes, I think, more energy to push yourself beyond that to ask, well why have you chosen this or why do you think that's not a good idea? I see this larger pattern, what makes you think it'll be different this time. To make yourself ask bigger questions. To see the student as an individual, that takes more energy, I think.

Tabitha, also mentioned asking questions during her advising appointment and uses this as a way to gage how much they need to assist the student in his learning. She mentioned that "if they're very quiet, then I know definitely, okay they may need a little more information. I may try to dig, find out, "Do you know everything, all the resources on campus? Has this been told to you?" Go from there, whether or not I need to give them more information."

Alyceia also discussed what asking questions does to her as an advisor to build her confidence when working with African American males:

Also, I think something that's built my confidence, maybe previously I mentioned the importance of advisor's sort of making themselves take that extra step, ask that extra question, dive a little deeper to help students, is sort of seeing the

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benefits of that play out. I don't know how to word this. I'm gonna try to think of a couple of examples.

Asking questions can be crucial in an advising relationship. In many ways, it is connected to many of the subthemes discussed above regarding care. Asking questions allows the advisor to individualize the appointment at a greater depth because the advisor knows specific concerns and how to best serve the African American male that stands in front of you. Asking questions will also prompt the student to speak more and provide more information to the academic advisor, which gives the advisor more opportunities to listen to the student to individualize the appointment. Although asking questions was not the most reported subtheme of this category, it cannot go without mention because of the impact it can make in establishing rapport and how it is intertwined with many of the other subthemes reported.

The last and final piece of data that was provided was *mentorship*. This sub-theme was only discussed by one advisor, specifically the African-American male advisor, but was such a significant component of his interview, that it is worth mentioning for others that operate in a mentorship fashion.

Mentorship. The advisor expressed mentorship as an opportunity that they received to assist in the development of the student. As noted, this was the most evident and time-consuming method of showing care for their African American male advisees. However, this method appears to have a big impact in the lives of the advisor because they themselves were invested in the student. Ashton mentioned that he first utilizes mentorship as a method of showing that he cares about the student. He does his best to individualize the student appointment by providing tips for improvement of the student.

For example, Ashton will give the students things that he knows African American males have used to succeed. This could be referring them to tutoring resources, potential student organizations to enhance their leadership abilities, and more. Ashton notes that taking time to invest in a student inevitably reveals that you care about the student's success. He stated:

> Almost like yeah, I'm advising, but then almost I'm providing almost like a mentorship as well. It's trying to get them to see that and like I said, when they kind of see that you genuinely care, I think then they open up more. They see like, okay, you're giving me things that is going to help me grow rather than just hey, go to class and that's it, but things that are going to help me even prepare for when I get out of here because my whole plan is to get this degree but get a job afterwards too. But I'm trying to make sure you're going to have to build and have other things besides this. It's competitive out there so you want to get involved, get connected from the beginning.

Ashton viewed mentorship as a great opportunity to help the student understand that the he was investing in his success and that this built rapport that lead to trust between the advisor and the student. Ashton recognized that the student is more likely to open and reveal issues that they are challenged with. This relationship also allows the student to share their successes with the advisor. Ashton mentioned:

> Like a lot of times it's just truth mentorship. That's just, I do that helps out with just connecting in general anyway. They open up that way. You know, just taking the time to go and meet up whether it be at lunch, it could be after work. Just going somewhere and talking about what's been going on or whatever. Them

giving me feedback about how things have been going as far as classes or school

in general. Celebrating those moments or those things that have been going really

well or whatever and I think that helps keep them encouraged. Also, maybe some

things where they're just looking for a resource that then we can help with a

situation, because maybe they're stressing about something that was kind of going

on and just trying to make them feel comfortable about the situation and that helps

a lot too.

Ashton also takes a holistic approach when working with African American

males. The advisor takes his time to personally help the student engage in campus life,

gives professional advice and personal wisdom that he has acquired throughout his years

in higher education. He expresses:

So, I gave a little bit more of myself because that's why I say that was more of

like a mentorship type situation. So, getting him to go to organization meetings,

going with him actually, getting feedback from him, telling him importance of

being professional at all times, giving that extra little additive, a first impression is

very important and understanding that, professional dress. I helped him get his

first little job here on campus through the business department upstairs and all.

Just taking in to and showing like hey I'm investing a lot in you, that kind of

thing. And to who much is given, much is expected, that kind of understanding.

So, it was like hey, you doing all this for me, I need to make sure that I'm

handling my business as well.

Ashton recognized the power of mentorship in the lives of his students. Because

he is an African American male that attended the university and now works as a

professional academic advisor, he is believes this not only gives him passion but also allows this relationship to naturally flow. Although Ashton is an African American male advisor, there is much to be learned from his strategy of mentorship. Ashton's approach was not only holistic but it was proactive in nature. He provided students with many opportunities for leadership development, recommended them to campus organizations, and connected them with other campus leaders. In addition, Ashton found opportunities to meet with the student outside of the advising office on campus. In taking the risk to open up to the student and to give more than the typical job duties, Ashton allowed himself to be human, also utilizing the humanizing component of advising.

Don't Blame the Student, Blame the System

This theme was the final theme that emerged from the data relative to research question one. Don't blame the student, represents the awareness advisors had about outside factors that affected the advisor-advisee relationship. Advisors must be knowledgeable about the individual student needs to have more advisee involvement (Higginson, 2000). Advisors that recognized these outside factors realized the effect that this had on their African American males' students and the way they could perceive the appointment when meeting with their academic advisor. As a result, advisors sought methods to overcome challenges that they had no direct control over to establish a welcoming and safe environment. It is noteworthy that advisors recognized that there was more going on than just a student walking into their appointment, but that there are outside factors that play a role in the entire equation that can ultimately hinder the success of the student. The outside factors mentioned by advisors that affected African

American males were: (a) campus climate, (b) representation, and (c) department barriers.

Campus climate. The first outside influence that advisors noticed that could deteriorate an equitable and inclusive environment was the campus climate. Each advisor that shared this was cued in to what was happening in the environment outside of their office. Judy, a veteran advisor at the institution as both student and advisor, provided an example of the campus climate over the years and the need for more work to be done. She discussed that the institution was making efforts to become more diverse in its curriculum and the uproar that this caused. She provides a snippet of her experience:

> There were people on both sides of the fence. Faculty, staff, and students who were concerned about what this multi ... You know, does that mean that the perspective was gonna be so changed, then. It's like, here's the white version of history and here's the multi-cultural version of history. That was another eye-opening experience where in where I was already advising, was when that went through. When students were asking me what the difference was between this class being multi-cultural and this class not being.

Judy's observation of the mentee's personal experience with racism aligned with literature, noting that racism is still frequently experienced by many African American male students on our campuses (Bonner II, 2016; Harper, 2012).

Some advisors that recognized the campus climate, possessed a knowledge and understanding that allowed them to be tuned into the student and ultimately notice how their identities could impact the way they engage with or the way students engage with

them. Rolanda, discussed that her awareness of the campus climate challenges her to be intentional about how she conducts her appointment:

> I keep an idea of what's going on campus. And I know that lately on campus, it hasn't felt like the most warm and welcoming environment, but I try and make that ... I try to make my office a welcoming space, because I know what's going on, and that students of color in particular, might not feel welcomed or heard on campus sometimes, because they feel ... I could understandably see how they would feel that people aren't listening. So, I try and make my appointments a place where I can ... they can be heard, and I can listen and help them address, you know, what's going on. So, I try and be an ally in that way, just by keeping myself knowledgeable of what's happening, but also in the state and in our nation.

The understanding and the awareness of this advisor allowed her to tap into many of the methods for showing care that were indicated in the previous theme. Rolanda was able to provide an equitable and inclusive environment by allowing students to be heard (listening). Other advisors were able to show care as a result of understanding the campus climate as well. For example, Alyceia, mentioned how even when she delivers certain sensitive information how she regulates information. She reported:

> So, the way I deliver news to students or the way I talk with them about difficult policies or difficult results of an appeal that maybe didn't go their way. I try to remember that the way I deliver that news maybe just as important as what the news is itself or the way I explain the policy. And something I try to remember with students with a lot of diverse circumstances is that not all those students believe, when they step foot on the university campus, that this institution cares

about them or that institution will act favorably toward them. And I'm part of that, does that makes sense?

In a follow-up interview with Alyceia, she discussed a particular student that was an African American male that she had to deliver unfortunate news to. The student was frustrated because he was in this situation partially due to failure on the university's part. He been receiving several referrals but was not receiving an answer. However, the advisor noted that she did everything that she could to help this student and was eventually able to refund him his money for the course. Then, she noted that despite her efforts to help the student he still appeared guarded with her. It was not until she remembered the conversation shared above that she made a clear statement that she cared about the student's well-being and is doing her best to make sure that he succeeds. It was then that the student opened up and thanked her and mentioned that he did not feel as though anyone at the instruction had his best interest in mind.

Advisors were able to uncover outside influences like campus climate that impacted their advising sessions with African American males. This awareness allowed advisors to consider the way they delivered information to students as well as the way they interacted with their students by providing a place for them to be heard. It is important that advisors be aware of the campus climate.

Representation. This subtheme relates to the lack of representation at the selected institution for African American males. Many advisors made mention that there are not many African American males that are full-time employees that they can refer students to and that there are even fewer that exist within the advising context. There are also very few male advisors within their respective colleges. Advisors recognized that

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this could be a very big problem when African American males are seeking someone that looks like them. Judy, had an interaction with a student that really changed her perspective regarding representation. She stated:

And the student was African-American male and he said I want to ask you a question but I'm not sure how. And I said well how about you just ask it? You can ask me anything. He said, "Is there anyone else that looks like me?" When he asked me that the blood rushed to my feet because again, you have that moment when you say you are ... What are we doing, are we not doing enough that you don't see a mirror of enough ... you look in the mirror and everyone around you doesn't look like you? And he wanted to know if there were other people on the college of science that look like him. Or if people who were going to be teaching him look like him. Or other people he would encounter would look like him.

This experience was coupled with a similar encounter; however, it was with an African American grandmother concerned about her African American grandson. She stated:

But what the grandmother asked me, and this was what, again was one of those kinds of profound moments were " What assurances can you give me that my African-American grandson, his needs will be met? Who's going to care or will they care that he graduates from here?" And I don't want to ever get that question again.

This cognizant awareness of a need for representation was also recognized by other advisors as well. Stacie noted her concern for the lack of representation at the institution for African American males:

And my biggest concern, is whether they have someone to see here who looks like themselves…And I worry about the African American males because I think there are even fewer African American male faculty on campus than there might be female African American faculty. There are very few of either… It is this concern that that they need someone to ... they need to be recognized and acknowledged, and I'm not sure exactly where that happens. Even though ... I think they find a home in our college. That's one positive thing. And students have said that, that they see a positive atmosphere here. And that takes some growth on our part too.

Tabitha also realized that it is important that students see themselves represented on the college campus. She began to recognize this when speaking with an African American male advisor and colleague about his experience working with an African American male. He discussed with Tabitha the student's excitement to have an African American advisor. This stood out to Tabitha as she stated "yeah, but you don't realize that. He was happy to get someone that looked like him. It's just not something I ever would have thought of, if he didn't share that with me"

Amongst these advisors and a few others appeared to be a sense of awareness of a need for representation. In their experience working with African American males, they noticed a desire from the students to connect with someone that looked like them. However, many of the advisors noted that they did not have much representation in their offices and this was of concern. While there was no particular solution provided within this theme, it is important to discuss the power of awareness. These advisors understood that having a lack of representation could possibly affect the advising relationship and

that this is a real concern for students. This awareness allowed the advisor to be prepared for these possible instances where this could arise as an issue. Finally, these advisors that noted this appeared to establish equitable and inclusive environments as multicultural awareness underlies the development of equity and inclusivity (Dreasher, 2014, p. 4).

