

REPRESENTATION MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND  
PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) STUDENTS IDENTIFYING WITH ACADEMIC ADVISORS

by

Temeshia N. Lemons

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Breck L. Perry, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Darren D. Howland, Ph.D., Committee Member

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) at a public higher education institution. The theory guiding this study was the relational cultural theory (RCT), as it assisted with understanding the importance of BIPOC students developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. This study's central research question asked, "What are the experiences of BIPOC students building positive relationships with assigned academic advisors?" A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to explore further the experiences shared among BIPOC undergraduate students who have underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. This phenomenological study occurred at a public higher education institution. The participants were enrolled at a public higher education institution and identified as BIPOC. I have selected individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing as the three data collection methods to connect to the purpose of my study and the central research question to attain triangulation. The collected data is analyzed using a hermeneutical framework. The thematic findings for this study were lack of relationships, positive advising experiences, motivation and encouragement, lack of empathy, creative problem-solving, the importance of culture focusing on a sense of comfort and relatability, race not being a primary factor with a focus on shared experiences, creating friendships, and frequent communication.

*Keywords:* academic advisors, BIPOC, college students, identifiable relationships, underdeveloped relationships

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to God and my ancestors because, without them, none of this would be possible. To my entire family, who has taught me that family is not just an important thing, but it is everything! To my Mom, Melissa Rufus, thank you for giving me all that you had at a time when you did not have enough to give to yourself. The strength you found to pour into me has shaped me into the person I am today. Thank you. To Nia-Imani, my firstborn child, you were the first to bless me with becoming a mother, and I humbly thank you. All of the hard work that I do, Nia, I need you to know that it has always begun because of you. I love you deeply! To Autumn, my youngest princess, who is too young to read and has no clue what is taking place. Just know that Mommy loves you, and I will continue to try to be one of the best role models I can be. To Tyler Dean, my bonus son, who has accepted me unconditionally. Thank you for allowing me to raise such a kind-hearted, responsible, bright king. Mommy T loves you! To my mother-in-law, Nedra Lemons, my "Mamoo," thank you for your support. You are indeed my second mom. I thank you and love you for embracing me like your very own. To my husband, Erik Lemons, my number-one supporter throughout this journey! I could not have done this without you. Thank you for all of the support and encouragement. Taking on "mother duties" while upholding your very own obligations is not easy, but you did this so sincerely and effortlessly. I will forever be grateful. I love you! To my closest friends, who became my sisters: Dr. Alberta Tamika Quick, Aneesah Nelson Wright, Charisma Jackson, LaKeesha Eure, Maryann Diaz, Dr. Tacquice Wiggan Davis, and Tiffany Franklin, the way you ladies have all supported, inspired, and emerged into me in your unique ways is astounding! You ladies have taught me and shown me many experiences and a plethora of knowledge! To everyone mentioned and those not mentioned, thank you all. It truly takes a village. This one is for you!

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication .....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
Table of Contents .....	7
List of Tables .....	13
List of Abbreviations .....	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	15
Overview .....	15
Background .....	15
Historical Context .....	16
Social Context.....	17
Theoretical Context.....	18
Problem Statement .....	19
Purpose Statement.....	20
Significance of the Study .....	20
Theoretical .....	20
Empirical.....	21
Practical.....	22
Research Questions .....	22
Central Research Question.....	22
Sub-Question One .....	23

Sub-Question Two .....	23
Sub-Question Three .....	23
Definitions.....	23
Summary .....	24
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	26
Overview .....	26
Theoretical Framework .....	26
Related Literature.....	29
The Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Experience .....	30
Student, Advisor, and Mentor Relationships .....	39
The Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Faculty and Staff Experience .....	42
Race and Culture .....	48
BIPOC Student Development .....	50
Summary .....	56
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS .....	58
Overview .....	58
Research Design.....	58
Research Questions.....	59
Central Research Question.....	59
Sub-Question One .....	60
Sub-Question Two .....	60
Sub-Question Three .....	60
Setting and Participants.....	60



Site .....	60
Participants.....	61
Recruitment Plan.....	62
Researcher's Positionality.....	62
Interpretive Framework .....	63
Philosophical Assumptions .....	63
Researcher's Role .....	65
Procedures.....	65
Data Collection Plan .....	66
Individual Interviews .....	67
Focus Groups .....	70
Protocol Writing.....	72
Data Analysis .....	72
Trustworthiness.....	76
Credibility .....	77
Transferability.....	77
Dependability.....	78
Confirmability.....	78
Ethical Considerations .....	78
Summary .....	80
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	82
Overview.....	82
Participants.....	82

Addie.....	83
Adelina.....	84
Ashanti.....	84
Celeste.....	85
Davina.....	85
Gabriel.....	85
Gunay.....	86
Jabari.....	86
Jose.....	87
Liz.....	87
Mai.....	88
Maria.....	88
Maya.....	88
Naomi.....	89
Rey.....	89
Results.....	90
Lack of Relationships.....	91
Positive Advising Experiences.....	92
Motivation and Encouragement.....	92
Lack of Empathy.....	94
Creative Problem-Solving.....	95
The Importance of Culture.....	96
Race is Not a Primary Factor.....	99

Creating Friendships .....	100
Frequent Communication.....	101
Research Question Responses.....	102
Central Research Question.....	103
Sub-Question One .....	103
Sub-Question Two .....	105
Sub-Question Three .....	106
Summary .....	107
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	108
Overview .....	108
Discussion .....	108
Summary of Thematic Findings.....	108
Interpretation of Findings .....	109
Implications for Policy or Practice .....	111
Empirical and Theoretical Implications.....	113
Limitations and Delimitations.....	120
Recommendations for Future Research .....	121
Conclusion .....	123
References.....	125
Appendix A.....	155
Appendix B .....	156
Appendix C .....	157
Appendix D.....	160

Appendix E .....	161
Appendix F.....	162
Appendix G.....	164
Appendix H.....	165
Appendix I .....	166
Appendix J .....	167
Appendix K.....	168

## List of Tables

Table 1. Open-Ended Interview Questions .....	68
Table 2. Open-Ended Focus Group Questions .....	71
Table 3. Protocol Writing Prompt.....	73
Table 4. Participants.....	85
Table 5. Themes and Sub-Themes.....	73
Table 6. Research Questions Thematic Alignment.....	105
Table 7. Theoretical Applications.....	118

### **List of Abbreviations**

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST)

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT)

Target of Opportunity Programs (TOPS)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

As Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) continue to grow and develop, HEIs must understand the importance of supporting all students who attend HEIs. Unfortunately, many students need more support and demand change (Edwards et al., 2022). The problem is that college students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. Historical prejudice against BIPOC students has occurred within education over the last hundreds of years (Best Colleges, 2021). This study aims to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC students attending HEIs and how this affects the ability to build meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. The theoretical significance focuses on the study's relational culture theory theoretical framework. There was an empirical significance of the BIPOC students' lived experiences and the practical relevance of higher education institutions' role in assisting BIPOC students in identifying and building relationships with assigned academic advisors. The findings of this study discuss the needs that BIPOC students require to develop meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. Key terms and definitions are highlighted and explained to assist with understanding the topic of this study.

### **Background**

BIPOC students attending higher education institutions struggle to build relationships with academic advisors (Edwards et al., 2022). Historical context has shown that BIPOC students were mistreated for centuries (Best Colleges, 2021). Recent studies discuss how BIPOC students deal with challenges when attempting to connect with academic advisors, resulting in a negative college experience (Endo, 2020; Western Washington, 2023). Higher education

institutions play a significant role in supporting BIPOC students in building relationships with academic advisors and mentors (Mayer, 2022).

## **Historical Context**

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which legally allowed the segregation of Black and White students attending public educational institutions as long as all institutions were equal (Best Colleges, 2021; Cornell et al.; History, 2023a; History, 2023b; Thomas, 2023). However, ensuring that all public educational institutions were treated equally in a society where Black people experienced daily racism and other segregated concerns was a challenge (Best Colleges, 2021; Braveman et al., 2022). People of color were unable to attend the same schools, ride the same bus, or use the same public facilities as Whites due to Jim Crow laws that allowed the legalization of segregation between the BIPOC and White communities (Arrasyid et al., 2022; History, 2023a; PBS, 2023). It was not until the early 1950s that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began pushing back on these unequal and unjust segregation laws (History, 2023a; James, 2022). The NAACP filed lawsuits on behalf of plaintiffs in states such as South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware that challenged the segregation laws in public schools (History, 2023a; Martinez-Cola, 2023).

Developing from these lawsuits was the famous case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, where plaintiff Oliver Brown filed a class-action suit in 1951 against the town of Topeka's Board of Education, located in Kansas, after Brown's daughter was denied admission to all-white elementary schools located in the city (Copeland, 2023; History, 2023a). In addition to Oliver Brown, four other cases related to school segregation were combined in 1952, creating the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case (History, 2023a; Yell, 2022). The *Brown vs. Board of Education* suit exposed the inequality concerns of public schools for students of color not



being equal to white students (Darling-Hammond & Darling-Hammond, 2022; History, 2023a).

Although on May 17, 1954, when announced that a unanimous verdict against school segregation would become active, and public schools were told to stop desegregation (Cook, 2023), many schools and local officials in southern states refused to comply with treating students of color equally (Black Colleges, 2021; History, 2023; Ware, 2022). Given the historical context that BIPOC students face within the educational system, it is unfortunate that some BIPOC students still have negative experiences throughout every educational journey.