Department barriers. The third and final subtheme, *department barriers*, describes the barriers that exist for students within the departments that the advisors serve in. Comments within the overarching theme of not blaming the students, but blaming the institution, demonstrated that advisors have moved beyond the deficit approach to working with students that often place blame on the student for any failures and lack of accomplishment. However, these advisors looked beyond what the student was struggling with and asked more challenging questions that analyzed institutional barriers for the students. Advisors noted that there were often policies and procedures that impede the success of their students. These barriers often were at the expense of their minority and marginalized students. Stacie, spoke to this idea of how we can change the way that we think about our African American male students:

> We trained ourselves to think that way. If that person is falling through the cracks, then there must be something the system is doing that's at fault here. Let's blame the system. What could we have done differently that have kept that person from getting into this academic difficulty? There usually are things that we need to do differently. Just recognizing that everybody doesn't learn the same way is one of those and just not assuming. It's just so easy to assume.

Stacie, reiterates again about how it is easy to make assumptions about students that are in academic difficulty and while that often prevents us from looking at the larger issues:

Even when we talked about a deficit thinking, it was so interesting to us because we saw all the opportunities that just fell our way when we were working with students that were in academic difficulty to make assumptions about that. Most of those assumptions would put some blame on the victim, the person that this had happened to. Well, he must not have been going to class. Well, he must not have been reading his assignments. Well, he must not even have bought his textbooks. What is going on here?

In this study, advisors recognized that these barriers affected a lot of their African American male advisees and prevented them from accomplishing their desired goals. Rolanda spoke about issues within her department that often do not consider the diversity of her students and have particularly become barriers for her African American male students:

I've noticed with our programs ... our programs in general have lots of barriers. So, there's GPA, there's sequencing, there's internships. And that's what I've noticed has been difficult, like the students that I'm thinking of, they were struggling to get to the GPA. Internship placements were difficult because they're having to work, and that doesn't work out sometimes.

Rolanda continues to elaborate on the difficulty department barriers create and how she as an advisor can help the student in these situations:

So, the student successes I'm thinking of that made it through graduation, they had

to overcome all of that, and that's something I've shared too with my supervisor

and with our departments, like, can we eliminate these barriers, or can we

talk about how to help students succeed. If you're going to require this, how can

we help students be successful in those things. So that's, I think that's the biggest

part is, it's not really student-facing, it's more our program-facing. And that, I

think that encompasses a lot of, when you talk about student diversity, it's not just

diversity in ethnicity, it's diversity in student experience. They're having to ...

students that have to work, students that have families. So, that makes it really

tough.

It is important to consider all of the factors that affect the student and their

success rather than immediately blame the student. When an advisor is able to consider

things such as department barriers, the advisor may be able to change the conversation

with a student that may ultimately change the dynamics between the advisor and the

advisee. For example, advisors can use different language that encourages the student

and seeks methods of assistance that will aid the student rather than just assuming that the

student did not study, complete assignments, etc. Advisors that understood department

barriers were willing to listen to the students and tried their best to offer options that

could help the student achieve similar goals.

Summary: The nature and experience of advising African American males

When one examines the four emergent themes related to the experience that

academic advisors have with their African American male students, it is clear that they

are relational in nature. Each theme represents a method of developing a rich and

authentic relationship with African American males to promote trust, communication, and connectedness. That is to say, that each participant expressed ways in which to engage African American males and what they have done to improve the relationship. An example of this could be seen as advisors uncovered strengths of African American males such as family involvement. Advisors utilized families to serve as a support system for their students. In addition, advisors discussed techniques through which they expressed care; this built rapport and developed trust within the advising relationship. The advisors also developed ongoing communication with their African American male advisees once trust was established and this allowed the advisors to asset the students more effectively in their specific needs. Finally, expressing care fostered s sense of connection as advisors intentionally worked with African American males to ensure they were seen, heard, and valued so that they could receive and give without judgment (Brown, 2010). Each of the themes related to the experience of advisor advising African American males are summarized below.

Table 4.1

Summary of Themes for Research Question #1: What is the Nature and Experience of Advising African American Males?

Theme	Subtheme	Supporting Excerpt
1. This is me!	It's a family affair	They have parents who are involved in how much they want this education. And this last person that I was just telling you about too, both he and his girlfriend talked about how much it meant to their families for what they had done. That they've changed the family dynamic, because they were the first ones who got degrees from their family.

	He who believes is strong	You should be very proud of what you've accomplished because it would have been very easy to give up, and you didn't," and I think that persistence, that resilience of, "I don't want to be beat down by this, this is not going to overcome me, I want this," and when they tell me that's what they want, then I tell them back, "I want this for you because you want this for you.
2. The key to life is accepting challenges	Preconceived notions	Some come in not knowing what to expect, assuming they're going to be judged for how life is happening in their academic world. Are sometimes surprised that we don't approach them in a judgmental fashion. And that we recognize that they're not defined by their transcript in front of them.
	Overcoming Challenges	Um, he'd wanted to do a teacher's certification and he didn't have the grades and I said, well, you know, you just need to become a substitute teacher. Finish your degree out, enjoy the classes that you're taking. You'll do better in them. Then do your alternative certification. And that just seemed like it opened up a whole new world for him
3. I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care	Individualizing the appointment	I just try to connect to whoever I'm meeting with it's always this is a different person, so I don't group people all together. Each persona that comes in is their own person. They have their own story, so I try to get to know them right from the beginning of kind of where they are, their interests, and kind of let them talk and I'm listening.
	Listening	In this field of work is that listening is so important, and sometimes people have to work on been better listeners…so you got a lot of time hear them out.
	Mentorship	Like a lot of times it's just true mentorship. That's just, I do what helps

		out with just connecting in general anyway. They open up that way. You know, just taking the time to go and meet up whether it be at lunch, it could be after work. Just going somewhere and talking about what's been going on or whatever
	Affirmation	…I like the idea that you use the word we. Instead of just you. And I said what do you mean and he says well, when you're talking to me you say, "And we're gonna enroll in these classes" and "We're gonna work on this together" and it's we, like we're on this journey together.
	Asking questions	Also, I think something that's built my confidence, maybe previously I mentioned the importance of advisor's sort of making themselves take that extra step, ask that extra question, dive a little deeper to help students, is sort of seeing the benefits of that play out.
4. Don't blame the student, blame the system	Campus Climate	I keep an idea of what's going on campus. And I know that lately on campus, it hasn't felt like the most warm and welcoming environment, but I try and make that ... I try to make my office a welcoming space, because I know what's going on, and that students of color in particular, might not feel welcomed or heard on campus sometimes, because they feel ...I could understandably see how they would feel that people aren't listening.
	Representation	And my biggest concern, is whether they have someone to see here who looks like themselves…And I worry about the African American males because I think there are even fewer African American male faculty on campus than there might be female African American faculty. There are very few of either.

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| | Department
barriers | I've noticed with our programs ... our programs in general have lots of barriers. So, there's GPA, there's sequencing, there's
internships. And that's what I've noticed has been difficult, like the students that I'm thinking of, they were struggling to get to the GPA. Internship placements were difficult because they're having to work, and that doesn't work out sometimes. |

Advisors' Modes of Learning as They Sought to Better advise African American males?

The second research question was dedicated to the modes of learning that professional advisors engaged in to learn how to effectively serve their African American male students. Because the research that is specific to African American males in advising is limited, the research sought to understand how advisors were able to learn how to advise African American males. There were two majors' themes that arose from the data: conference attendance and educating themselves. The themes listed below provide insight into the way's advisors have gone about learning to better advise African American males.

Conferences, professional development, trainings!

This theme included conferences (i.e. institutional, local, and national level), professional development (in the form of workshops), and trainings. While advisors enjoyed participating in all three of these learning formats, conference attendance was by far the most discussed opportunity attended by professional academic advisors in which they are able to learn about advising African American males. Stacie, mentioned conference attendance for her office as she stated:

Because when we go to conferences, there are always topics that interest us

because of that kind of thinking that might be going on there. And I like to think

that these advisors might make some presentation like that too.

Attending conferences was something that appeared to be the norm for advisors at this

institution. Discussing conferences was a joy for most academic advisors and it appeared

that there was also a culture of conference attendance at this institution. Through

conversation, it could be concluded that conferences at the regional state, and national

level were viewed as important by administration. Similarly, Judy commented on the

importance of attending a professional conference to her learning:

When I first became an advisor there was no official training. I think the first sort

of learning experience, if you will, was probably my first NACADA. I think

going to the first NACADA and then the advising handbook. I read that book

cover to cover. And I read it cover to cover because I like the way it was.

Conference attendance appears to be significant part of the culture among the

advising staff at this institution. Most advisors viewed conferences through a positive

lens and utilized this opportunity for growth and learning. In fact, when asked

specifically ways in which advisors typically here about topics related to advising African

American males, most, if not all advisors responded with conferences as being the

primary source of education on this topic. Specific to learning about advising African

American males, Judy discussed her experience attending a session about African

American people at the National Association for Academic Advisors (NACADA)

conference in Atlanta, Georgia. She stated:

It was in Atlanta. I was forever changed by that presentation, and it really made

me think about, in general, advising African Americans so differently. I told the

presenters that. I said, "I am forever changed. Here, I think I'm a veteran advisor.

I've been advising." I said, "I know for sure that I will forevermore be a

lifelong learner, but I am forever changed." When he presented statistics, it was

an incredibly powerful moment for me because ... and I'm gonna put some blame

on the media. What they put in the media is all the negative stuff. And then when

you go back and dig a little deeper, turn the page, and you're going wow. Here's

the number of people that are in prison. Here's the number of people with PhDs

and advanced degrees and leading Fortune 500 companies. That was just

incredibly overwhelming and powerful.

Jaimie also mentioned her thought process when she heard that there were

presentations and topics about advising African American males at NACADA. She

stated:

I'd say that some of my first awareness to something that made me consider how I

work with that population differently than I might work with others, was

honestly hearing that people went to your presentation at the advising conference.

I think I had something else going on during that session. I don't know why I

wasn't there, but just honestly hearing that you made that presentation made my

think, huh, how do I work with those students differently? What kind of reading

have I done differently? What have I done to learn about what challenges those

students might face? So that's connected to first experience, I think I remembered

that you gave that presentation that made me ask those questions about my practice.

In contrast to finding by Tokarczyk (2000) that discussed the frustration advisors experienced in attending conferences due to repetitive information and not being able to apply the knowledge gained, each of the advisors felt that they gained the greatest knowledge through conference attendance. In fact, it appeared that the institution had a "culture" of conference attendance and saw this as a great opportunity for professional development. Many of the advisors reported attending presentations on advising African American males and found that this was often the only place where they were able to hear about such topics. However, the advisors noted that while conferences like NACADA and local and state conferences provide greater opportunities for presentations and discussions on African American males, there was still a limited amount offered. The next option that advisors sought out for education was other professional development opportunities.

Professional development that was not associated with conference attendance was also discussed, but not as frequently as conference attendance. Advisors often used conference attendance as their primary form of professional development but were able to find other opportunities to educate themselves in multicultural awareness--generally at their respective institutions in the form of workshops. In their discussion, advisors also realized that there were limited professional development opportunities for multicultural issues. A few advisors did expand their understanding of what it meant to participate in professional development to include activities outside of workshops and conference attendance. Some advisors discussed professional development as a way of life. Those

that were in leadership roles within their advising context were able to create spaces where they incorporated things like requiring their advisor supervisees to have difficult conversations and to journal about their experiences. Other professional development included reading books as a staff, much like a book club. Alyceia provided an example of this:

> But we sort of cultivated this office culture where people really care about learning and about reading and some of the best team building things we've done, honestly, have been let's all read this together and come together and talk and agree and disagree. And it feels very like a graduate class, like an academic setting.

More on reading as a group of advisors will be discussed in the following theme as a method advisor used to educate themselves. Additional activities noted for professional developmental included but were not limited to, discussing an assigned book that touched on key things that were important in our lives, attending campus events around diversity, volunteering with non-profits, developing summer projects, and field trips to historical areas that were rich in both positive and negative events. In summary, the advisors that used a broader definition of professional development thought it was important to touch on issues that were not always "directly" related to advising. These advisors believed that we bring our lives, privileges, biases, and prejudices into our appointments. Thus, it is important to speak to the many facets of our lives so that we can become a more well-equipped advisor.

Finally, training was discussed but mostly in regard to its limitations. Advisors were asked if during their training they received any information regarding African

American population or even multicultural issues. Unfortunately, most advisors received little to no formal training in this area. Every advisor interviewed reported that they had not received any training early in their careers on diversity or African American males. However, many advisors voiced a desire to have had this knowledge entering their professional career as an academic advisor.

Educate Your Self – Informal Learning

Outside of conferences, professional development, and training, advisors listed several ways in which they chose to educate themselves on African American male concerns. This theme represents the advisor's desire to seek out more information about their African American male advisees. As noted above, academic advisors recognized that their training and education on African American males in the advising context were limited, thus, they sought ways to increase their knowledge to be impactful in their individual appointments with students. This theme also represented the choice to remain a lifelong learner. Advisors hoped that by remaining a lifelong learner that they would be able to continue to engage their students in conversation. Not only did advisors want to learn, but they wanted to apply their learning in an advising appointment. Advisors were also asked how they have learned to advise African American males beyond formal and professional development such as conferences and trainings. The methods advisors utilized for learning to better advise African American males was through (a) dialogue, (b) reading, (c) proximity to African American culture, (d) participation in campus events, and (e) eliciting feedback. These subthemes are described below.

Dialogue. The first and the most reported sub-theme for advisors educating themselves was dialogue. Advisors noted several ways that they have engaged in

dialogue that often-sparked genuine conversation and also lead to a change in perspective. Dialogue took place in both group and individual settings where advisors were able to ask questions and learn from others in the African American community. Much of the learning that took place for advisors came from casual and intentional dialogue with colleagues and friends.

Stacie, an advising administrator, spoke to the importance of having dialogue. She mentioned that it is key to the development of the academic advisors and takes you beyond the nuts and bolts of academic advising. Dialogue allows advisors to develop and grow. She stated:

Because the advisors have to be trained on a different level from just this part about knowing the curriculum, knowing the policies, knowing the courses. That is nice to have. It gives you the foundation that you need. But it does not make you an advisor. And if you don't have conversations with them that help them grow as young professionals, then I don't think you're doing your job as an administrator working with academic advisors.

Advisors also began conversations with other colleagues and individuals in their lives that were African American to learn more about the culture. One advisor initiated a conversation with a student about African Americans and was able to learn about differences that exist amongst the African American and African student population. Alyceia mentioned:

Something I thought would have been interesting to know about that particular student, I actually talked about some with my peer mentor is she would argue that there are even differences between working with African American students and

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working with students who are like of African origin. So, like first gen, she would

say that this student is a first-generation African student, and that's a different

situation than being an African American student.

Alyceia 's discussion with a student expanded her knowledge of African

Americans in general and specifically African American males. This dialogue allowed

the advisor to create a space with her peer mentor to where they could have difficult

conversations. Tabitha, another advisor chose to have dialogue with an African

American male colleague to learn more about African American culture. However, her

conversation appeared to be more casual in nature rather than intentional. Despite the

intention of this conversation, she was able to learn something that expanded her

understanding of the challenges of African American males. Tabitha expressed, "one of

my coworkers, told me that during orientation, someone, he went and called their name,

and the student was like, "All right, I've got a brother."

This example allowed Tabitha to understand the importance of representation and

how effective this can be. Not only did Tabitha recognize this, but she also developed an

open relationship with an African American male colleague where he felt comfortable to

disclose this information to her. Many other advisors found that dialogue was helpful

when learning about the experiences of African American males. Some advisors

discussed open dialogue in settings such as professional development, where maybe

colleagues could share their experiences. Others discussed speaking with colleagues in

the advising profession especially when attending conferences. Judy reported engaging

in conversations with advisors from Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Yet

other advisors opined creating an office culture where they are able to have these

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discussions about race, class, gender, etc. No matter the avenue chosen to engage in dialogue, advisors indicated these conversations provided priceless knowledge that they could use in improving their appointments with African American males.

Reading. Reading was another subtheme that arose from the data that illustrates advisors being both active and lifelong learners. These advisors chose to educate themselves by reading and learning about research that was currently available. Advisors spoke about actively engaging in reading about African American male students. Many advisors were aware of the alarming statistics that plague the African American male and were able to have meaningful discussions about this. Stacie reported that from the literature that she has read, she knows that "there are retention issues, persistence issues, preparedness issues, all these things. But I don't think that there is very much that we hear about strategizing to overcome." Due to the limited focus on advising African American males in advising literature, advisors resorted to readings on African American males in other fields such as higher education or student affairs specifically. Judy, discussed how she has been able to engage in reading to educate herself with limited focus in advising on African American males:

> Then, the other thing is I read a lot. I read articles and books, and not just advising, in general, but advising specific populations, advising disabled students. I follow the entire Black Lives Matter, then follow the whole Black Student Lives Matter (Judy, June 2018)

Judy, indicated later that she considers herself a lifelong leaner and somewhat of a nerd because she is constantly reading. As an advising supervisor, Stacie uses her role as an opportunity to engage her staff in corporate reading. An example that was provided

invited advisors in her center to read and discuss deficit thinking. While this was not specific to African American males, due to what has been reported from African American males in literature regarding stereotypes, microaggressions and the like, these two topics can be linked. Stacie stated:

> We talked about Deficit Thinking, we all read a chapter together about Deficit
> Thinking and learned how to identify it. And any time those kinds of
> conversations come up in training, we notice that they're typical conversations
> you hear again and again and again in your center and you hear other places.
> Because all of a sudden if you're talking about it, you realize that other people are
> talking about it that you didn't realize until ... it's like seeing the car you just
> bought, all of a sudden it looks like you see them all over the road. Even when we
> talked about a deficit thinking, it was so interesting to us because we saw all the
> opportunities that just fell our way when we were working with students that were
> in academic difficulty to make assumptions about that. Most of those assumptions
> would put some blame on the victim, the person that this had happened to.

Being an avid reader not only educated advisors on successes, challenges and concerns of African American males, but it also provided academic advisors with confidence when working with African American males. Alyceia touched on the impact that reading has for her as both an advisor and a lifelong learner:

> The activities give me extra confidence in this arena, one is sort of doing plenty of
> reading and feeling like I understand. If the charge is to educate a diverse
> population of students, that I should understand who might be walking into my
> office, what kinds of life experiences they could have, what challenges they face

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at the university. Also, I think something that's built my confidence, maybe previously I mentioned the importance of advisor's sort of making themselves take that extra step, ask that extra question, dive a little deeper to help students, is sort of seeing the benefits of that play out. I don't know how to word this. I'm gonna try to think of a couple of examples.

Reading was associated with being a lifelong leaner and as a source of education. It provided advisors with knowledge that allowed them to understand discussions around African American males in higher education. Reading also provided a platform to engage in dialogue with other colleagues that provided personal growth. It also provided advisors with confidence to work with African American males as they were able to have a deeper understanding about successes and challenges that this student may encounter. While reading was discussed in a positive manner, advisors noted that reading did not remove the need to develop personal, individualized connections with each student. Reading was a supplement to the advising relationship and that deeper understanding came with more interaction with this population of students. Interacting with African American male students was discussed in the following subtheme.

Proximity. As a sub-theme, proximity describes how advisors purposefully chose to place themselves in situations where there were more African American people so that they could learn from them. Therefore, to educate themselves on African American people, and as this study relates, African American males, advisors chose to engage with this population. Of all the subthemes reported, this subtheme appears to provide the richest connection to African American males. One advisor noted that the only way to truly know someone from a particular group is to interact with them:

You have to be approximate to something to know it and understand it, I think

that's true. And if people have never had the opportunity to be around anybody

except people like themselves, they've not had this ability to know that all people

are people with the same desires, concerns, and wishes in life. And you've got to

be approximate to it to know it.

This theme was expressed in two specific ways: (a) a personal perspective of

proximity that advisors engaged with, and (b) a workplace perspective of proximity that

advisors engaged in. One advisor in particular chose to educate herself with proximity in

her personal faith. She noted that she actively chose to do this because she did not grow

up adjacent to African American culture. In order to increase her awareness and

understanding that proximity is key to understanding a cultural group, she chose her faith

in her personal life as a means to learn more about African American people and African

American males. Alyceia stated:

But it was also important to me when I came down to these two churches I was

interested in. The church that I decided to make my home, one of the things I

really valued about it is that it had a really diverse congregation. So, one, the

theology was really inquisitive, which I liked, all that stuff. But the congregation

was really diverse. So, it gives me the opportunity to interact with. I know

diversity is not just about numbers on a page. I think maybe the biggest impact it's

had is. I don't know, you can sit in a classroom and read all the books you want,

and read articles, and whatever. But sometimes that stuff doesn't matter in the

same way until you meet someone whose story mirrors what you've read or is

different from what you've read. I don't know what it is about ... the same way we

say you don't know anything about the student until you meet them. You may have studied their transcript and looked at their excessive hours but you don't know them until you meet them. I think you can read all the research in the world about a group of people, but until you start interacting with those people personally, you don't know anything about those people. I think that's the biggest impact it's had on my practice, is I bring those experiences into these individual interactions with students.

Another advisor discussed her personal story of bonding with an African male that is profound. This advisor was able to develop such a close relationship with this student that it impacted her life. While this student is of African origin, but not African American, the advisor was able to make this connection to African American males and understand many of the challenges they face. Stacie stated:

I met with a student who was a refuge from Rwanda. And this person's picture you see here in my window, this is him. He is now dead, but I took him home and he became my son. And I observed things in that perspective that were different because I was approximate. I had people walk up to me when I was with him and ask me if I was okay. This would be white males that walked up to me and said, are you okay? I never knew that would happen, it was shocking. I also saw that he was targeted by the police. I saw it on a very personal basis. I accused them of targeting him. I visited him in jail and recognized that I was maybe the only white person sitting in the waiting room, that all the others were Hispanic or African-American. And it caused me to be more aware of the true racism that exists in society, the injustice, than I would never have been otherwise.

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Stacie's story provides a clear perspective of the impact that proximity can have in the life of an individual and the advisor. Not only were advisors able to find proximity in their personal lives, but also in the workplace. Tabitha, discusses her opportunity to work with an African American colleague on Black Greek Letter fraternities and sororities to present to her fellow advisors. The advisor was able to not only have proximity by working with her colleague, but also with her understanding about Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). This has now provided her with opportunities to connect with African American males that may currently be in a BGLO or with those that may be interested. This can also help establish rapport with African American males as well. Tabitha mentioned "neither one of us are involved in African American fraternities or sororities, but we have an interest. If there ever strolling, I love to go see them do their stroll."

Proximity is also connected to many other subthemes. For example, advisors that participated in campus events often found themselves in close proximity with African American people and African American males. Many advisors also participated in dialogue with African American male colleagues and many of their African American male students. Finally, discussed later in this section, were advisors gaining direct feedback from African American males on their advising experience. Advisors chose various methods to achieve proximity in order to educate themselves about the African American male population on their campus.

Campus events. Another sub-theme that arose from the data was attending campus events. Advisors were creative in this approach to educating themselves and saw campus events as an engaging way to learning about the African American male

population. This theme has close ties to proximity in that advisors chose to find student

organizations and events that celebrated African American culture and heritage.

Advisors expressed that campus involvement was something that was important

because it was a small way for professional development to occur. Those advisors that

expanded their view of professional development saw campus events as a method for

learning about African American culture. Attending campus events developed the

advisor as an individual and allowed them to grow in their thinking and multicultural

awareness. Stacie discussed ways that her entire office has chosen to use the

opportunities on campus to develop her staff in multicultural issues. She discussed her

excitement with attending a campus event on justice. According to Stacie:

> Those are such uplifting kinds of experiences there where you see students and
>
> family and how much support they have for each other, that I would think
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> experiences like that are good training is just that you got to get out of your office
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> and participate in the rest of the campus. I just can't say enough good about this
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> last year's common experiences and common reading being on justice and what
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> an awakening experience that was for a lot of people. But I would love to go. I
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> think the speaker is a world changer. I honestly do. I believe that he knows how to
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> get people to address racism by saying that we have to look at it to know it and
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> that in our country, we've not looked at it. We have looked away from it, we've
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> swept it under the rug, we've ignored it, we've denied it, but we haven't
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> looked at it.