### **Social Context**

Many students who identify as BIPOC face obstacles when establishing relationships and identifying with academic advisors and mentors (Endo, 2020; Western Washington, 2023). The problem of BIPOC students identifying with academic advisors and mentors has had a social impact not only on BIPOC students but also on higher education institutions, faculty, and staff (Law & Domínguez, 2022; Western Washington, 2023; Zerai & López, 2022). Research has shown that Higher education institutions across the county are beginning to address institutional racism and implement anti-racism strategies to provide better services and resources to BIPOC students (National Association, 2021; Western Washington, 2023). Institutions are beginning to recognize that BIPOC students need treatment that involves empathy, understanding, and acceptance of the BIPOC culture and identities (Western Washington, 2023). BIPOC faculty are also a population socially impacted by the problem of BIPOC students successfully building relationships with academic advisors and mentors. BIPOC faculty are underrepresented at many higher education institutions (Khamis, 2023), resulting in the need for better recruitment and retention of BIPOC faculty at higher education institutions. Since BIPOC students seek BIPOC faculty for advisement and mentoring services (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021; UCONN,

2021), the miniature representation of BIPOC faculty at HEIs feel pressured to provide services to BIPOC students, resulting in BIPOC faculty feeling overwhelmed and stressed because BIPOC faculty are not fully represented (Khamis, 2023; Lin, & Kennette, 2021).

### **Theoretical Context**

Racialization and colonialism continue to shape the experiences of BIPOC students attending higher education institutions (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). Research continues to reveal that BIPOC students are struggling to build relationships with academic advisors, resulting in BIPOC students having a less positive college experience compared to non-BIPOC students (Chakraverty, 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). Within the last few years, colleges and universities have been paying closer attention to the violence occurring to BIPOC students on college campuses and connecting how these incidents and other negative experiences have impacted how BIPOC students build relationships (Mayer, 2022; Whitman & Jayakumar, 2023). Studies continue to prove that higher education administrators have a significant role in assisting BIPOC students in making the necessary relationships throughout the college journey (Luedke, 2023; Mayer, 2022). When higher education institutions create an environment where BIPOC students feel welcomed and safe, this increases the opportunity for BIPOC students to feel secure to initiate building relationships with others (Mayer, 2022; Mayoum et al., 2022).

Mayer (2022) discussed how college campuses should provide more spaces on campus that offer a relaxed environment where students can gather to study, dine, and have meaningful conversations, which can help students develop and maintain diverse relationships with others. Introducing students to educational opportunities, diverse programming, and leadership opportunities also assisted with building various relationships (Mayer, 2022). Incorporating

interfaith friendships can assist BIPOC students in building positive relationships with others (Hudson et al., 2021; Mayer, 2022). When students create friendships related to interfaith, this increases the opportunity for students to show empathy and be more receptive and respectful to others (Hudson et al., 2021; Mayer, 2022). Higher education institutions are becoming aware of the issues affecting BIPOC students attending HEIs, allowing the opportunity to extend further research (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2022; Chakraverty, 2022; Hudson et al., 2021; Luedke, 2023; Mayer, 2022; Mayoum et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Whitman & Jayakumar, 2023). Higher education institutions can create a plan to address the problem of BIPOC students struggling to build relationships with assigned academic advisors, creating solutions that will result in better recruitment and retention within the BIPOC population.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that college students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors (Allen et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sarcedo, 2022; Salazar, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Students receive more career and psychosocial developmental support from advisors with similar racial and ethnic background experiences (Blanchard & Haccoun, 2019; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Scheitle et al., 2023). A sociocultural gap can occur when cross-racial matching occurs with mentor and mentee pairings (Sánchez et al., 2021). A sociocultural gap can negatively impact mentors' and mentees' relationships (Rasic et al., 2022; Sánchez et al., 2021). BIPOC students have problematic relationships with advisors because faculty view White students as ideal students who need worthier advisor support (Park & Bahia, 2022). These negative experiences BIPOC students face result in BIPOC students not trusting assigned academic advisors (Johnson et al., 2023; Sifuentes, 2021). Due to the lack of trust that BIPOC students have in academic advisors, they

cannot build meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors (Cropps, 2023; Sifuentes, 2021).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. At this stage in the research, developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors will be generally defined as student-advisor relationships that are motivated beyond the direction of academics (Cuseo, n.d.; Holland, 2020). The theory guiding this study was the relational cultural theory, as it assisted with understanding the importance of BIPOC students developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study includes an explanation of the involvement that this study produces to the base of knowledge from a theoretical, empirical, and practical point of view. This study's theoretical significance expresses how the study will play a part in the theoretical findings of the problem. The empirical significance of this study explained how the study is similar and relatable to other studies and will contribute to comparative literature. This study's practical significance communicated why the knowledge of this study is significant to the participants and the higher education institutions associated with this study.

### **Theoretical**

The theoretical significance of this study relates to the relational cultural theory, which is used as the theoretical framework for this research. The relational cultural theory proposes that humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-

fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2018). Building meaningful relationships with academic advisors is a vital component needed among BIPOC students attending higher education institutions (Lee, 2018; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Incorporating relational cultural theory allowed BIPOC students to build positive connections with others and achieve a sense of well-being and safety (Jordan, 2010). Cultural differences are discussed within relational cultural theory, identifying the impact of a larger culture and the difference in status on the quality and nature of relationships and the succeeding effects on healthy coexistence (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). This study using the relational cultural theory as a theoretical framework will contribute to the importance of BIPOC students building relationships with assigned academic advisors, resulting in a better experience for BIPOC students as they attend higher education institutions (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022).

### **Empirical**

The empirical significance of this study focused on the phenomenological approach that highlights the lived experiences of the BIPOC student population (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), contributing to other research that relates to bringing awareness of the obstacles and concerns that BIPOC students face while attending higher education institutions (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). This study will contribute to other studies that discuss how BIPOC students have experienced being treated differently compared to non-BIPOC student peers (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022), needing and having a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2023; Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt, 2021), and the importance of building relationships with academic advisors and mentors (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). This study relates to other studies that discussed the experiences

BIPOC students struggle with when attending higher education institutions (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021; Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt, 2021; Williams et al., 2022), the relationships between BIPOC students, advisors, and mentors (Ijoma et al., 2022; Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021), and the role of higher education institutions relating to BIPOC students identifying with academic advisors and mentors (Barber et al., 2020).

### **Practical**

The practical significance of this study focused on the significant role that higher education institutions play in assisting BIPOC students in identifying and building relationships with academic advisors and mentors (Barber et al., 2020). Higher education institutions are beginning to acknowledge and seek better methods to recognize the research, services, and other related strategies regarding improving equity and inclusion within BIPOC faculty and staff (Huff, 2021; Lane Community, 2021). The findings of this study will assist higher education institutions in better supporting BIPOC students in building relationships with academic advisors and mentors (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. Understanding the importance of BIPOC students identifying with assigned academic advisors will fill a gap in the current literature. The following central research and sub-questions will be answered in this study.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students building positive relationships with assigned academic advisors?

### **Sub-Question One**

How are assigned academic advisors assisting BIPOC students in achieving a sense of well-being and safety through growth-fostering relationships?

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to the experience of building positive relationships between BIPOC students and assigned academic advisors?

### **Sub-Question Three**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors?

### **Definitions**

1. *Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions* - a higher education institution with an enrollment of at least 10% Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander students (Nguyen, 2020).
2. *BIPOC* - The new terminology for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Clarke, 2020).
3. *Culturally Engaging Advising* - a humanizing, proactive, and holistic academic advising approach that benefits BIPOC students (Museus, 2021).
4. *Higher Education Institutions* – Universities, colleges, and other institutions offering higher education (IGI Global, 2023).
5. *Hispanic Serving Institutions* - a higher education institution with an enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

6. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities* - Historically Black colleges or universities established before 1964 to educate Black Americans (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).
7. *Predominantly White Institutions* - higher education institutions with at least 50 percent enrollment of White students (Sage Publications, 2023).
8. *Relational Cultural Theory* – a theory that proposes that humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2018).
9. *Sociocultural Gap* - societal and cultural influences on an individual's feelings, behaviors, and thoughts (Cormier, 2020; Gonzalez & Birnbaum-Weitzman, 2020).

### **Summary**

College students identifying as BIPOC have underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. BIPOC students may receive more career and psychosocial developmental support from assigned academic advisors with similar racial and ethnic background experiences (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). Historical experiences have shown that BIPOC students have been mistreated in educational settings, resulting in a terrible experience for BIPOC students (Best Colleges, 2021). BIPOC students are still facing challenges in academic settings, including building meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors (Endo, 2020). The relational cultural theory exhibits that BIPOC students can develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2018). Therefore, building meaningful relationships with academic advisors is essential for BIPOC students. The significance of this study is that it focused on highlighting the lived experiences of the BIPOC student population



and the role that higher education institutions play in assisting BIPOC students in identifying and building relationships with assigned academic advisors. The purpose of this study was to understand the importance of developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as BIPOC attending a higher education institution. Furthermore, the findings of this study will address the experiences of students who identify as BIPOC in developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors at a public higher education institution.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A systematic literature review explored why representation matters within higher education and the importance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. Chapter Two presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. First, the relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976) is discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature discussing BIPOC students' experiences and developmental stages, relationships between students, advisors, and mentors, BIPOC faculty and staff in higher education, culturally engaging advising and environments, and sociocultural gaps. The literature illustrates how the connection between BIPOC students and academic advisors and mentors connects to students' academic, identity, and personal development. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding practices that higher education institutions (HEIs) can implement to assist BIPOC students in better developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the theoretical framework applied to this study is essential to comprehending the importance of BIPOC students developing identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. The relational cultural theory (RCT) guided this study and is necessary to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC students in creating meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. Originating from the work of Jean Baker Miller (1976), the foundation of RCT started to develop, with the original population targeted for RCT being women.