In addition, involvement in campus events also showed students the care and

willingness of their academic advisor's support. By attending campus events, student

was able to see their academic advisor outside of the context of advising. Academic advisors that attended campus events were able to participate in humanistic advising, allowing their students to see them as more than just an advisor, but as someone that supported them in their growth. Tabitha expresses her interest attending campus events:

> Yeah, I just say attending diversity training, also going to events on campus that include the African American culture, I think that could help. I can't say that it's helped me in my advising, but I think ... I try to attend all events on campus like that, just so students see that I support this, and I'm aware. Yeah, I guess that's really it. Every year me and my family, we will do the MLK March just to support the community. I also make sure I do it every year on campus, if I can. I do it on campus because I want my students to know that this stuff's important to me, and that I am there.

Ashton, also expressed a similar agreement with Tabitha, but takes it a step further by specifically being involved in African American male events and organizations. He has also joined a network of African American males on campus that come together to provide support for their African American male students. If a student is in need or has a particular academic concern, he serves as a point of contact for the student. Ashton explained that:

> But, besides that, I go to some of the events that's around here and all and tie it in to they have like a faculty direct- well directory for African American type students, plus students in general like that, and I'm a part of that.

> It is evident that involvement and attendance at campus events can be an enriching experience and be used as a method of professional development. Not only can

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involvement and attendance grow the individual advisor's multicultural competence, but it can also serve as a way to develop deeper and more authentic relationships with students as they are able to see the advisor outside of the context of advising and recognize their commitment and support to them as an individual.

Feedback. The final and most simplistic way of educating themselves on how to effectively advise African American males was to ask students for feedback. This was not suggested by the majority of advisors but was profound and worthy of reporting. The few advisors that shared this discussed student that expressed a great service provided by the advisor. Rather than simply being satisfied with good ratings, the academic advisor would often ask the student what it was in particular that they enjoyed during that appointment that made a difference in their experience. They found that if one student expressed gratitude for something they did during a session, that it might be worth continuing in other appointments with African American males. Advisors found that asking for feedback from students was the easiest and often most effective way to educate themselves on advising African American males. Ashton expressed how feedback can prompt an advisor to consider his/her practices with students (Ashton, June 2018). The forms of feedback that were discussed were feedback from students' panels and one-on-one feedback from the student the advisor advised. Joy suggested that she enjoys direct feedback from student via a student panel. She enjoyed learning about the student challenges and felt that this made a great impact on her advising style and approach. She mentioned:

When we're learning about what students are going through or a few of the

trainings we've been too we've actually gotten to hear a student panel and so it's

always nice to hear it straight from the student. I know it can be uncomfortable for them to talk to a room of advisors that they don't know, but it's always appreciated. I like the dialogue in the training.

Rolanda, also agreed that student panels were the best forms of feedback that she felt was ideal for learning about a student population. The other way advisors sought feedback was when they asked students directly. Judy, during her interview provided solid examples of what she does when working with African American male students to get their feedback on their session. Her comments were:

Then, the other thing, too, is I will even ask my students, when they say, "Oh, thank you so much. You were so helpful," and I'll say, "I'm not tooting my own horn," I said, "but what did you find helpful? What did I do that helped you," because if that's something that really was helpful, I want to continue to do that. Being able to at least ask my own students and say, when they say, "Oh, you have no idea. This was really helpful," and then I'll ask them, "Okay. Tell me what was the most helpful part of that, and if that continues, that's helpful for you, then I'd like to continue to do that for you, as well as other students." And then the other things that I've also done from there is once my, if my students open up the door to say thank you, that was very helpful, that meant a lot to me or this is the best advising session or this was incredibly helpful. I'll ask the students I'm not, I want to continue to maintain that level of satisfaction in terms of what went well in our session. Can you tell me why? Or what did you particularly like or what made the session good for you? And I get that feedback from them and that helps me

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understand. Hey, yes, that worked. That's important to them because that helps me understand that.

Feedback, of two types was provided. The first was feedback from the student about their lived experiences and perhaps many of the challenges that they faced and things that they wish they had from their advisors via a student panel. The second aspect of feedback highlighted things that the advisors practiced in their session that the student enjoyed. Both forms of feedback appeared to be beneficial to tailoring the advisors advising approach. Feedback when directly asked from the student was utilized only when the student voiced that the enjoyed the session or initiated some satisfaction with the advisor. This may be helpful to recognize so that this conversation could be facilitated properly. Asking the student directly for his feedback can directly influence the approach of the academic advisor.

Summary: Advisors' Modes of Learning as They Sought to Better advise African American males?

A careful analysis of the learning experiences of the participants provided evidence of the most common ways they've learned to better advise African American males. These included conference attendances, dialogue, reading, proximity with African Americans, attendance at campus events, and feedback. It appears that conference attendance was perhaps the most frequently reported method of learning for the participants and that their institution, specifically advising administrators, valued and supported conference attendance. This support provided opportunities for advisors to engage in learning and allowed the advisors to have a higher satisfaction with conference

attendance. This was true even for conference attendance, although there was a greater

like hood for a presentation facilitated around African American males.

The lack of formal and nonformal professional development opportunities

advisors were able to participate in around African American males prompted the

advisors to seek non-traditional or informal ways of learning to better advise this student.

Many of the methods discussed overlapped, but the most impactful and discussed method

was dialogue. The participants expressed that having conversations with others about

African American males, racism, microaggressions, injustices and marginalization

allowed them to grow and develop as a result. Participants also capitalized on other

opportunities such as campus events to engage themselves with the culture, and often

then to modify their advising approach. Others allowed themselves to be fully immersed

with African American culture and interacted with African American males in their

personal lives to gain a rich understanding, translating those learned lessons into their

advising appointments. In addition, the participants also found simple, yet powerful

methods of learning how to better advise African American males by simply asking for

feedback in an appointment with a student or via a student panel. Although some

methods advisors chose to learn how to advise African American males better were

discussed more frequently than others, each had its own significant impact on the

advisors. A comprehensive summary of the themes related to professional learning as

identified by the academic advisors is provided below.

Table 5.1

Summary of Themes for Research Question Two:

How have advisors gone about learning to better advise African American males?

Theme	Subtheme	Supporting Excerpt
1. Conferences, trainings, professional developments		…have the exposure to go to conferences. So NACADA was the first one, the NACADA book, and then of course TEXAAN. But I think NACADA was the one because it was so big.
2. Educate Yourself	Dialogue	We have lots of difficult conversations. We deliberately learn to have difficult conversations. We think that we've grown individually, and that that all rubs off on the people you're then talking to. And it takes effort, and it takes a staff that wants to grow that way. That's not afraid to have the difficult conversations.
	Reading	in our center is we are all avid readers and it's not just that we try to hire people who are nerdy, who like reading. It's not that, but she stresses the importance of having your nose in a book and learning about this research that affects the work that you do, that we can't help students effectively if we're not continually learning.
	Proximity	You have to be approximate to something to know it and understand it, I think that's true. And if people have never had the opportunity to be around anybody except people like themselves, they've not had this ability to know that all people are people with the same desires, concerns, and wishes in life. And you've got to be approximate to it to know it.
	Campus events	Yeah, I just say attending diversity training, also going to events on campus that include the African American culture, I think that could help. I can't say that it's helped me in my advising, but I think ... I try to attend all events on campus like

| | that, just so students see that I support this, and I'm aware. |
| Feedback | And it's more of that sort of the feedback to say okay, this is good, this works. This is working. And the students want this. This is meeting that need for them. This is what their expectation is. |

Chapter Summary

New information has been gained from applying adult learning theories and concepts to the workplace learning experiences of advisors working with African American males. Specifically, with regard to the first research question, four distinct themes emerged when discussing the nature and experience of advising African American males. In the first theme, which focuses upon the positive characteristics identified, the participants emphasized that the connection to family provided African American males with support and the desire to continue through tough situations. The second theme, which explored the challenges advisors encountered when working with African American males, encompassed preconceived notions that come from the students based on their specific background and experiences, as well as common challenges that advisors have worked with their advisees to overcome.

The third emergent theme focused on the various activity's advisors utilized to communicated to advisees that they cared. Within this theme, it was highlighted that in order to establish a relationship with their African American male advisee, it was necessary to communicate care. The participants listed four methods for modeling care that included listening, mentorship, affirmation, and asking questions. The final theme focused upon the outside factors affecting their advisee that can easily be overlooked. Of

these factors included considering the campus climate, the representation of African American male faculty, staff and/or students, and the barriers that exist within the department. The above themes represented the advisor's experiences with African American males and their best practices to serve this student more effectively.

With regard to the second research question, the advisors' learning was taken into consideration to understand how they perform their job. From this research question arose two distinct themes emerged. The first theme related to advisor participation in conferences, professional development, and trainings. The participants discussed their involvement and desire to attend conferences on all levels (institutional, state, region, and national). Participants also noted the impact that conferences have on their workplace learning, expressing that conferences were their main source of connection to multicultural concerns such as advising African American males. Professional development was also expanded to include things such as, but not limited to workshops, organized readings, self-reflections, and attending fields trips. Trainings were also mentioned but were not as frequently reported as conferences.

The second and final theme explored informal modes of learning that advisors participated in. Advisors were able to educate themselves regarding advising African American males outside of conferences, professional development and trainings. Participants listed five distinct methods for educating themselves that included (a) dialogue, (b) reading, (c) having close proximity to African American culture, (d) attending campus events specifically relating to African Americans, and (e) eliciting feedback from their African American male advisees.

Each of the listed themes provide evidence for how advisors have obtained and refined their skills to perform their roles when working with African American males. This chapter aimed to consider the findings of the study and to answer the research questions that guided the study. The final chapter will focus on the interpretation of the findings and provides future implications.

V. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This study employed qualitative methodology and theoretical frameworks of adult learning to explore the experiences of professional undergraduate academic advisors advising African American males. Specifically, the research sought to understand their workplace learning experiences with the research goals of (a.) identifying the experiences of professional academic advisors advising African American males, and (b.) identifying methods in which they learn to advise African American males better. As discussed in the review of the literature, Means (2014) documented the experiences that African American males have when participating in an advising appointment as well as how advising contributes to the retention and graduation of these students. A plethora of research has been discussed on the status of African American males in higher education from both positive and deficit points-of-view. Yet, limited research has also discussed the workplace learning of advisors and how they learn to become better advisors, a gap this study sought to address.

Phenomenology was the most appropriate approach for this investigation as the study highlighted the lived experiences of the academic advisors who served as research participants. The nine advisors, one or two from each academic college from a large, Hispanic Serving Institution in the Southwest region of the United State, shared their workplace learning experiences over the course of two interviews and a follow-up discussion with the participant for validation. These advisors held 144 years of collective experience in higher education, with 126 years of academic advising experience at the time of participation in the study. Rich content and detail regarding the participants' experience were gathered using a multiple interview format. The inclusion of critical

incidents allowed the participants to select a specific experience to reflect on, providing a greater source for detail on salient instances as identified by the participant.

This study is unique in its approach to investigating the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors, selecting an often-marginalized group, African American males, and to understand the methods of learning that academic advisors participate in to do a better job of advising these students. More importantly, this study captured the perspectives of the academic advisors. To add, this study also utilized adult learning frameworks to expand the definition of learning activities to include everyday life experiences. For instance, adult learning models highlight the learner's own experience in learning and the learner's ability to direct their own learning activities (Knowles, 1990; Merriam et al., 2007; Tough, 1971). In this section, the findings discussed in the previous chapter will be discussed, and later interpreted through adult learning theoretical frameworks.

The Nature and Experience of Advising with African American Males

The first research question of this study focused upon the experiences of professional undergraduate academic advisors when working with African American males. Participants discussed a variety of experiences including positive attributes (This is Me), challenges they've encountered (The key to life is accepting challenges), strategies that have been useful for appointments (I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care), and things to consider that could potentially affect the advising appointment (Don't blame the student, blame the system). The themes listed above will be discussed below and will provide insight into the experiences of advisors.

This is Me

As discussed at-length in the preceding chapter, the theme "This is Me" reflected the positive attributes that academic advisors discussed when working with African American males. The advisors expressed significant familial involvement in the lives of their African American male students and also noted the resilience these students show in the face of obstacles.

The advisors' years of experience with African American males and frequent exposure have allowed them to see trends with their students. The same personal hands-on experience allowed them to also see their resilience. Coupled with hands-on experience was the use of past professional experiences in their reflection of their critical incidents to inform their current practice. Many advisors discussed the ways in which they capture the families' and the students' resilience to build rapport. This finding on familial involvement is in alignment with the literature that was discussed in chapter two, specifically, that family involvement is present in the lives of African American males (Harper, 2012). Resilience is another subtheme that aligns with the literature presented in chapter two that discusses Black male achievers who have successfully navigated the college and university landscape (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper & Wood, 2016). Defining characteristics of Black male achievers include their ability to overcome the common challenges encountered on four-year campuses.

The Key to Life is Accepting Challenges

In the second theme, participants conveyed the challenges that they encountered when working with African American males. Through their experience, especially with increasing concern of racial tensions in the nation, some advisors have discovered that outside factors have brought challenges to establishing relationships with their African

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American male advisees. Other advisors found their share of challenges when working with students to overcome academic barriers. While others found that there were developmental challenges that entered the advising session that were outside the realm of advising.

This theme is consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter two, "Preconceived notions" builds upon what African American males have reported, noting that despite their accomplishments, they have continued to encounter stereotypes on their respective college campuses (Cuyjet, 2006; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). This subtheme, preconceived notions, does not portray stereotypes from the advisor; rather it highlights how preconceived notions based on a combination of past experiences can affect the advising relationship. Moreover, the preconceived notions subtheme suggested how advisors have sought to overcome this challenge. Advisors acknowledged that there are African American males that struggle with academics, which is consistent with Haper and Wood's (2016) findings for Black males. However, the preconceived notions subtheme expands the current challenges of academics and stereotypes to include *other* pressures such as finances, prioritizing work, and the challenges of familial involvement that African American males have noted during sessions with their advisors.

I Don't Care How Much You Know Until I Know How Much You Care

This theme described the various methods advisors employed that communicated to the student that they genuinely cared. Many of the methods discussed were not profound at face-value but pulled from more recent strategies within advising to determine an appropriate approach. Each subtheme (e.g. campus climate, representation, department barriers), as discussed in the previous chapter, were opportunities to build a

relationship with their students. Ultimately, advisors made use of multiple strategies to establish rapport with their students. For example, to begin, advisors that sought to individualize their appointments, the first subtheme, aligned with many of the discussions in the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Guide (2017), highlighting that since "each student is unique, with their own unique combination of experiences, of intersectionality of identities… no one single approach alone will work with every student" (Spight, 2015, para. 6).

Advisors that utilized listening as a strategy seemed to utilize narrative advising (Hagen, 2007/2008), in which students tell their stories and advisors use these stories to facilitate the conversation. Mentorship, the second subtheme, was utilized as a strategy for building rapport with their students and was also consistent with discussions in the advising community that challenge professional advisors to take advantage of the opportunities available. These are opportunities that advisors can use to support students in their personal and professional development (Kreitler, 2006). Advisors who seek to build a relationship by asking questions demonstrate intrusive/appreciative advising where advisors ask pointed and detailed questions to really understand and get to know their students so that they can make the appropriate referrals (Bloom & Archer Martin, 2002; Glennan, 1975). Affirmations that advisors provided to their students seem to reflect components of Rowe's (2008) theory of micro-affirmations and Powell, Demetriou, and Fisher's (2013) use of affirmation in the advising context to communicate to students that they are capable of performing well in the academic environment.

Don't Blame the Student, Blame the System

The final theme describes advisors who looked beyond the appointments with their students and thought critically about the systems that they operated in and how those systems affect the students. Three subthemes surfaced within the larger theme, including (a) campus climate, (b) representation, and (c) department barriers. The findings related to campus climate focused on what has been documented in literature on African American males in higher education; that many African American males have reported an unwelcoming campus climate where they feel isolated. Literature has also informed us that African American males have experienced unwelcoming environments and often have to navigate racially politicized spaces where there are few peers of their same racial group (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper & Woods, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012). Representation, aligned with campus climate, confirmed that not only did African American males report a lack of representation among their peers, but also among the faculty and staff (Bonner II, 2006). Finally, advisors also recognized the departmental barriers. This bit of information built upon the literature in chapter two as it critically analyzed a system through the lens of race to uncover disparities. The advisors recognized that these three factors contributed to the students' success and were outside of the students' control. Ultimately, advisors discussed these problems with solutions in mind so that they could overcome these challenges while still assisting the students to be successful.

Advisors' Modes of Learning as They Sought to Better Advise African American Males

Conferences, Professional Development, Trainings

The participants discussed the various learning activities including conferences, professional development, and trainings. Among the three themes, conferences were

reported as the most frequent learning activities within this category. Professional academic advisors sought out conferences as their main source of learning, contradicting what is discussed in Tokarczyk (2001). According to Tokarczyk's results, many of the advisors did not perceive that conferences and workshops were interesting or useful. Many advisors also did not participate in conferences due to funding and lack of administrative support. However, the participants in this study perceived conferences to be very helpful, especially in the context of working with specific populations. The institution of choice also supported and encouraged professional development through conference attendance. As a result, there was a high participation rate of advisors at conferences. In addition to conference attendance, professional development, generally in the form of workshops and training was discussed. Initially, professional development was discussed in narrow terms, particularly through workshops, however the subthemes discussed in *educate yourself,* expand the thought of professional development that is in line with NACADA's (2017) vision and mission. The final piece discussed was training. Institutionally required training was mentioned on par with self-initiated professional development. With regard to training, participants reported that information on African Americans, or diverse populations in general, was little to none. These findings confirmed my initial thoughts and observations in the advising literature that the inclusion of African American males is little-to-none. On the other hand, the research does align with the findings of Tokarczyk in that conferences alone are not likely to provide useful learning opportunities. As such, advisors listed additional methods of learning that are discussed below.

Educate Yourself. The final subtheme indicated informal job-related learning linked with maintenance and development of skills throughout the advisors' careers to serve African American males better. In this way, professional development, though not directly labeled as such, was expanded to include dialogue, reading, campus events, and feedback. Participants engaged in lifelong learning by having difficult conversations with colleagues and delving into reading both in and outside of advising. These two subthemes mostly related to academic advising approaches as well as strategies and methods to create and maintain inclusive environments mentioned in in the NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Guide (2017). This guide also encouraged advisors to find ways to create equitable and inclusive environments and it is suggested that they continually review relevant literature. Dialogue, the final subtheme, was another method for establishing equitable environments. For this study, advisors engaged in dialogue to learn more about African American males to inform their practice. Additionally, proximity, campus events, and feedback also add to the way's advisors can create equitable and inclusive environments. These final themes provide practical and concrete examples of how advisors can attend to creating these environments. The NACADA (2017) Advisor handbook provides three ways to create an inclusive environment through intentional reflection, continual review of relevant literature, and contributions to new knowledge in this area.

Theoretical Frameworks

A goal of the study, as mentioned previously, was to employ multiple frameworks from the field of adult learning in order to understand the experiences of professional academic advisors advising African American males. The theories included in the

multiple frameworks for professional academic advising experiences include types of adult learning, elements of workplace learning, and level of formality. The following discussion includes how each theme appeared in light of the framework.

Types of Learning

In this section of the chapter, the types of adult learning will be reviewed. These types of learning are also included within the theoretical framework that was introduced and discussed in chapter two of the literature review. Experiential learning, self-directed learning, and transformative learning will be examined in light of the research questions and study findings.

Experiential learning. Experiential learning served as the foundation of all learning for the advisors and it was intertwined with self-directed learning as well as transformational learning. Literature reviewed on adult experiential learning emphasizes the important role of hands-on learning. The participants were able to better serve African American males through hands-on experience and through years of experience. When asked how they learned how to serve African American males, many if not all advisors mentioned that it was by experience. For example, Valerie described how experience has been her greatest teacher:

> Experience. Just doing it, getting to know different people, different people's experiences, what works, sometimes what doesn't work with a student. "Okay. I'm not going to do that again." Mostly just, like I said, just experience going to as many diversity trainings as you can.

> Valerie's point does not refer to experience only, but also to formal and nonformal diversity training. Also presented in the literature, was the important role that

reflection *upon* experience can play in learning (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1998). Reflection

is also listed as one of three ways to create equitable and inclusive environments for

students (NACADA Core Competencies, 2017). Each advisor was asked to reflect on a

critical incident in their initial entrance to advising and throughout their career. Each

participant provided an experience that was critical to their learning. Advisors were able

to reflect on their past experience(s) that were connected to what one learns in the

present, having potential for future application. In fact, hands-on learning experience was

found as the primary theme for the first research question. The advisors learning was

derived from experience; however, this came in several forms that included learning from

personal experience and the accumulation of professional experience.

Self-directed learning. Self-directed learning was shown most prominently in the

way's advisors chose to educate themselves. Advisors took ownership to improve their

own learning about African American male issues and concerns by reading, having

dialogue, exposing themselves to the culture by becoming proximate to the population at

hand, attending campus events, and gaining direct feedback from students without the

assistance a teacher/instructor (Tough, 1978). Tabitha, for instance, expressed her desire

to learn about the African American culture on her own.

> …also going to events on campus that include the African American culture, I
>
> think that could help. I try to attend all events on campus like that, just so
>
> students see that I support this, and I'm aware. Yeah, I guess that's really it. Yeah,
>
> if that can count, I would say I definitely do the MLK March. That's opened my
>
> eyes, just to the African American community in general. Yeah, stuff like that I

seek out on my own, just to, I guess learn, yes, but also just to show support, bring awareness, things like that.

Embedded within the advisors' experience was implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating those learning outcomes as they sought to show the student how much they cared. By doing so, advisors used various methods to establish a relationship with the student through individualizing the appointment, mentorship, listening, asking questions, and affirmation.

Transformative learning. Transformative learning is about changes in perspective or an inward change in reality that yields an outward manifestation (Clark, 1993). Part of transformative learning is the process of shifting meaning perspectives. Advisors found that much of their transformative learning was rooted in the experiences that took place in a powerful presentation format, particularly at conferences. For one advisor, Judy, the fact that a presentation was even provided on African American males made her think critically about the concerns of African American males that she had not considered. She mentioned that she had not seen this population as a concern and this sparked her interest. Judy noted her transformative experience during a presentation in which the attendees were provided with alarming information that "forever changed" the way she viewed African American males. Judy noted:

> It was in Atlanta. I was forever changed by that presentation, and it really made me think about, in general, advising African Americans so differently. I told the presenters that. I said, "I am forever changed. Here, I think I'm a veteran advisor. I've been advising." I said, "I know for sure that I will forevermore be a lifelong learner, but I am forever changed.

Transformative learning not only took place at conferences and workshops, but it also took place in the everyday workplace of advisors. For those participants who engaged in transformative learning, each expressed perspective shifts in which they began to think differently about the needs and concerns of their African American male students.

Elements of Workplace Learning

In this section, elements of workplace learning are discussed. Elements of workplace learning describe learning that is characterized by its context and social interactions. Communities of practice and situated cognition, while both related, are identified in light of the research questions and its findings. The following section will explore these two concepts within the research findings.

Communities of practice. Communities of practice were established mainly through the workplace. Advisors who participated in communities of practice were defined by their (a) interest in African American males/people, (b) sense of community as shown by discussions and information sharing, and (c) practice outcomes that included shared experiences. Communities of practice were represented in four of the findings discussed through the second research question. Participants were able to operate in communities of practice by conference attendance, and through dialogue, readings, and campus events. For many of the participants, conferences provided the best opportunity to participate in communities of practice as they engaged with several colleagues, attended specific presentations about African American males and African American issues in higher education, and engaged in conversations with other advisors. Judy

discussed the role that networking at a conference has played in her development as an advisor. She explained,

> And I also, the other thing I also did was when I was at NACADA and somebody was at my table or we're at a session and they said I work for a historically black college I was always drawn to ask questions. To ask them and say, "Well tell me about this." Or, "tell me about this." And it was more information gathering for me. I wanted to be more aware, and more informed.

Participants also engaged in conversations about African American males with their colleagues at work and in the office. Conversations were both intentional and informal, and provided rich knowledge and experiences of others. Each method provided advisors with meaningful discussion and information sharing. To add, NACADA (2017) also provides its members with the opportunity to join up to four advising communities that allow others to network with advisors with similar interests. A specific community for African American males or American students has not yet been created. However, there is a Multicultural concern that discusses advising students of diverse cultures.