As the theory developed, the core idea of RCT is that people grow through and towards connection (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). RCT explains how humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). The primary component of RCT is to achieve a sense of well-being and safety by building positive relationships throughout an individual's lifespan (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022; Miller & Stiver, 1997). These relationships are referred to as "growth-fostering" relationships, which should create "five good things" (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). The "five good things" created will be: (1) a sense of zest, (2) clarity about oneself, the other, and the relationship, (3) a sense of personal worth, (4) the capacity to be creative and productive, and (5) the desire for more connection (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010, p. 2; Lértora et al., 2022). RCT allows individuals to develop by creating growth-fostering relationships and communities (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Failure to build growth-fostering relationships will result in the opposite of the "five good things" that should be generated from growth-fostering relationships (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010;). The opposite of the "five good things" are: (1) a drop in energy, (2) decreased sense of worth, (3) less clarity and more confusion, (4) less productivity, and (5) withdrawal from all relationships (Jordan, 2010, p. 3; Lértora et al., 2022).

An additional component of RCT relates to the power dynamics in the culture and family and how this can affect the well-being of individuals (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Rector-Aranda, 2019). A disconnect can transpire within society when there is a stratification of differences and when minority groups are shamed by others (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010).

Power dynamics can result in silencing, isolating, and humiliating people, weakening the representation of reality in the dominant discourse (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022).

Therapeutic applications in RCT can relate to redeveloping humans due to power dynamics, race, and cultural effects (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022). RCT can develop creative moments resulting in a new creation of growth-fostering relationships that guide the relationship in a positive and expanding direction, which RCT identifies as a movement-in-relationship (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). Movement-in-relationship is when the relationship develops powerfully and meaningfully and broadens while every participant does as well (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022).

Relating to the differences in human culture and showing that human relationships are needed for survival, RCT is necessary for humans (Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022). Building positive connections with others assists with achieving a sense of well-being and safety through RCT (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). Creating relationships can create a sense of enthusiasm, clarity of self and relationships with others, a sense of personal worth, the ability to be creative and productive, and the aspiration to build more connections with others are all essential components of RCT (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). RCT discusses the unrealistic standards of traditional models of psychological growth, highlighting that healthy development among humans is moving from dependence to independence (Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022). The cultural component of RCT highlights and focuses on the impact of a larger culture and the difference in status on the quality and nature of relationships and the succeeding effects on healthy coexistence (Jordan & Hartling, 2008; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019).

The RCT was chosen to frame this research because it discusses the importance of

building relationships among individuals. Understanding the importance of building relationships can assist with understanding why it is essential for BIPOC students to connect and identify with academic advisors and mentors. It is necessary to discuss the cultural aspect of BIPOC students building relationships, which RCT explains how power dynamics in culture can affect people's well-being and how disconnections can occur when there is a stratification of differences and individuals from a leading group criticizing and humiliating a group at the edge (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). Focusing on the differences in human culture, RCT can assist with understanding relationship needs among BIPOC students. Separation and isolation create discomfort among humans, which triggers the brain to register this type of pain the same way it will react to physical pain, hunger, and lack of oxygen (Jordan, 2018). As a result of RCT moving more towards including diverse populations (Lértora et al., 2022), RCT can assist in understanding how the absence of building relationships can hurt BIPOC students, affecting academic and personal development.

### **Related Literature**

The literature review was conducted to understand current research on the importance of BIPOC students identifying with assigned academic advisors. Understanding recent research on the importance of BIPOC students identifying with assigned academic advisors includes exploring the BIPOC students' experiences (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021) and the relationships between students, academic advisors, and mentors (Ijoma et al., 2022; Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). When discussing the BIPOC student experience, exploring BIPOC students' barriers to graduating college and the experiences attending predominantly White institutions and historically Black colleges and universities is essential (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022;

Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021; Strayhorn, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Through this research, a better understanding of the importance of BIPOC students identifying with assigned academic advisors was established, and the sociocultural gap and culturally engaging advising and environments are explained (Francis et al., 2019; Hang & Walsh, 2021; Museus & Shiroma, 2022; Williams et al., 2022; Wright-Mair et al., 2021), concluding with the discussion on how higher education institutions can improve practices to better assist BIPOC students in identifying with academic advisors and mentors (Barber et al., 2020).

### **The Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Experience**

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, many higher education institutions did not allow BIPOC students to attend HEIs (Clayton et al., 2023; Daun-Barnett et al., 2014). In 1896, after the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the segregation of Black and White students attending public educational institutions was allowed as long as all institutions were equal (Best Colleges, 2021; Cornell Law School, n.d.; History, 2023a; History, 2023b). However, due to Jim Crow laws, the problem was that Black students were not treated equally, leading to other segregated concerns (Best Colleges, 2021; History, 2023a; PBS, 2023). Unfortunately, BIPOC students are still expressing concerns about not being treated equally as non-BIPOC peers as they attend higher education institutions (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021).

BIPOC students' experiences differ from non-BIPOC student peers (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). The classroom experience for most BIPOC students can be a feeling of isolation (Sifuentes, 2021) and having the exhausting responsibility of teaching others within the classroom about the Black race and culture (Park & Bahia, 2022). BIPOC students, who are

already dealing with mental and physical weariness (Ijoma et al., 2022), are now also experiencing being stereotyped and discriminated against (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). It is not an easy journey for most BIPOC students who attend HEIs. However, BIPOC students find strength and support from other BIPOC students (Park & Bahia, 2022) and mentors (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021), particularly mentors BIPOC students see as a representation of themselves (Ijoma et al., 2022).

### ***BIPOC Students' Barriers to Graduating College***

BIPOC students encounter many barriers in the journey to graduate from college (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). These extreme barriers BIPOC students face are systemic and deeply rooted historically (Ottmann, 2017; Park & Bahia, 2022a). Unfortunately, one of these barriers for BIPOC students is experiencing discrimination within the learning environment (Basma et al., 2021; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). This population of students is forced to confront stereotypes and assumptions that they are criminals and not as advanced as their White counterparts (Park & Bahia, 2022a; Park & Bahia, 2022b; Park & Bahia, 2022c). In addition, when BIPOC students have accomplished hard-earned achievements, they are usually accused of having unfair privileges (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022a).

BIPOC students undergo dealing with racial insults and physical attacks, which can lead them to become hostile (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022a). These negative experiences BIPOC students encounter affect their well-being (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022) and their ability to succeed in college (Park & Bahia, 2022a; Ijoma et al., 2022). The BIPOC population goes through social and academic isolation while coping with being discriminated against by peers, faculty, and staff (Bailey, 2016; Park & Bahia, 2022a; Ijoma et al., 2022;

Sifuentes, 2021), creating a social division between BIPOC and non-Bipoc students (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022a). BIPOC students are often taught knowledge that is misleading and falsely represents the BIPOC community (Clark et al., 2014; Park & Bahia, 2022a). When BIPOC students are taught misleading information, it results in BIPOC students experiencing invalidation of identity, culture, and history in education and denying the racialized reality (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022a).

As a result of BIPOC students encountering these problematic obstacles, they can become insecure about their intellectual capabilities (Ijoma et al., 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). When students experience institutional forms of racism, such as being excluded from peer study groups, lacking social integration within academic programs and campus communities, and feeling as if they do not belong, this negatively impacts their performance as students (Alejandro et al., 2020; Park & Bahia, 2022a). However, with the support of mentors, advisors, and other BIPOC students, BIPOC students will feel supported and can overcome some of the obstacles they face (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). These examples provide content on why representation is vital for BIPOC students and the importance of identifying and building relationships with academic advisors.

### ***Experience at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)***

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) are defined as having 50% or more White students enrolled and are deemed historically White institutions (Gaston & Ojewuyi, 2022; Sprull & Starling, 2021). Although PWIs have over 50% of White students enrolled at PWIs, 53% of BIPOC students who attend HEIs in the United States choose to attend PWIs (Lake, 2021; U.S. Department, 2021). With the increase of BIPOC students choosing to attend PWIs, it is surprising that this population still tends to have controversial experiences (Lee, 2018;



Sifuentes, 2021; The Hunt, 2021). Although BIPOC students represent 45% of undergraduate students in the USA, only 24% of faculty are BIPOC, which leads to one of the concerns BIPOC students face in higher education (Davis & Fry, 2019; Sandhu et al., 2022). The lack of BIPOC faculty and student representation at PWIs results in BIPOC students having negative experiences while attending HEIs (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). At PWIs, BIPOC students are challenged with experiencing racial slurs from peers and feel excluded from on-campus activities (Lee, 2018; Sifuentes, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021). These BIPOC students who attend PWIs have expressed significant concerns about hostility and segregation, unlike White students who attend PWIs (Lee, 2018; The Hunt Institute, 2021). Experiencing a sense of not belonging on campus (Lee, 2018; Sifuentes, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021) and needing levels of support and guidance (The Hunt Institute, 2021) are some of the primary concerns BIPOC students encounter.

Students are highly aware of the lack of BIPOC faculty representation among colleges and universities (Davis & Fry, 2019; Sandhu et al., 2022). Protests have emerged regarding the controversial experiences among BIPOC students attending PWIs (Francis, 2020; Sandhu et al., 2022). These controversial experiences relate to BIPOC students encountering racism and discrimination, deficiency in inclusion, and a shortage of student and faculty diversity representation on campus (Francis, 2020; Sandhu et al., 2022). Students demand that higher education institutions make a difference and go beyond just voicing solidarity toward action and structural transformation (Ellis, 2020; Sandhu et al., 2022) due to BIPOC students' educational experiences being impacted negatively due to the lack of BIPOC representation (Sandhu et al., 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). When BIPOC students can build meaningful relationships with faculty that they identify with and share similar backgrounds, they have

expressed that they feel more comfortable in this learning environment (Holloway et al.; Sandhu et al., 2022).