Situated cognition. Situated cognition can also be referred to as contextual learning, meaning that the context itself shapes our learning and occurs within a specific context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within the research, it can be noted that the learning was contextual for advisors based on the college they worked in. For example, some advisors noted that they tend to work with students who are on academic probation or are undecided with their major as a result of the type of college they work in. Some advisors rely heavily on proper sequencing of courses in order to meet prerequisites for courses in certain majors, and some of these things might be learned through their own social

networks, while African American males might be more dependent on their advisors for such key information (Means, 2014). One advisor, Alyceia, discussed the nature of the demographics of her advisees. She explained,

So, working with students who were sort of exploring their place in the university. So, in general I work with a lot of students who were feeling kind of displaced. They're not quite sure what their home might look like at the university and then beyond that, one of my assignments in my role is to work with students who are reinstated from suspension. Those are some of the students that I see the most. So, I wrote on that demographic questionnaire that I might have a caseload of about 10 African American males right now, and most of those students are in really challenging circumstances right now, because of the nature of my job.

Alyceia also mentioned that the nature of her job has shaped the way that she delivers information and her thought process when working with these students. Other advisors noted more department barriers because their college requires more internships, practicums, block schedules, and so on. Some advisors discussed overcoming academic challenges with regard to GPA admittance. These issues were contextual and required different approaches with students because not all colleges required an internship, practicums, block schedules, detailed sequencing, and/or GPA admittance for their academic programs. These advisors varied in their method of learning and their experiences with African American males as a result of their context. As there are different subgroups of African American males, meaning that not all African American males operate in a similar manner, the same is true that not all African American males operate in a similar manner within each college. This notion is confirmed by the various

advising communities that have emerged within NACADA. Each college contains a unique set of challenges, thus the need for college-specific communities. NACADA (2017) provides advising communities like Liberal Arts Advisors, Fine Arts Student, and Health Professions. The specificity of the communities infers that there are differences in the type of advising that takes place based on the college. As mentioned above, the type of learning that takes place is situated within the context, meaning that the context itself shapes the learning. Thus, the advising approach might vary as a result of the context. The same is true when applied to African American males as a specific population of advisees.

Level of Formality

The level of formality refers to the setting in which learning occurred for the academic advisor. This study acknowledges the various learning settings that adults participate in. Learning is therefore divided into three categories: formal, nonformal, and informal settings. This section analyzes the research findings in relation to each of these learning contexts.

Formal learning. Formal learning is described as learning that is structured and often takes place in a classroom setting where education is the primary concern. This type of learning is often degree-based or has the option of obtaining a certification or some form of credentials. The formal education of the advisors varied. There was a clear divide between participants who believed that their degree-based education aided them in developing their multicultural awareness when working with students, and those who did not believe that their formal education developed them into being a better advisor in this regard. For the participants who believed that their education imparted some knowledge

pertinent to their work with diverse populations like African American males, these advisors' education included student affairs, political science, history, and psychology. Each of these educational backgrounds discussed African Americans in some aspect. While coursework in these fields of study did not dedicate concentrated efforts to discussing African American males, it did provide the advisors with *some* basic knowledge. Mary discussed how her formal education has provided her with insight:

> …let me say this, my undergraduate degree was in psychology, and I double majored with anthropology. I feel, I believe ... I don't feel I believe that the combination of those two degrees, those two majors has prepared me to be an academic advisor for all students, but it's also given me insight on different cultures. Even though, we are all created equally we're all created equally in a different environment. I think the biggest part is being able to understand that, and not only did my education give that, but all of my experience as an academic advisor has given me that lesson, so to speak.

The remaining advisors simply concluded that their formal education did not aid them in their ability to better serve African American males. While it cannot be concluded that formal education necessarily makes one a great advisor, it can be inferred that formal education *can* provide insight into different facets of advising, in this case, working with diverse populations such as African American males although that was not typically the case for study participants.

Nonformal learning. In addition to formal learning, the participants' experiences also provided evidence of nonformal learning and education. Nonformal learning can be understood as organized learning that is sponsored by institutions or agencies but takes

place outside of the formal educational system (Merriam et al, 2007). This form of learning is still guided by a curriculum and administered by a facilitator. A teacher assists their self-determined interests, by using an organized curriculum, as is the case in many adult education courses and workshops (Livingstone, 2001). In this study, the nonformal activities that were used to describe learning by the participants were conferences, training, and workshops (e.g. sessions held by the university outside of the advising setting). Each participant expressed a desire to be a lifelong learner and actively chose to engage in nonformal learning activities as a way to development as an advisor. Valerie expressed the benefits of nonformal learning as an advisor:

> And sometimes you need help; you need the diversity training or whatever, to learn how to best connect with the demographic, or things like that. So, just to be a better ... Not just a better advisor, but help the student be successful overall.

> Nonformal learning also appeared to be embedded within the campus culture. Each advisor noted that they enjoyed nonformal learning regardless of the type and actively sought ways to engage in the learning. It was implied that their supervisors were supportive of their efforts as they did not list barriers to participating in nonformal learning such as conferences, which contradicts the results found by Tokarczyk (2001). Self-directed learning also appeared to be interrelated to nonformal learning as participants actively chose to opt into this type of learning. Through nonformal learning, advisors also were able to have transformative experiences because many of the topics discussed were related to diversity issues that challenged the perspectives of many. Many of the transformative experiences listed occurred in nonformal learning settings,

although not all. The remaining transformative experiences occurred in the context of informal learning.

Informal learning. Finally, informal learning describes learning that involves the pursuit of understanding knowledge or skill which typically occurs naturally, whether on an individual or group basis, without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria (Livingstone, 2001). The themes and subthemes related to informal learning included reading, dialogue, campus events, and feedback. The inclusion of informal learning allowed me to capture other forms of learning that have not generally been considered in the literature. Often, the advisors were not promoted to participate in these types of activities. Stacie described her experience attending campus events that prompted learning for her:

> Just going to something like the multicultural graduation ceremony that they house has been rewarding for advisors because usually, somebody goes each semester. Those are such uplifting kinds of experiences there where you see students and family and how much support they have for each other, that I would think experiences like that are good training is just that you got to get out of your office and participate in the rest of the campus.

Of all the concepts of adult learning mentioned in this study, informal learning appears to have the greatest impact on advisor learning and development. The second research question sought to understand the various methods of learning advisors participated in to advise their African American males better. Throughout the interviews, advisors were asked what other ways outside of formal and nonformal means did they learn. It appeared that the informal method of learning provided rich knowledge and

understanding that may have taken the least amount of effort. This method of learning was something that was embedded into the everyday lives of the advisors. Tokarczyk's (2001) research sought to analyze the workplace learning experiences of professional advisors, highlighting informal learning as the most impactful form of learning for the workplace. In line with Tokarczyk (2001), informal learning appeared to be most impactful for advisors in this study.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conceptual Framework Revisited

The adult learning literature and in particular the theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), self-directed learning (Tough, 1971), and transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) constituted the core of the conceptual framework which defined the breadth of this study. Also included in the framework are other concepts such as formal, nonformal, and informal learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Elements of workplace leaning were also mentioned in the form of situated cognition (Seel, 2001) and communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). A goal of the study was to demonstrate that the findings support the conceptual framework and to provide relevance for an adult learning framework.

Participating advisors were asked to describe or relate verbally two incidents they recalled as critical to their learning about African American male advice—one from earlier in their career which played a triggering role in spurring their interest to learn more about African males, and one more recent. The critical incidents provided further insight into both the experiences of advisors working with African American males and the ways that advisors learn how to better advise these students. The participants described their experiences with African American males, experiential learning being prominent, frequently highlighted hands-on learning, utilizing trail-and-error strategies, and drawing from their own experiences, as the primary means they acquired and maintained the knowledge to serve African American males better. In fact, as demonstrated by the theme "I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care" theme, the advisors' years of experience and ability to just immerse themselves

in appointments initially had the most impact on their workplace learning. In keeping with step six in Colaizzi's (1978) process for phenomenological data analysis calls for providing a complete description of the phenomenon, Figure 3.1 provides a revised pictorial representation of the study conceptual framework, expanding the circle on the left to incorporates themes derived from participants' emic descriptions of the experience of advising African American male (Research Question One). The constellation of circles on the right reiterates the learning theory components of the framework, all of which were supported by the data addressing Research Question Two.

The inclusion of a second research question also provided insight into modes of learning through which advisors sought to better advise their students. Three models of adult learning utilized by the advisors were experiential learning, self-directed learning, and transformative learning. In addition to these adult learning concepts, the findings also suggest the informal of both nonformal learning and informal learning activities. Participants frequently relied on both conference and workshop attendance as well as drawing on other colleagues, remaining engaged with literature, engaging more with African American males outside of the office, attending multicultural campus events, and acquiring feedback from students to initially obtain or maintain their skills and knowledge to better advise African American males. In fact, as shown by the "Educate yourself" theme, informal learning strategies was repeatedly emphasized and a preferred method the advisors employed to enhance their advising skills with these students.

Figure 3.1 Revised Conceptual Framework for Learning to Advise African American
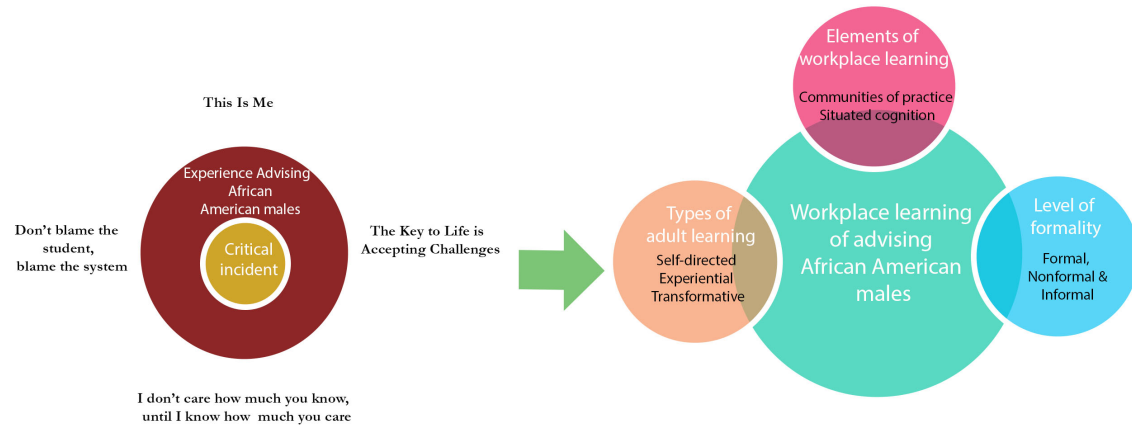

Figure 3.1 Represents the exhaustive description of the experience advising African American Males.

Merriam et al. (2007) suggests that about 70% of learning in the workplace is informal. The findings from this study support this idea that much learning in the workplace occurs in an informal way. Although informal learning strategies were frequently reported in the findings, nonformal learning was also referenced by participants. The participants found great value in attending conferences, which contradicts previous literature that indicates that advisors see participation in nonformal learning such as conferences as problematic (Sofranko, 2004; Tokarczyk, 2001). Those that found conferences problematic mentioned redundancy of information presented. The participants in this study did have financial support from their administration which is a significant factor in their value of nonformal learning. Participants also discussed their

formal education, but in general it was not discussed as vital to their acquisition of skills to become a better advisor in general, or for African American males specifically.

The findings from this study demonstrate an alignment with the theories of adult learning. As advisors sought to improve their advising skills with African American males, each participant engaged in some type of learning: experiential learning, self-directed learning, and/or transformative learning. In addition, advisors engaged in elements of workplace learning through communities of practice and situated cognition. Thus, the selected theories of adult learning theories provided an appropriate lens for analyzing data. Each of the adult learning theories and concepts are interrelated, meaning that there is crossover and an advisor could engage in multiple forms of learning simultaneously with others. For example, an advisor could have had a critical incident in their initial advising experience with an African American male, which they reflected on and were then prompted to be self-directed in seeking out opportunities to learn about how to better serve them. While being self-directed in their pursuit to serve this student, the advisor might participate in a conference where they attend a workshop dedicated to learning about African American males in advising. While at this workshop, the advisor might engage in dialogue and conversation with a community of advisors that also have interest in serving African American males. In this example, the advisor has participated in experiential and self-directed learning, nonformal learning, and communities of practice. Therefore, the adult learning theories and concepts within the workplace often apply simultaneously with one another.

In the case of the critical incidents, as mentioned earlier, this provided an opportunity for advisors to reflect on past experiences both entering and continuing

within advising as they worked with African American males. A critical incident seeks to describe as something that contributes either positively or negatively to a phenomenon (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident was used as a research tool to generate information on the advisor's learning experiences to be analyzed by the learning theories, modifying the way Flanagan originally used it for research on the competencies of airline pilots. From the findings, it appears that the many of the participants had significant incidents that prompted them to act. However, not all advisors had a critical incident within the advising context with African American males that sparked interest in creating and developing ways to serve these students better. For example, Ashton, being an African American male, drew his passion for serving African American males from his own personal experiences as an African American male. Other advisors could recall critical incidents, but they did not immediately prompt an interest in seeking more knowledge. For many, they were everyday incidents that happened outside of an advising appointment. For instance, Alyceia's interest in learning more about African American males was due to seeing a colleague's conference presentation.

Research Implications

This study sought to build understanding of the phenomenon of workplace learning for professional academic advisors advising African American males. Primarily, this study provides initial understanding of the learning activities that advisors participate in given the limited focus in advising literature. In addition, the findings of this study provide implications for training and professional development and extends existing knowledge regarding workplace learning for academic advisors.

First, the findings in this study provide a deeper understanding of the types of activities that contribute to advisor learning. Nonformal learning activities such as workshops and conferences have been critiqued for not solving the advisor training and professional development dilemma, given that there is a single-day workshop that does not reach the majority of the profession (e.g., Sofranko, 2004; Tokarczyk, 2001). However, the findings from this study suggest otherwise and speak to the richness that is found in nonformal activities. The institution studied appears to provide financial support to its advisors for conference attendance, the desire for participation in conferences and workshops yields a different narrative than what has previously been presented in the literature. Each of the advisors who mentioned conference attendance appeared to have gained something that they used in their daily advising practices. While there is much to be gained at conference, it is still important to remember that what is gained at conference relating to African American males, is not much although more than was is generally provided through more formal training. Thus, there remains a limited focus on advising African American males in literature and advisor preparation programs. However, the small amount that is offered at conferences, appears to have had a powerful impact on the advisors that have attended them. Thus, it would be beneficial for administrators to consider allocating funds for professional development. As mentioned in the literature, advising is closely tied to retention (Hunter & White, 2004), making advisors even more critical for students from minoritized groups at predominately White institutions.

This study specifically investigated the learning activities of advisors for African American males given the limited focus on advising African American males in the

related literature and advisor preparation programs. It is valuable to know what advisors rely on in order to prepare themselves for a particular subpopulation of students. However, the investigation also led to additional questions concerning how advising centers conduct training and professional development. The literature suggests that advisors have almost no training on diverse populations let alone African American males (Brown, 2008; Creamer, 2000; Habley, 2000; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; McGillin, 2000; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). Therefore, this study attempted to identify examples of workplace learning to specify the types of learning activities that can influence advisors' training and professional development. In other words, if advisors have little-to-no formal training for diverse populations or African American males, through what means can advisor training and professional development be improved?

In the current study, the findings also provided insight for developing a culture of professional development within advising offices. Previous investigations of advisor learning have been examined, such as communities of practice and mentorship (Lewis, 2000; Tokarczyk, 2001). Tokarczyk's (2001) study supported advisors' reliance on informal learning. The prominence of informal learning in this investigation expands the findings of informal learning activities of Tokarcyk's study. Advisors noted participating in dialogue, reading, proximity (e.g. allowing oneself to be close in interaction with a group), campus events, and feedback. However, it is important to point out that the two participants who discussed these informal learning strategies were in leadership positions within their advising office. The participants mentioned creating an office culture of professional development in which they were ensuring that their staff became lifelong

learners. Each of the participants in leadership positions believed that better people make better advisors (Archambault, 2015).

The NACADA Core Competencies (2017) stresses that advisors should continually review relevant literature that informs practice. The language used in this guide does not specifically speak to *only* reviewing literature specific to academic advising. The findings in this study support the need and impact that reading has on the development and growth of academic advisors. Moreover, the findings from this study suggest that advisors benefited from readings that were not directly related to advising. The participants who emphasized reading generally looked "outside of the box" of advising to develop themselves as an individual, and some believed that a better person is a better advisor. Advisors who read widely beyond the advising literature appeared to be more in-tune with understanding the relevance of this study as they were knowledgeable of the literature in higher education on African American males. Examples of their reading included but not limited to articles on Black Lives Matter, articles specific to African American males, etc. As a result, many of the advisors were able to speak specifically to their experiences when advising African American males related to research question one, providing examples such as using affirmation with their students and understanding the campus climate and how it impacts the advising relationship.

Recommendations

As with any research, there are recommendations for practice and future research. The following sections will discuss my recommendation for practice as well as recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Practice

A number of recommendations from practice can be made based on study findings. First, additional thought should be given to developing an office culture that embodies professional development. The findings suggest that there are other ways to provide professional development to advisors beyond conferences and workshops. As previously mentioned, better people become better advisors, meaning that it is the role of the supervisor to constantly assist the advisors in developing as an individual and a professional, in order to ensure that they are the best advisor. However, the findings suggest supervisors should be intentional in their efforts to create a workplace setting that encourages lifelong learning. In this way, supervisors might consider creating a safe space and having more group discussions where best practices can be shared. Along these same lines, supervisors of advising centers may be able to choose books for the team to read together and share their thoughts. On-or-off campus field trips to various resources (i.e. African American Museums, events specific to African American populations) are also helpful tools when developing your staff. It is also important to note, however, that while participants listed several specific strategies that have been used in their offices to develop their staff, that these methods are not finite.

Second, with regard to training sponsored by the organization, multicultural topics and topics related to societal bias and discrimination should be included. Questions were asked during the interviews if advisors had received training within the organization on advising diverse populations. The overwhelming response was, no. Because the findings revealed that given little or no preparation was provided regarding multicultural concerns, there was certainly no training specifically on advising African American males. However, the participants did note that as a reflection, they wished more discussions on

multicultural concerns, especially those involving African American males, within advising were discussed during training. Therefore, it is important that training topics be reconsidered in light of advising diverse populations given that higher education demographics are changing, reflecting a more diverse population than has been seen in recent history (Brown, 2008; Brown & Rivas, 1993). Many advisors relied on previous formal training to assist them with advising diverse populations. The findings suggest that supervisors or those who play a large part in training should serve in providing at least rudimentary knowledge of working with diverse populations, especially if a new advisor does not have a formal degree that should prepare them. Similarly, the format of training for advisors should also be reconsidered. Finally, it should be noted that based on the themes that were illustrated, the relational piece when advising African American males is of utmost importance. Themes that yielded relationship and rapport building should be emphasized. For example, *It's a family affair,* provides insight that family is important and that a relationship for an African American male may be viewed in a familial construct. This lets us know that *Individualizing the appointment* is critical to this process when working with African American males. When connecting these methods to prior research, we find that African American males utilize advising more often as a source of direction for their educational journey than their female counterparts as well as their White male counterparts. As such, the advisor is again highlighted as a key source to persistence and retention for African American males. While these methods are critical for African American males, they can surely be utilized with other student populations for good advising practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results from the study warrant additional research focused on the intersection between academic advising and adult learning. One area of opportunity for future research is to investigate the community college sector of advising for African American males. As discussed in literature, there are areas of overlap that African American males experience in both community colleges and four-year public institutions. However, despite the similarities there are varieties of differences that exist, one of these differences being that there is generally a higher population of African Americans in attendance at community colleges. There are also differences that exist among the African American populations that attend community colleges. In addition to the differences that exist among African American males at the above types of institutions, there are also differences that exist among advising styles because of the vast differences presented at each type of institution. The overall purposes, goals, and demographics of students provide new perspectives and challenges for academic advisors. It is important to point out that findings from this study are likely not to be transferable to that setting, but also important that research on the advising African American males in community colleges does occur in the future.

Another area of opportunity for future research is to investigate private universities and what it looks like to advise African American males on this type of campus. This study was centered on the learning activities of academic advisors working with African American males at a large, public, HSI in the Southwest region of the United States. As mentioned previously, with variation among community colleges and four-year institutions, there may be important differences between four-year public and four-year private institutions, in terms of the population of African American males

attending and advising structures, as well as the unique characteristics of private universities. Hence valuable information may be gained from studying the learning experiences of advisors of African American males in private institution settings.

A third area of opportunity for future research is to investigate advisor learning for advising African American males across other large public institutions. This study was delimited to concentrate on one particular institution in the Southwest region. Future studies could investigate this phenomenon at other institutions that are similar in status, size, advising structures, and demographics. Such a study would be able to expand and make comparisons that would be more inclusive of advisor's voices. The findings could vary across institutions and hence would add to a broader understanding.

Another area of opportunity for future research would be to investigate how advisors learn to advise other diverse populations. A major component of this study focused on the learning strategies utilized by advisors as they worked with African American males. As this study focused on the advising of African American males, other studies could be centered similarly. For example, another study could examine the learning activities of advisors when working with African American females or Latino males. The possibilities for research with diverse populations that are not adequately represented in the literature are endless. It is imperative that we move away from a "one size fits all" approach to understanding the delicate intricacies of specific diverse student populations.

Limitations

This chapter began with the application of the conceptual framework, which includes the rational for the frameworks applied. The intentions of including the

application of the conceptual framework was to provide an understanding of the lenses being used to understand the findings of this study. Nevertheless, all empirical investigations must discuss limitations. Limitations must be recognized in order for me to ensure that the application and interpretation are applied correctly (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The limitations of this study are detailed below.

The first limitation of this study was my inability to obtain participants from one of the colleges at the university. My original goal was to have at least one participant from each college to ensure diversity of thought, and perhaps providing different perspectives that could vary from college-to-college when working with African American males. Given that there are various subgroups that exist within the African American male group, there is a great possibility that there are differences among the students across the college. This may prompt differences in responses from the academic advisors. Not having data from one advisor in one college means that conclusions may be limited by not hearing from advisors in this college.

Another limitation existed related to the perspectives represented among the advisors who served as research participants. The intent was to have the same number of advisors who are women and men in the participant group. That is, the sampling strategy for participants aimed for a sample that was diverse with regard to gender. However, there was only one male participant in the sample. The recruitment method that was chosen for this study solicited to all advisors who met basic criteria based on their online profiles through the college website. Moreover, the institution of choice did not have many male advisors. I utilized the public emails from the directories available and hoped to have at least two-to-three male advisors. While this may be a limitation of the study, it

is reflective of the NACADA membership profile that was mentioned earlier in the study. While there was not a larger participation of male advisors, the reader should be able to apply the presented information for other advisors in higher education in a similar context (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations do not negate the findings of this study but rather prevent the research from being misinterpreted (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The following section is intended to build upon the critical analysis to propose recommendations for future research.

Conclusion

This study, at its core, is an investigation of learning among professional academic advisors. In the context of this study, I sought to understand the learning activities of professional academic advisors when working with African American males. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to understand how academic advisors learn to perform their role with a specific underrepresented population, given that there is limited research about advising that population in advising literature and a lack of targeted discussion in trainings and professional development. The study can be summarized by what the research infers and how these workplace learning activities can be considered when working with African American males.

The findings of this study indicate that advisors use a variety of learning modes in the workplace. The most notable forms of learning were nonformal and informal, such as learning through conferences and workshops (nonformal learning) and learning through dialogue/conversations (informal) as the means that the participants perceived to have enhanced their initial acquisition and maintenance of professional knowledge and skills

when working with African American males. Formal learning was vaguely mentioned as contributing to advisor learning when working specifically with African American males, although about half of the participants mentioned having some exposure to multicultural issues.

The findings also indicate that outside of nonformal and informal training, there was little to no discussion around advising diverse populations. Participants expressed a desire to have some type of formal multicultural training. In terms of ongoing professional development, advisors sought much of their learning toward multicultural issues through conferences and workshops, but also found alternative methods for gaining additional knowledge and skills.