Advisors are essential for BIPOC students attending PWIs, especially when BIPOC students share similar backgrounds and identities (Holloway et al.; Llamas, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). When students are assigned to advisors strategically regarding race and ethnicity, this will positively impact academic performance and graduation among BIPOC students (Llamas, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2022). However, the primary focus for most colleges and universities is to have student satisfaction and experience be the center of attention, leaving limited opportunities to focus on the student's perspective relating to the importance of having a diverse representation of higher education administrators (Hong et al.; Sandhu et al., 2022). Although it may be a controversial topic to focus on hiring just BIPOC advisors (Glasener et al., 2019; Sandhu et al., 2022), non-BIPOC advisors have minimum or no experience advising BIPOC students, which can result in advisors being unable to relate to or understand the painful interactions BIPOC students encounter (Lee, 2018; Santa-Ramirez, 2022). When advisors cannot understand the BIPOC students' journey attending PWIs, they cannot connect and build meaningful relationships with BIPOC students (Lee, 2018; Santa-Ramirez, 2022). Academic advisors must build relationships with BIPOC students (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). This vital and much-needed component can assist BIPOC students in succeeding at PWIs (Llamas, 2021; Sandhu et al., 2022).

### ***Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).***

For over six decades since Brown versus Board of Education, an increase of BIPOC students have chosen to enroll at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the face of higher education institutions having the reputation of not being equally accessible for

BIPOC populations (Franklin et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). With this slight increase of BIPOC students enrolling in HBCUs, comprised of high-profile college athlete recruits (Franklin et al., 2023; Hill, 2019), and the first Black woman vice president of the United States, HBCUs have a positive influence on BIPOC students have been a trendy topic of discussion (Chenier, 2019; Franklin et al., 2023). When BIPOC students decide to attend an HBCU, this experience will include being a part of the 20% of African American graduates and the 25% of STEM graduates (Franklin et al., 2023; United Negro College, 2022). BIPOC students will also experience lower tuition rates when attending HBCUs compared to non-HBCUs. They will be able to relate to other BIPOC students who may share similar financial burdens, being first-generation college students or being at an academic disadvantage due to having a lack of college prep resources available (Franklin et al., 2023; United Negro College, 2022).

HBCUs have proved essential for BIPOC students and higher education institutions (Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). BIPOC students attending HBCUs are more satisfied with the college experience than BIPOC students who attend colleges and universities that are not HBCUs (Cook, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021). When BIPOC students attend HBCUs, they seek to be around other students who look like them to avoid lower levels of racism and further study the cultural background's history (Cook, 2021; Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021). Culturally affirming practices at HBCUs establish inclusive and nurturing environments for BIPOC students (Strayhorn, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). BIPOC students who attend HBCUs have a higher level of self-confidence post-graduation (Strada Education, 2022; The Hunt Institute, 2021), a sense of pride (Taylor, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021), and a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2023; Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021).

HBCUs produce over 30% of BIPOC engineers (Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021; US Black, 2021), 50% of elected BIPOC Congress members (Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021), 80% of BIPOC federal judges (Strayhorn, 2021; The Hunt Institute, 2021), and as mentioned, the first BIPOC Vice President and BIPOC woman of the United States of America (Franklin et al., 2023; Strayhorn, 2021).

### ***Experience at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)***

Defined in federal law, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) must have an enrollment of 25% or more students identifying as Hispanic and Latina/e/o/x to identify as an HSI (Abrica et al., 2020; Hispanic Association, 2023; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). HSIs enroll two-thirds of Hispanic students, 16% of Black students, which is more than the Black students who attend HBCUs, more American Indians than all Tribal colleges and Universities, and more than 41% of Asian Americans enrolled college students (Hispanic Association, 2023; Stanislaus, 2021). Representing 16% of all higher education institutions, HSIs have grown from 18 institutions to 525 as of 2018 (Hispanic Association, 2023; Stanislaus, 2021). HSIs continue to grow, with 393 HSIs on the verge of being established, with an estimated 15-24.9% of Hispanic student enrollment; these emerging HSIs will become HSIs over the next ten years (Hispanic Association, 2023; Stanislaus, 2021). With such a promising future, it is unfortunate that HSIs are financially disadvantaged compared to other colleges and universities (Abrica et al., 2020; Hispanic Association, 2023).

HSIs were designed to serve Hispanic students. However, concerning the BIPOC students' experiences attending HSIs, there are some concerns that HSIs need to support the population they supposedly serve (Abrica et al., 2020; Garcia, 2018). Many HSIs need more programming dedicated to Hispanic/Latinx students and work toward educating and

understanding the culture of Hispanic faculty and staff (Preuss et al., 2019; Preuss et al., 2021). Many HSIs have not intentionally institutionalized Hispanic-serving practices and patterns (Garcia, 2019; Preuss et al., 2021). They are leaving BIPOC students who attend HSIs to be faced with the chances of being taught and advised by faculty and staff who have no comprehension of the history, experiences, preferences, and culture of Hispanic students (Preuss et al., 2019; Preuss et al., 2020). BIPOC students will be better served, which will lead to a better experience at HSIs if these institutions provide resources that have helpful information about Hispanic culture, backgrounds, perspectives, and needs of the Hispanic and Latina/e/o/x community (Preuss et al., 2019; Preuss et al., 2020).

### ***Experience at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving***

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) enroll at least 10% of students who identify as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islanders and sustain a significant amount of students with low socioeconomic backgrounds (Nguyen, 2020; The California State, 2016). Over the years, the U.S. Department of Education has funded 35 institutions to develop academic and co-curricular programming for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, staff, and faculty (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, 2020). AANAPISIs are located throughout the United States but primarily in states such as California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, and Washington due to large populations of Asian Americans resulting from refugee resettlement policies and patterns (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, 2020). Creating AANAPISIs displays the commitment and recognition the federal government has in ensuring the needs of BIPOC students, particularly AAPI students (Park & Teranishi, 2008; Nguyen, 2020). However, AANAPISIs still lack the understanding of how to support the

needs of BIPOC students, particularly AAPI students (Pimentel & Horikoshi, 2016; Nguyen, 2020).

Asian Americans are misunderstood and usually misrepresented in education research due to the model minority myth (Kurland et al., 2019; Poon et al., 2016). Stereotyped as the most successful minority group, Asian Americans are forced to live up to the expectations of being brilliant, intelligent students or musical geniuses due to the model minority myth (Blackburn, 2019; Kurland et al., 2019). In addition, the model minority myth does not apply to Pacific Islanders, resulting in the experiences of Pacific Islanders appearing to be invisible (Empower Pacific, 2014; Kurland et al., 2019). Asian American students experience being represented in the media and among others as only attending prestigious colleges and universities (Chaudhari & Chan, 2013; Kurland et al., 2019). However, many of these students attend community colleges, and AANAPISIs enroll over 40% of AAPI students, proving that AAPI students require more significant support from higher education institutions (Chaudhari & Chan, 2013; Kurland et al., 2019). When AAPI students attend AANAPISIs, they are introduced to programs that address the harshness of uniting the backgrounds of AAPI students who are underrepresented and the expectations and norms of privileged White students (Gasman & Conrad, 2015; Kurland et al., 2019). AANAPISIs provide AAPI students with culturally driven programming, advisement, and student services (Kurland et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2018). These students have access to vital institutional agents, leadership opportunities, civic engagement, and community building, allowing them to gain a sense of belonging at AANAPISIs (Kurland et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2018).

### **Student, Advisor, and Mentor Relationships**

The student-advisor relationship plays a significant role in the BIPOC students' college experience (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). Advisors are usually the primary advocates for BIPOC students when they require support dealing with student and social justice concerns (Lee, 2018). Students identifying as BIPOC have more positive experiences forming student-advisor relationships with other BIPOC advisors (Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022). However, these students need help connecting with academic advisors (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Many students who identify as BIPOC have expressed that they feel forced to build relationships with advisors to whom they cannot relate and then left to find a new academic advisor that is more relatable (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021).

BIPOC advisees feel a lack of respect and neglect from academic advisors (Park & Bahia, 2022). BIPOC students sometimes need to be more understood and feel academic advisors have negative assessments when analyzing BIPOC students' ideas (Park & Bahia, 2022). Advisees of BIPOC descent have reported not receiving advice and constructive criticism, similar to peers who do not identify as BIPOC (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). BIPOC students have expressed that white peers receive more attention because the advisors are more invested in them than BIPOC students and the white male student is viewed as the ideal student (Park & Bahia, 2022). Due to these experiences, BIPOC students cannot gain trust and build meaningful relationships with academic advisors, resulting in BIPOC students questioning the advisors' role and purpose (Sifuentes, 2021). Advisors may have good intentions in building substantial relationships with BIPOC students because they believe they support them (Park & Bahia, 2022). However, advisors are failing to provide the BIPOC population with the

constructive feedback needed to develop the academic skills to succeed as students (Park & Bahia, 2022).

### ***Advising and Mentoring Relationship Experience***

Many BIPOC students seek advice and mentoring while forming relationships with other BIPOC advisors, mentors, and faculty (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). When BIPOC students can build relationships with other BIPOC advisors and mentors, BIPOC students feel security, comfort, and connection (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). The BIPOC population faces many challenges as students (Basma et al., 2021; Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022), with one of them being able to connect with academic advisors (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Discussing racial discrimination and other microaggression concerns with an advisor is beneficial for BIPOC students' growth in the academic journey (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Many of the racial and discrimination experiences the BIPOC community encounters are in the classroom (Ijoma et al., 2022; Sifuentes, 2021), which makes it hard for these students to engage and learn from non-BIPOC professors and peers (Sifuentes, 2021). Although some PWIs are beginning to realize the need for more BIPOC advisors (Endo, 2020), many HEIs need more BIPOC advisors and mentors for the BIPOC community of students (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Acknowledging the issues and concerns about the lack of representation for BIPOC students is one step closer to understanding why BIPOC students must connect and identify with academic advisors.

Academic advisors and mentors are the most common supporters of BIPOC students when relating to students' success and career preparations post-college graduation (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). Students receive more career and psychosocial developmental support from advisors with similar racial and ethnic background experiences (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). BIPOC



students tend to be more motivated, inspired, and eager to graduate when they build meaningful relationships and gain support from academic advisors (Fernandez, 2019; Santa-Ramirez, 2022). When BIPOC students can identify with academic advisors by speaking similar languages and discussing cultural expectations, this helps build relationships with academic advisors and assists them in successfully navigating through the college experience (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). BIPOC advisors understand the non-traditional ways of BIPOC students (Santa-Ramirez, 2022), making it easier for BIPOC students to gain trust with academic advisors, leading to student success. Programs relating to mentorship and other support resources for BIPOC students provide the educational tools, guidance, and skills this population needs to overcome the tough challenges faced by difficult obstacles while attending HEIs (Barber et al., 2020; Goering et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022).

### ***Mentorship and Other Support Resources***

Higher education institutions need more mentoring programs designed for BIPOC students and developed by BIPOC faculty and staff (Columbia University, 2023; Mata et al., 2022). Mentoring programs allow faculty to mentor students and share diverse experiences with students, which can support BIPOC students (Columbia University, 2023; Goering et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2022). Culturally responsive mentorship appreciates the differences in cultural diversity and demonstrates interest in BIPOC mentees' identities (National Academies, 2019; Markle et al., 2022). Mentoring programs such as Mentoring of Students and Igniting Community (MOSAIC) (Columbia University, 2023), UW School of Drama BIPOC Student Mentorship Program (Onyema & Williams, 2022; University of Washington, 2020), Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males Mentorship Program (Onyema & Williams, 2022; The University of Texas, 2023), Great Expectations Mentorship Program (GEM) (Onyema & Williams, 2022;

Lewis & Clark, 2023), and ScholarShot support the academic and professional development of BIPOC students (Onyema & Williams, 2022). Other programs to help BIPOC students include a remediation model (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Programs that include remediation will assist students in becoming better due to mandatory requirements, such as taking remedial courses that will help the student perform better academically (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Strength-based programming is also beneficial for BIPOC students because it focuses on BIPOC students' strengths, resulting in building confidence within the students, leading to higher percentage rates of academic success, retention, and graduation for BIPOC students (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

### **The Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Faculty and Staff Experience**

Higher education institutions seek better methods to acknowledge the research, services, and other related strategies for improving equity and inclusion within BIPOC faculty and staff (Huff, 2021; Lane Community, 2021). Diversity recruitment plans are being created in higher education institutions to focus on recruiting, hiring, and retention efforts in gaining and retaining BIPOC faculty (Huff, 2021; Lane Community, 2021). Organizations such as the National Institutes of Health have decided to fund selected institutions in efforts to recruit and hire clusters of BIPOC career researchers through its Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) program (Huff, 2021; Mervis, 2020). Programs such as FIRST will assist over a dozen colleges and universities in supporting a group of 10 or more newly hired BIPOC faculty (Mervis, 2020; National Institutes, 2023). FIRST is one of the most recent programs launched by the National Institutes of Health and has acknowledged that BIPOC researchers are less likely to be recognized by the National Institutes of Health and be awarded than non-BIPOC counterparts (Mervis, 2020; National Institutes, 2023). Fortunately, many institutions are beginning to use cluster hiring to increase research capacity in developing areas

and increase the number of BIPOC faculty hired for institutions (Huff, 2021; Mervis, 2020). Furthermore, the National Institutes of Health has established the goal of removing the culture of having a poor representation of diverse faculty and will work towards taking the necessary steps to use an unorthodox approach to recruiting BIPOC researchers (Huff, 2021; Mervis, 2020).

Another initiative created to recruit more BIPOC staff and faculty is a referral networking program titled LSA Collegiate Fellowship, which LSA represents The College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan (Huff, 2021; National Center, 2023). The LSA Collegiate Fellowship program is a referral network program that includes historically Black and Latinx universities to identify transpiring BIPOC scholars (Huff, 2021; National Center, 2023). This program will bring attention to and attract new faculty members who have shown that they are committed to diversity through teaching or research (Huff, 2021; National Center, 2023). LSA Collegiate Fellowship will provide one to two years of post-doctoral fellowship support for newly hired faculty to prepare for tenure-track appointments or will receive immediate tenure-track work for any department within LSA (Huff, 2021; National Center, 2023).

It is great to see that some higher education institutions recognize the issue of BIPOC faculty being underrepresented at HEIs. Unfortunately, once hired, some BIPOC faculty experience being treated differently from non-BIPOC colleagues (Huff, 2021; Lane Community, 2021; Markle et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2022). BIPOC faculty have reported not having the same responsibilities as other non-BIPOC faculty, such as having a higher caseload of students, higher teacher course load, and experiencing a delayed promotion to tenure track professor (Huff, 2021; Lane Community, 2021). University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill hired Nikole Hannah-Jones, a known Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who led the 1619 Project for *The New York*

*Times Magazine* but was refused tenure despite that the prior two faculty hired for the same position were granted tenure upon appointment (Huff, 2021; Robertson, 2022). BIPOC faculty represents 18% of all psychology faculty positions and almost 25% across all disciplines (Elfman, 2020; Huff, 2021). However, over five years, a pattern of BIPOC faculty moving towards the promotional track to pull professors has declined (Elfman, 2020; Huff, 2021). Recruiting BIPOC faculty is one of the first steps higher education institutions should implement, but it will take much more effort and support to create a deeper layout of BIPOC faculty within higher education (Elfman, 2020; Huff, 2021).

### ***Underrepresentation of BIPOC Advisors and Mentors at Higher Education Institutions***

There is an underrepresentation of BIPOC faculty and staff at higher education institutions (Davis & Fry, 2019; Whitford, 2020c). Less than 10% of higher education professionals are Black (The Hunt, 2021; Whitford, 2020b; Whitford, 2020c), and less than eight percent of administrators and executive leaders in higher education are Black (Whitford, 2020a; Whitford, 2020c). Regarding full-time faculty in higher education, in the fall of 2022, only seven percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, five percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females, four percent were Black females, 3% were Black males, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females, and one percent or less were American Indian/Alaska Native and Bi-racial (Huff, 2021; National Center, 2022), impacting the representation of BIPOC advisors and mentors available to BIPOC students in higher education. Higher education institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison created Target of Opportunity Programs (TOPS), designed to hire faculty that are known to be associated with underrepresented groups (Baloch, 2020; Johns Hopkins University, 2023; Huff, 2021). Programs such as TOPS have a funding budget

specifically used to recruit outstanding, diverse future BIPOC faculty (Baloch, 2020; Huff, 2021).

It is beneficial to increase BIPOC representation among faculty within higher education institutions for several reasons (Huff, 2021; New York University, 2023). BIPOC faculty sit at the head of the table regarding research surrounding diversity issues (Huff, 2021; New York University, 2023). With BIPOC faculty having input on diversity issues, BIPOC students can seek adequate progress in research on BIPOC issues and marginalization issues (Huff, 2021; New et al., 2023). Groups such as the Board of Educational Affairs are investigating further diversity and hiring practices with the intent to examine educational fields for hiring initiatives to create a position statement outlining best practices (Huff, 2021; New York University, 2023).

There is more to hiring BIPOC faculty than just using traditional hiring networks (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). In addition to creating job postings on networks such as the National Latinx Psychological Association or relevant APA divisions, being present at conferences is one way BIPOC scholars can be recruited (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Social media platforms, job announcements via email, and word of mouth are great ways to encourage BIPOC scholars to apply to these positions (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Performing personal outreach as a form of recruitment allows the BIPOC scholar to better understand the higher educational institution's department and increases their chances of accepting the position if offered (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Biases should be eliminated from all recruitment processes at higher education institutions to guarantee more recruitment and hiring of BIPOC faculty (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019).

The University of Arizona hires at least 200 faculty annually, and every person who sits on the search committee is required to complete an online training that will cover topics such as

bringing awareness to how unconscious bias may impact reviews of candidates, conversations about candidates, and final choices about finalists (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Following the required training of all search committee members, a rubric must be created for every faculty position at The University of Arizona (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). These rubrics must be created using the required qualifications and applied to each candidate to avoid biases (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Biases include choosing a candidate with a degree from a -high-profile institution or choosing candidates similar to the faculty of the hiring institution (Huff, 2021; The University of Arizona, 2019). Incorporating these practices can assist with the problem of underrepresentation of BIPOC Advisors and Mentors at Higher Education Institutions.

### ***The Role of BIPOC Advisors and Mentors at Higher Education Institutions***

BIPOC advisors and mentors play a massive role in creating a much-needed change in higher education (Markle et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2022). A sense of belonging and greater academic self-efficacy can be developed among BIPOC students when BIPOC advisors and mentors actively advise and mentor BIPOC students (Apriceno, 2020; Markle et al., 2022). When BIPOC students do not have access to someone they identify as a role model, they can experience decreased satisfaction, engagement, success, and self-efficacy (Markle et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). Although there is a concern about the lack of much-needed training offered by higher education institutions for BIPOC advisors and mentors to advise and mentor BIPOC students (Markle et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2022), BIPOC advisors and mentors still desire to support BIPOC students (Markle et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2022). Many predominantly White institutions are focusing on increasing the amount of BIPOC students enrolling in higher education, but these institutions are failing to provide support to BIPOC students, specifically

those who choose to pursue programs relating to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (Hurtado et al., 2015; Markle et al., 2022; Reardon et al., 2018; Sowell et al., 2015). BIPOC students represent only 22% of STEM undergraduate degrees and 9% of doctoral U.S. STEM degrees (Markle et al., 2022; NSF NCSES, 2019). Furthermore, only 8.9% of STEM faculty are BIPOC (Markle et al., 2022; NSF NCSES, 2019). The evidence of underrepresentation in higher education exemplifies that in comparison to White scholars, BIPOC STEM scholars and faculty lack similar entry to interchangeable-background role models, mentors, and networks (Byars-Winston & Dahlberg, 2019; Harris & Lee, 2019; Markle et al., 2022). BIPOC students, particularly those choosing a career path in STEM, have expressed feeling unnoticed, isolated, and unappreciated (Markle et al., 2022; Schwarz & Hill, 2010).