Finally, the findings revealed that three adult learning models identified as lenses through which to analyze data were all evident in the workplace learning experiences of the advisors. Experiential learning, often so job-embedded as to reflect situated cognition, was demonstrated and served as a foundation for all the participants' experiences. When attempting to develop and enhance professional skills and knowledge, self-directed learning was also used. Throughout many of the opportunities the advisors had both inside and outside of the appointments with students, advisors experienced transformative learning which caused changes in their perspectives and their practice. Finally, communities of practice and situated learning arose in the workplace learning experiences of those advising African American males.

The findings of this study make significant contributions to the current advising literature. First, the findings contradicted previous research that conferences and workshops did not have a significant impact on advisor learning. The findings also

contradicted previous research that states that nonformal modes of learning are ineffective. Rather, such learning appears to have had a significant impact for the advisors interviewed, as indicated that the fact that this mode of learning was cited by every participant several times when discussing their learning about advising African American males. The participants also indicated a variety of ways they participated in informal modes of learning to support the nonformal modes of learning sponsored by professional associations and the institution where they worked.

Not only did this study contribute information in relation to the practitioner, but it also provided new information about advising African American males. Thus, the findings provide a different perspective that adds to the knowledge base on advisor learning that specifically focuses on a diverse population.

Most importantly, this study expands the definition of professional development for academic advisors, to include informal learning activities used by advisors as they seek the knowledge and skills needed to do a good job in advising African American males. Utilizing adult learning concepts, a new perspective is provided regarding workplace learning for advisors working with a diverse population. Based on the findings from this study, there is potential for further exploration into how staff advisors learn to work with underrepresented populations, as well as other positive implications for higher education.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: EMAIL RECRUITING: INITIAL AND REFERRED PARTICIPANTS

To:
From: McClain, Terrance J
BCC:
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Advising African-American Males: From the Advisor's Viewpoint

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Dear Interview Participant,

You have been invited to participate because you have been an advisor for at least five years, have advised some African American males, and work in an academic college that has at least 150 African-American males. You may also have been selected because you were recommended by another advisor as likely meeting the previously mentioned qualifications.

The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of advisors of African American male undergraduate students, both rewarding and challenging, and what prompts them to seek to learn more about advising African American male students. Beyond this, the study seeks to explore advisor participation in formal and informal learning activities aimed at better serving African American male advisees. It is expected that this study will create dialogue regarding best practices for academic advisors that work with African American males.

Your participation involves completing a 5-10-minute questionnaire, an in-person 60-90-minute interview, a follow-up in-person interview of approximately 30 minutes, and a follow-up phone call to ensure validity of findings from participant responses. Participation is voluntary, you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequences. If you consent to participate, please complete the attached form and return to me within the next week.

To ask questions about this research please contact me by email at tjm80@txstate.edu or by phone at (713) 351-9365.

This project [insert IRB Reference Number or Exemption Number] was approved by the Texas State IRB on [insert IRB approval date or date of Exemption]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

Email Recruiting: From compiled list of advisors

To:
From: McClain, Terrance J
BCC:
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Advising African-American Males: From the Advisor's Viewpoint

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Dear Interview Participant,

You have been invited to participate in a study to explore advisor participation in learning activities and the lack of resources regarding formal training and development for advising African American males. In order to participate in the study, you must have been an advisor for at least five years, have advised some African American males, and work in an academic college that has at least 150 African-American males.

The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of advisors of African American male undergraduate students, both rewarding and challenging, and what prompts them to seek to learn more about advising African American male students. Beyond this, the study seeks to explore advisor participation in formal and informal learning activities aimed at better serving African American male advisees. It is expected that this study will create dialogue regarding best practices for academic advisors that work with African American males.

Your participation involves completing a 5-10-minute questionnaire, an in-person 60-90-minute interview, a follow-up in-person interview of approximately 30 minutes, and a follow-up phone call to ensure validity of findings from participant responses. Participation is voluntary, you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequences. If you consent to participate, please complete the attached form and return to me within the next week.

To ask questions about this research please contact me by email at tjm80@txstate.edu or by phone at (713) 351-9365.

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APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the demographic questionnaire that you will be completing is to first

ensure that participants meet the criteria listed in the initial email and consent form as

well as to save time in face-to-face interview. The questionnaire also serves the purpose

of ensuring participant diversity, including variation based on gender, race/ethnicity, and

academic colleges. Finally, the questionnaire will aid me to become more familiar with

you as the participant.

Demographic
1. If you feel comfortable doing so, please state:
    a. Your gender
    b. The race/ethnicity with which you most closely identify

Employment
1. In your current advising position, do you primarily advise undergraduate
    students?

2. In your current advising position, what college/department are you associated
    with?

3. Total # of years as a professional academic advisor:

4. Total # of years as a professional academic advisor at the current institution (if
    different than above):

5. Total # of years working in higher education (if different than above):

6. How many African American male advisees would you estimate you currently
    have?

7. How many African American males would you estimate you have advised
    during your years as an academic advisor?

Education History

8. Please list all degrees that you have attained (including the specific area(s) of
    study):

Miscellaneous

9. To protect your identity, your real first name will not be used in the final report. If you wish, you may choose an alternate name/pseudonym; otherwise one will be assigned.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preface:
First, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experiences advising African American males.

1. What have you enjoyed most about advising African American males?

2. What have been some perceived challenges you've experienced when advising African American males?

3. How would you describe your approach to advising for African American males? How did you develop this approach?

4. What activities/experiences have been the most influential in building your competence/confidence as a professional academic advisor working with these students?

    Follow up:
    - Can you give me an example?
    - How does your approach to advising African American males differ from advising other student populations, if at all?

Critical Incident Questions
Now that we have gone through a few questions, I would like to refer to the critical incident questions that were sent to you in my initial email to provide you the opportunity to think and reflect on particular experiences.

5. I'd like you to think of the time when you first became an academic advisor, and you met with African American male students. I'd like to discuss a critical time such as this.

    - What were the details of the situation/what was it that you needed to learn?

    - How did you feel and react; what did you do?

    - Describe the learning process.

    - Did you do anything that was especially effective or ineffective in order to remedy the situation?

    - What was the outcome or result of your action/what did you learn?

Preface:
Next, given the limited focus on advising African American males in advising literature and advisor preparation programs, I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you have learned to improve your practice in advising African American males?

6. In what ways has your formal education prepared you for working with a diverse group of students as a professional academic advisor of African American males? What limitations do you see in how that education prepared you?

7. What comes to mind when you think about the terms "training" and "professional development"? What sort of activities and/or feelings do you associate with these terms?

8. How did you initially learn about meeting the advising needs of the African American male population at your institution (common student characteristics, etc.)? As the student profile changes, how have you learned about the changes and how to incorporate them into your daily practices when working with African American males?

9. Please describe (in detail) your training experiences for advising minority populations upon becoming a professional academic advisor?
   a. How was your training structured/in what sort of activities did you engage?

   b. What topics/concepts/skills did you learn through your training?

   c. Who was involved in your training (names of specific individuals are not necessary, but roles are of interest) and in what ways were they involved?

10. Although, I have asked previously asked about training related to advising African American males, I'd like to ask you more here. Please describe (in detail) your training experiences for advising African American males upon becoming a professional academic advisor?

   d. How was your training structured/in what sort of activities did you engage?

   e. What topics/concepts/skills did you learn through your training?

   f. Who was involved in your training (names of specific individuals are not necessary, but roles are of interest) and in what ways were they involved?

11. What are some of the ways you learned to advise African American males beyond formal training and professional development?

Follow up:
- How did you find that activity contribute to your learning or improved your practice?
- Have you worked with colleagues to enhance your professional learning? If so, describe.
- Did you get assistance from others in the advising profession (i.e. supervisor, resources, journals, etc.)?
- How has your learning impacted your advising practices with African American males?

12. What informal learning experiences related to African American males are you *currently* involved in?

   Follow-up:
   - Was this activity initiated by choice? At work/during work/outside of work?
   - Why did you select this particular learning experience?
   - Which of your current learning activities do you feel is most useful to your practice at this time?
   - Why?

Follow-up Interview/ 2nd Interview

1. I'd like you to reflect on your entire career to this point as a professional academic advisor. In the course of your career, you have acquired new skills and grown as a professional. For example, perhaps you became more adept with issues and/or best practices around African American males. I'd like to discuss such a learning experience.

   - What were the details of this learning experience/what it is that you needed or wanted to learn?

   - How did the learning come about/how did you realize the need/what motivated you?

   - What did the learning experience look like, who was involved, etc.?

   - What was the outcome or result/what did you learn?

APPENDIX D: CRITICAL INCIDENT QUESTIONS

Critical Incident #1

I'd like you to think of the time when you first became an academic advisor, and you met with African American male students. I'd like to discuss a critical time such as this.

- What were the details of the situation/what was it that you needed to learn?

- How did you feel and react; what did you do?

- Describe the learning process.

- Did you do anything that was especially effective or ineffective in order to remedy the situation?

- What was the outcome or result of your action/what did you learn?

Critical Incident #2

I'd like you to reflect on your entire career to this point as a professional academic advisor. In the course of your career, you have acquired new skills and grown as a professional. For example, perhaps you became more adept with issues and/or best practices around African American males. I'd like to discuss such a learning experience.

- What were the details of this learning experience/what it is that you needed or wanted to learn?

- How did the learning come about/how did you realize the need/what motivated you?

- What did the learning experience look like, who was involved, etc.?

- What was the outcome or result/what did you learn?

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Advising African American Males: From the Advisors Viewpoint

Principal Investigator: Terrance J. McClain

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon

Email: tjm80@txstate.edu
Phone: 512-245-6237

Email: jr24@txstate.edu
Phone: 512-245-8048

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
You are invited to participate in a study regarding your experiences as a professional academic advisor working with African American males. In particular, the study will seek information about your learning experiences, both formal and informal, as you have sought to better serve African American males. My desire is that the information learned from this study will contribute to a better understanding of how advisors seek to better serve African American male undergraduate students. This is NOT an evaluation of you, or your preparation. You are being asked to participate because you have been an advisor for at least five years, have advised some African American males, and work in an academic college that has at least 150 African-American males.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in the following:
- 1st Demographic Questionnaire and critical incident review
- 2nd procedure One 60-90-minute interview about critical incident and workplace activities
- 3rd procedure One 30-minute follow-up interview about your professional development activities.
- 4th procedure One 30-minute telephone exchange for member-checking

We will set up a time for you to meet at your office where you conduct advising appointments or a location most comfortable to you. You will first complete a questionnaire and return it within the next week before the initial interview. You will also review the critical incident questions before the initial interview to provide quality responses. Then, the second list of critical incident questions will be provided at the close of the first interview for the follow-up interview. Finally, once all data has been collected

and analyzed, the interviewer will call you to provide the result to ensure validity of the participants responses.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
The survey will include a section requesting demographic information. We will make every effort to protect participants' confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

In the event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Texas State University employee, you may contact the University Health Services for counseling services at list 512-245-2208. They are located at LBJ Student Center, 5-4.1.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will create dialogue regarding best practices for academic advisors that work with African American males.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team, and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS
If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, by email at tjm80@txstate.edu or by phone at (713) 351-9365.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Study   **Signature** of Study   Date
Participant   Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

TEXAS ★ STATE
UNIVERSITY
SAN MARCOS
The rising STAR of Texas

In future correspondence please refer to 2018552

May 21, 2018

Terrance McClain
Texas State University
601 University Dr.
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Terrance:

Your application 2018552 titled, "Advising African American Males: From the Advisors Viewpoint" was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB and approved. It has been determined there are: (1) research procedures consistent with a sound research design and they do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. (2) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (3) selection of subjects is equitable; and (4) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects' welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects. (4) Compensation will not be provided for study participation.

This project is therefore approved at the Expedited Review Level until April 30, 2019

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments, please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance.

Report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Notify the IRB of any unanticipated events, serious adverse events, and breach of confidentiality within 3 days.

Sincerely,

Monica Gonzales

Monica Gonzales
IRB Regulatory Manager
Office of Research Integrity and Compliance
Texas State University

CC: Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
601 University Drive | JCK #489 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4616
Phone: 512.245.2314 | *fax:* 512.245.3847 | WWW.TXSTATE.EDU

This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University-San Marcos, a member of The Texas State University System.

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