A sense of belonging occurs among BIPOC advisors and mentors employed at predominately white institutions when they experience mentoring relationships, mentoring students, supportive peer mentoring, and community-based mentoring (Markle et al., 2022; Wright-Mair, 2020). Not only does a sense of belonging occur within BIPOC advisors and mentors, but the representation of BIPOC faculty can have a significant impact on BIPOC students, aspiring them to pursue possible future faculty positions in research-intensive colleges and universities compared to higher education departments without BIPOC faculty (Markle et al., 2022; Stockard et al., 2021). Many will argue that academic advisors and mentors with different racial backgrounds from mentees can still be influential (Markle et al., 2022; Thomas, 1993). However, the amount of time required of mentees, effort, knowledge, commitment, and skills to effectively advise BIPOC mentees in an environment where these students already feel isolated is significantly high (Markle et al., 2022; Thomas, 1993). Many advisors and mentors do not have the proper training to guide BIPOC students in navigating racial barriers and how to

flourish in an academic environment where they have no sense of belonging (Markle et al., 2022; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). Throughout the United States, only 36% of STEM doctoral programs offer targeted mentoring for BIPOC doctoral students, and only 26% provide faculty mentor training, which shows that the amount of support offered for BIPOC students is inadequate in higher education institutions (Markle et al., 2022; Sowell et al., 2015). When higher education institutions are recruiting BIPOC faculty to serve as advisors and mentors, instead of asking these prospective candidates if they have what it takes to succeed as a faculty member, higher education institutions should focus on the institutional environment, ensuring they are providing the faculty support needed for the faculty to be successful (Manuel & Karloff, 2020; Markle et al., 2022).

### **Race and Culture**

Mentoring programs are vital for BIPOC students since mentoring provides the academic tools, guidance, and skills needed for this population of students as they overcome difficult obstacles while attending HEIs (Barber et al., 2020; Goering et al., 2022; Matthews et al., 2022). However, what is not discussed often is the impact and role race and culture play when developing mentoring programs (Sánchez et al., 2021; Santa-Ramirez, 2022). More than 50 % of mentors with BIPOC mentees are White, creating a sociocultural gap that can harm relationship-building between mentors and mentees (Sánchez et al., 2021). Mentoring programs and other support resources created in the best interest of BIPOC students are unintentionally replicating inequality and further encouraging a system of White supremacy, which is detrimental to BIPOC students' development (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Race-related events and hate crimes have increased on college campuses, impacting BIPOC students significantly (Bauman, 2018; Hernández & Harris, 2022). According to the



National Center for Education Statistics (2021), 814 hate crime incidents occurred on college campuses in 2018. Of the 814 incidents, 43 percent of the hate crime events were triggered due to race (Hernández & Harris, 2022). BIPOC students report experiencing a hostile racial campus environment almost twice as much as non-BIPOC students (Hernández & Harris, 2022; Lee, 2018). Although racism on college campuses is usually monitored and documented, there is a lack of information on the impact that racism has on BIPOC students (Hernández & Harris, 2022). Experiencing racism on campus is a form of trauma for BIPOC students and should not be ignored (Hernández & Harris, 2022).

### ***Culturally Engaging Advising***

Applying culturally engaging advising practices will broaden advisors' advising philosophies, resulting in a more diverse approach when advising BIPOC students (Lee, 2018). Cultural competency is a foundational skill for academic advisors (Lee, 2018), which benefits BIPOC students. Culturally engaging environments connect with academic motivation (Cisneros et al., 2019; Francis et al.; Hang & Walsh, 2021; Museus & Shiroma, 2022; Talusan & Franke, 2019; Williams et al., 2022; Wright-Mair et al., 2021) and promote the quality and nature of BIPOC students' interactions allowing these experiences to influence motivation (Museus, 2014; Museus & Shiroma, 2022). A culturally engaging environment will assist in increasing student involvement on campus, a sense of belonging among BIPOC students, and perseverance to graduate college (Blake et al., 2020; Druery & Brooms, 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Museus et al., 2022; Museus & Shiroma, 2022). When academic advisors and mentors do not learn and understand the historical context of race and culture, this prevents creating positive relationships with advisees and mentees (Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). Advisors and other higher education administrators should understand that they do not need to be labeled as a racist

to participate in and promote a racist system within higher education (Lee, 2018). BIPOC students should experience cultural familiarity, which will help them identify with faculty, staff, and peers who understand them and have similar backgrounds (Museus & Shiroma, 2022; Williams et al., 2022).

### ***Sociocultural Gap***

Sociocultural is societal and cultural influences on an individual's feelings, behaviors, and thoughts (Cormier, 2020; Gonzalez & Birnbaum-Weitzman, 2020). Some factors associated with sociocultural are sex, age, and racial-ethnic groups (Gonzalez & Birnbaum-Weitzman, 2020). Physical and mental health can also be connected to sociocultural (Gonzalez & Birnbaum-Weitzman, 2020). A sociocultural gap can occur when cross-racial matching occurs with mentor and mentee pairings (Cormier, 2020; Sánchez et al., 2021). Negatively impacting mentors' and mentees' relationships, sociocultural gaps can prevent educators from addressing the needs of BIPOC students (Cormier, 2020; Sánchez et al., 2021). Sociocultural gaps sometimes occur in mentoring programs established for BIPOC students, resulting in these programs unintentionally reproducing inequality (Cormier, 2020; Sánchez et al., 2021). Non-BIPOC educators and mentors have dispositions such as racial color blindness that are not of assistance in conveying the holistic needs of BIPOC students (Cormier, 2020; Milner, 2020).

### **BIPOC Student Development**

BIPOC students can experience a great deal of student trauma, which can have an impact on student development for BIPOC students (Basma et al., 2021; Hernández & Harris, 2022; Ijoma et al., 2022). Student trauma can be compared to student racism for BIPOC students (Hernández & Harris, 2022). Since BIPOC students are twice as likely to report a hostile racial campus climate compared to non-BIPOC peers (Hernández & Harris, 2022; Rise, 2021),

investigating the correlation of student trauma and the effects it has on BIPOC students' development should be considered (Basma et al., 2021; Hernández & Harris, 2022; Ijoma et al., 2022). Sense of belonging, academic, identity, personal, and professional identity development are other essential developmental factors for BIPOC students. Understanding these developmental elements will assist in understanding BIPOC students further and how the experiences and relationships with academic advisors and mentors can impact the developmental stages.

### ***Academic and Personal Development***

BIPOC students, particularly BIPOC first-generation college students, are more at risk academically, socially, and psychologically due to multiple marginalized identities (Gray, 2013; Schuyler, 2021). With lower GPAs, higher withdrawal rates, and lower graduation rates, BIPOC students, particularly Black and Latinx first-generation attending colleges and universities, face academic and personal development challenges (Cataldi et al., 2018; Schuyler, 2021). These academic and personal development challenges include but are not limited to having no desire to create academic and career-related goals, no self-standards, lack of critical thinking skills, and no access to social and academic support (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Schuyler, 2021). Challenges linked to academic and personal development can lead to BIPOC students being academically unprepared (Schuyler, 2021; Stephens et al., 2012). Furthermore, BIPOC students of lower socioeconomic status encounter additional barriers relating to stigma, marginalization, and hardship concerning social class identities (Schuyler, 2021; Stephens et al., 2012). Experiencing higher levels of classism on college campuses from faculty and other college peers, BIPOC students, specifically first-generation students, have to encounter these additional negative experiences (Schuyler, 2021; Rice et al., 2017).

Due to being stereotyped by professors and other students based on socioeconomic status, these BIPOC students feel embarrassed and invalidated (Havlik et al., 2020; Schuyler, 2021). Having limited financial resources and a reputation of low socioeconomic status applies pressure on BIPOC students to work full-time jobs while attending college (House et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2019; Schuyler, 2021). BIPOC students who are economically disadvantaged are at a higher risk of not having the academic skills, educational background, and knowledge compared to peers who may have high achievement and social statuses (Schuyler, 2021; Richards, 2020). As a result of not having academic skills, educational background, and knowledge, first-generation BIPOC students are more likely to avoid getting involved in campus activities, study groups, connecting with faculty, and other campus support resources that connect to academic and social success (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Schuyler, 2021).

Providing resources to BIPOC students to enhance academic development can result in academic progress, college success, career goals, and the capability to manage college-related barriers (Schuyler, 2021; Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Incorporating pedagogical approaches that promote collaborative group learning, learning in teams, and learning from peers can result in positive educational experiences for first-generation BIPOC students. (Schuyler, 2021; Roberson & Kleynhaus, 2019). Since first-generation BIPOC students are less likely to believe in themselves to perform well academically than White peers, BIPOC students must receive support in academic development, transitional adjustment, and mental health to improve self-efficacy (McCoy, 2014; Schuyler, 2021). Consistent meetings with academic advisors can improve self-efficacy by increasing academic retention and performance for first-generation BIPOC students (Schuyler, 2021; Swecker et al., 2013).

### ***Identity Development***

Identity development addresses questions such as, Who am I and how society forms assurance as a racialized being for BIPOC students (Hernández & Harris, 2022). BIPOC students are faced with trying to control their sense of susceptibility and safety as an outcome of noticing how racist experiences can weaken them, analyzing the environment on college campuses, they feel personal identities could be used as a target, and the places they may feel protected (Hernández & Harris, 2022). Usually, BIPOC students do not have the option of allowing which identity they wish to publicize since they are typically judged by skin color and other physical characteristics (Hernández & Harris, 2022). BIPOC students usually feel protected and supported by others who share the same identity as them (Hernández & Harris, 2022). When dealing with tension due to unsuitable events relating to some trauma-related experience, BIPOC students usually seek out coping and surrounding themselves with others with the same or similar identities (Hernández & Harris, 2022). This type of behavior can be viewed as anti-white and pro-cultural pride. Still, it is simply a way for BIPOC students to deal with past trauma experiences, which are usually racist-related (Hernández & Harris, 2022). To understand further what racial identity means to BIPOC students, they may take courses or study abroad to learn and develop more knowledge of BIPOC identity. (Hernández & Harris, 2022; Torres et al., 2019). These measures aligned with coping activities BIPOC students experience relating to trauma (Hernández & Harris, 2022). BIPOC students try to identify with individuals who genuinely understand the trauma, not just the facts (Hernández & Harris, 2022).

### ***Professional Identity Development***

Professional identity development within BIPOC students is an area of identity for BIPOC students who do not receive as much attention as needed (Trammell, 2022). In preparation for the real world after graduation, professional identity development can assist

BIPOC students with professional readiness (Mintz, 2021; Trammell, 2022). Many BIPOC students are unprepared for career opportunities and lack the skills and experience needed to obtain a career after graduation due to not partaking in or having the chance to experience internships (Ong & VanDerziel, 2021; Trammell, 2022). BIPOC students are not always presented with professional identity development opportunities in higher education settings due to BIPOC students not feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging and the opportunities not portraying realistic expectations (Trammell, 2022). The responsibility to ensure BIPOC students feel supported and included in professional development opportunities should rely on higher education institutions (Trammell, 2022). BIPOC students can become easily discouraged when they do not see a representation of themselves in future professional and career possibilities (Trammell, 2022). Higher education institutions should make sure that BIPOC students feel encouraged never to give up if they feel a sense of not belonging by including support services and focusing on the experience of BIPOC students within professional development needs (Trammell, 2022).

### ***Sense of Belonging***

A sense of belonging for college students is a feeling of being included and a part of the community (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). When students have a sense of belonging with the college community, students feel respected, appreciated, accepted, and needed by others (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Strayhorn, 2012). The phrase, sense of belonging, became popular within higher education with the assistance of Spady's research on perceived social integration (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Spady, 1970; 1970). Tinto also contributed to the popular term "sense of belonging" by bringing awareness to college retention and dropout rates and having educational discussions about a sense of belonging through the lens of the theory of

departure (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Tinto, 1975). Following Spady and Tinto's work, Rendon used theory to explain how BIPOC students are at high risk of feeling isolated and lacking a sense of belonging on college campuses (Bauman & Lott, 2021).

Sense of belonging from an academic and social integration component was introduced to higher education by Hurtado and Carter, where they took a psychological approach in discussing how the sense of belonging is essential for students' subjective feelings to connect with others and the campus community (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Colleges and universities focus more on recruiting BIPOC students rather than looking further into practices that can develop better ways to integrate BIPOC students into the campuses, creating a sense of belonging (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Strayhorn, 2018). Comprehending why BIPOC students, particularly BIPOC male students, need a sense of belonging is essential to understanding how they can be affected by social and academic experiences (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). BIPOC students who attend predominantly white institutions (PWIs) experience institutional climate differences, which can impact their sense of belonging (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Chen et al., 2014). BIPOC male students who attend PWIs feel unwanted, isolated, lacking support, and alienated by non-BIPOC peers, staff, and faculty (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Lee & Ransom, 2011). PWIs and other colleges and universities can improve the campus climates to increase the sense of belonging for BIPOC students by using strategies that will bring awareness and sustain positive relationships among the BIPOC student community, faculty, staff, and other students (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Locks et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). BIPOC students should not have to create opportunities for success due to colleges and universities' poor institutional structures (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Johnson et al., 2007). Colleges and universities are responsible for ensuring that the campuses have structures in place that will meet the needs of the growing

population of BIPOC students choosing to attend HEIs (Bauman & Lott, 2021; Bensimon, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007).

### **Summary**

Diverse representation among advisors and mentors within higher education institutions has become a trendy topic of discussion (Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). The importance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students identifying with academic advisors and mentors is vital for discussion (Ijoma et al., 2022; Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022). To further understand the importance of BIPOC students identifying with academic advisors and mentors, the relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 2018) was incorporated into this study to support the importance of BIPOC students building relationships with academic advisors. Relating to the cultural component of BIPOC students building relationships with academic advisors and mentors, the relational-cultural theory explains how power dynamics in culture can affect people's well-being and how disconnections can occur when there is a stratification of differences and individuals from a leading group criticizing and humiliating a group at the edge (Jordan, 2010). Using the relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Miller, 1976) to guide in understanding this study's topic, the reviewed literature discussed barriers BIPOC students encounter, student, advisor, and mentor relationships, sense of belonging, culturally engaging advising environments, sociocultural gaps, and academic, identity, and personal developments for BIPOC students (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Basma et al., 2021; Dodo-Seriki & McDonald, 2022; Ijoma et al., 2022; Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022; Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). A gap in the literature relates to current practices within higher education institutions to better assist BIPOC students in identifying with academic advisors and mentors. By examining the roles of relational-cultural theory and the reviewed



literature topics, better practices within higher education institutions can be developed to assist BIPOC students in identifying with academic advisors and mentors.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study is to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. Chapter Three explains the research design, procedures, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis plans related to this study. The subsections of this chapter discuss my role and positionality as the researcher of this study, interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and recruitment plan. In conclusion, this chapter discusses the standards established for the trustworthiness of this study, the established credibility, transferability, and dependability relating to this study, and this study's ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study to explore further the experiences shared among BIPOC undergraduate students who have underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. Qualitative research explains a shared understanding of a group of human beings lived experiences of a phenomenon or a general notion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The most beneficial reasoning behind using a qualitative research method is when a phenomenon needs an explanation of the human experience only described through observations, interactions, and documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Allowing the opportunity to simplify a method of explaining the meaning individuals bring to the experiences and highlighting the researcher's perspective can be accomplished through qualitative research methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, applying a qualitative research design to this study is appropriate for understanding the underdeveloped identifiable

relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as BIPOC at a public higher education institution.

A hermeneutic phenomenology approach was chosen for this study because it allows the researcher to address biases while demonstrating how subjectivity relates to the analysis process of the study (Neubauer et al., 2019; van Manen, 2016). Unlike other phenomenology approaches, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach persuades the researcher to include all preconceptions and not eliminate any impact they may have on the study (van Manen, 2016). As the researcher of this study who has experienced the phenomenon, I can use a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to acknowledge personal beliefs and attitudes while understanding how this can affect the study's process. The hermeneutic phenomenology design begins with the essence of the lived experience (van Manen, 2016). Outlining the existence of something instead of just recognizing it is the first step and purpose of phenomenology research (van Manen, 2016). Applying a hermeneutic phenomenology approach will allow me to investigate experience as lived rather than conceptualized, describe the phenomenon through writing, and balance the research by considering the parts and the whole (van Manen, 2016).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color at a public higher education institution. The established research questions align with the problem and purpose of this study. The following research questions in this study will provide answers:

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students building positive relationships with assigned

academic advisors?

### **Sub-Question One**

How are assigned academic advisors assisting BIPOC students in achieving a sense of well-being and safety through growth-fostering relationships?

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to the experience of building positive relationships between BIPOC students and assigned academic advisors?

### **Sub-Question Three**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors?

## **Setting and Participants**

This phenomenological study occurred at a public higher education institution. The participants in this study were currently enrolled students who identify as BIPOC. The participants were current students at a public HEI. I used pseudonyms for the HEI, city, and participants' name.

### **Site**

Lemons University is a public research university in the suburban town of Greenville. Lemons University's leadership and organizational structure includes a Board of Trustees with voting and non-voting members, a faculty representative, and a Trustee Emeritus (Montclair State, 2023d). Within Lemons University, the leadership organizational structure also involves officers of the university such as the President, Vice President for Communications and Marketing, University Counsel, Vice President for University Facilities, Interim Vice President for Information Technology, Interim Chief Operating Officer, and Senior Vice President, Interim

Vice President for Finance and Treasurer, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life, Vice President for Human Resources, Vice President for Development, and Academic Deans (Montclair State, 2023d). Lemons University is the second-largest University in its state and has a total population of 21,784 students (Montclair State, 2023a; Montclair State, 2023b).

Within the undergraduate student body at Lemons University, 37% of students identify as White, 36% as Hispanic/Latino, 13% as Black/African American, 7% as Asian, 3% as two or more races, 1% as Non-Resident Alien, and 3% are unknown (Montclair State, 2023c). The student-to-faculty ratio is 17:1, and the average class size is 23 (Montclair State, 2023c). In 2021, the demographics for full-time faculty were 55% White, 13.5% Asian, 7.2% African American, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 4.6 Non-Resident, 1.1% two or more races, and 11.1% unknown (Montclair State, 2022). Lemons University is a notable university ranked seventh among all 440 national universities in graduation rate performance (Montclair State, 2023b). Lemons University was selected as a site for this study because it is an HSI and a large university (Montclair State, 2022; Montclair State, 2023a; Montclair State, 2023b). Approximately 59% of students could identify as BIPOC, and less than 45% of faculty identify as BIPOC (Montclair State, 2022; Montclair State, 2023a; Montclair State, 2023b).

## **Participants**

The participants in this study identified as BIPOC students currently enrolled at Lemons University. There were a total of 15 participants in this study. All participants discussed their relationship experiences with the academic advisors assigned to them at Lemons University. The participants were males and females and were between the ages of 18 – 25. No minors were

selected for this study. The students varied in majors and were commuters and residential students.

### **Recruitment Plan**

I recruited 15 college students who identified as BIPOC, were between 18 - 25 years of age, enrolled at a public HEI, and had an assigned academic advisor. An explanation of the research, including the purpose of the study, was distributed via email to all prospective participants to ensure they understood the study, were interested in the study, and were willing to participate in individual interviews, a focus group interview, and protocol writing, and were aware that all information received from participants will be published data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I prepared a statement explaining the nature and purpose of my study, which was distributed to students enrolled at the higher education institution associated with my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This statement recruited all students interested in participating in my study. I used purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to identify 15 candidates who met the age, race, and ethnic background requirements and showed traits of experiencing the same phenomenon (van Manen, 2016).

### **Researcher's Positionality**

The motivation for conducting this qualitative study related to my experience as a first-generation student of color attending a predominantly white institution and feeling a sense of not belonging. As a first-generation African American student who attended predominantly white institutions during my undergraduate and postgraduate years, I understand the importance of BIPOC students identifying and building relationships with assigned academic advisors. As a leader, educator, advisor, and mentor in higher education, I ensure that all students receive the resources, tools, and relationships needed to succeed while attending higher education

institutions. Using a social constructivism interpretive framework allowed me to understand my participants' points of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative study allowed me to fill in the gap in previous literature that discussed how it is essential for BIPOC students attending higher education institutions to build meaningful relationships with academic advisors and mentors (Santa-Ramirez, 2022).

### **Interpretive Framework**

The paradigm interpretative framework I used in this study is social constructivism. Social constructivism allowed me to understand how individuals live and work in today's society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used social constructivism to develop subjective meanings of my participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I focused mainly on the participants' views of the shared phenomenon instead of only identifying specific meanings and grouping them into categories or ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using the social constructivism interpretative framework allowed me, as the researcher, to understand my participants' daily work and life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I better understand how BIPOC students develop meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), I will always bring philosophical assumptions and personal beliefs to my research. Therefore, I articulated my philosophical assumptions, which will assist readers in understanding my point of view in the manner I view society, which leads to how I approached my research. The three philosophical assumptions I will address are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

#### ***Ontological Assumption***

The ontological assumption focuses on the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I

researched the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for BIPOC students, I gathered information from different students. My ontological position as a researcher is to ensure that I report the different perspectives among BIPOC students attending colleges and universities. Interviewing different BIPOC students and understanding their unique experiences allowed me to identify any possible themes arising from the different perspectives received. Highlighting any possible themes showed the nature of reality. Reality is also based on power and identity struggles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Incorporating identity struggles that BIPOC students face also included my ontological position as a researcher.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

The epistemological assumption of a researcher requires the researcher to get extremely close to the participants they are studying (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological position as a researcher allowed me to build relationships with the participants. I had the opportunity to understand the participants further and explore the environment where they live and, possibly, where they work. As a leader, educator, advisor, and mentor at a higher education institution, I have experience building relationships with students and understand the importance of this occurring. My experiences further assisted with my epistemological assumption as I got to know my study's participants more in-depth. My experiences also helped minimize any separation between myself and the participants being studied in my research.

### ***Axiological Assumption***

The axiological assumption allows researchers to bring value to a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Being a BIPOC student, I have personal values and biases that I can discuss throughout my research. As an undergraduate student attending a predominately white institution, I understand the importance of developing a relationship with an academic advisor.



However, I am aware of the biases associated with this study. I managed my biases by not including my perspective on the problem and purpose of this study. Instead, I focused only on the shared lived experiences of my participants. My axiological assumption as a researcher allowed me to identify my biases and values relating to the importance of BIPOC students and identify with academic advisors and mentors. I value the importance of all students identifying with academic advisors, but I understand and can relate to how BIPOC students may struggle to obtain this goal. My axiological assumption as a researcher allowed me to discuss the different roles of values in this subject matter. I reported on the different values BIPOC students have, as well as identified values that others should consider.

### **Researcher's Role**

As a leader, educator, advisor, and mentor in higher education who identifies as a Black woman and understands the importance of BIPOC students building meaningful relationships with academic advisors, I know I may have biases and assumptions about my research study. Using a journal, I recorded my experiences as a researcher to address and minimize my biases. I served as the director of advising at a public higher education institution. Understanding my role as a Director of Advising, I ensured that no ethical data collection or analysis conflicted. Creating the requirement that none of the participants in this study were students currently assigned to me as an advisee assisted with eliminating possible ethical conflicts. Since some of my study participants were enrolled at the institution where I was employed, I ensured that I did not have any authority over them. Conducting a phenomenology study allowed me to abstain from incorporating personal beliefs and allowed me, as the researcher, to focus on my research topic with a fresh lens (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Procedures**

I used the following steps to conduct the research study. I obtained approval from the institutional review board (IRB) at Liberty University to commence the study (see Appendix A). I got all the necessary approvals and permissions from the site where I conducted the research (see Appendix B). I conducted the study once I received all IRB and site approvals and permissions. The next step was soliciting participants for the research. I provided information and a consent form (see Appendix C) that outlined the study's purpose and explained the participant's role in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began the data collection process for the study, which included protocol writing, conducting individual interviews, and ending with facilitating focus groups. I used appropriate video and audio software to record all interviews. The final step was analyzing the data I transcribed and using the appropriate software to assist. I selected protocol writing, individual interviews, and focus groups as the three data collection methods to connect to the purpose of this study and the central research question to attain triangulation.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed different data collection approaches for qualitative research: interviews, observations, documents, audiovisual materials, journaling, and focus groups. For the purpose of my study, I selected individual interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing as the three data collection methods to connect to the purpose of my study and the central research question to attain triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) described how phenomenological research explains a shared lived experience among individuals. Data collection should represent the accurate perspectives of the participants of the study, allowing the researcher to comprehend the lived experience, as opposed to just reporting the phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). During the data collection process, I, as the researcher, focused

on the participants' most meaningful words and conveyed them using terms, phrases, and expressions (van Manen, 2016).

Conducting individual interviews as the primary data collection method allowed me to capture the lived experiences of all participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2014). Using focus groups as a data collection type and as a form of an interview (Patton, 2014) allowed me, as the researcher, to interact with several participants simultaneously and listen to all of the experiences collectively while having the opportunity to encourage dialogue among them, bringing different perspectives to my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups are particular types of groups that gather opinions from individuals and assist with better comprehending how individuals perceive or believe in a matter, proposal, service, or outcome (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Protocol writing collected information from the participants about the personal experience of having an underdeveloped identifiable relationship with an assigned academic advisor. Participants were asked to focus on describing their feelings, moods, and emotions to produce a lived experience description among the participants (van Manen, 2016).

### **Individual Interviews**

The primary data collection I used for this study consisted of individual interviews. When applying the hermeneutic phenomenology method, conducting interviews has two primary purposes: to investigate and advance a rich understanding of the phenomenon and to expand a discussion around the meaning of experience (van Manen, 2016). Using the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, I conducted more conversational interviews while maintaining a semi-structured format, avoiding unstructured or open-ended interviews (van Manen, 2016). When a semi-structured interview is utilized, it will rely on the memories and reflections of the participants, assisting them in revisiting their lived experiences (Crotty, 1998). The individual

interviews were held face-to-face virtually via web-based. The following questions were asked during the individual interviews to identify the lived experiences of underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for BIPOC students attending a higher education institution:

**Table 1**

*Individual Interview Questions*

1. What has been your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor? CRQ
2. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you in achieving a sense of well-being (well-being relating to how you feel about yourself and your life)? SQ1
3. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor assisted you with achieving a sense of safety? SQ1
4. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you to approach a situation, or life in general, with excitement and energy, which made you avoid approaching tasks or activities halfway? SQ1
5. How has your assigned academic advisor encouraged you to gain a sense of personal worth? SQ1
6. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you to be more creative? SQ1
7. How does your assigned academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to building a positive relationship? SQ2

8. What has been your experience having an academic advisor with whom you share the same race, ethnicity, and culture? SQ2
9. What has been your experience having an academic advisor with whom you do not share the same race, ethnicity, and culture? SQ2
10. Explaining the experience: How did you build a positive relationship with an academic advisor with whom you shared the same race, ethnicity, and culture? SQ2
11. Explaining the experience: How did you build a positive relationship with an academic advisor with whom you did not share the same race, ethnicity, and culture? SQ2
12. How would you describe the importance of considering an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture when assigning them to a BIPOC student? SQ2
13. Explaining the experience: How did you establish and maintain a positive connection with your assigned academic advisors? SQ3
14. How has your assigned academic advisor increased your desire to build a further connection within your advisor-advisee relationship? SQ3

Question number one was designed to connect to the central research question, which assisted in better understanding the participants' shared experience. Questions two through six were created to understand how assigned academic advisors assist BIPOC students in achieving a sense of well-being and safety through growth-fostering relationships. Questions two through six focused on the primary component of RCT, which was to achieve a sense of well-being and safety by building positive growth-fostering relationships (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Asking the participants questions two through six examined the relationships among the participants and the assigned academic

advisors to detect growth-fostering relationships that create "five good things" according to the RCT (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022).

Questions seven through 12 examined whether culture contributes to building positive relationships between BIPOC students and the assigned academic advisors. Asking the participants questions seven through 12 highlighted an additional component of RCT, which relates to the power dynamics in culture and how this can affect the well-being of the participants (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Questions 13 and 14 explained the experiences of BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors. Asking the participants questions 13 and 14 highlighted the final component of RCT, which related to building positive connections with others (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022).

## **Focus Groups**

The second data collection method used for this study was a focus group. After evaluating the questionnaires and interviewing the participants, I created a focus group to gather all the participants to discuss sub-question three, which focused on the experiences of BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors. Focus groups are excellent ways to create triangulation and can save time by avoiding conducting several needed follow-up interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The following questions were asked during the focus group:

## **Table 2**

### *Focus Group Questions*

1. During our one-on-one interviews, we discussed your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor. Can you discuss how you felt during

the interview and your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor? CRQ

2. How would you describe the best practices an institution should implement to assist BIPOC students in building a positive relationship with assigned academic advisors? SQ1
3. Can you discuss the advice you would give to another BIPOC student who may struggle to build a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor who is not BIPOC? SQ2
4. How would you describe how a BIPOC student should establish and maintain a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor? SQ3
5. As we conclude this focus group, is there anything else you wish to discuss that you have not yet had the opportunity to share?

Question number one was created to build rapport amongst the group. Building rapport among participants is essential and will also help the participant understand the environment of the focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2018), creating a sense of comfort and trust within the group. It also allowed the participant to reflect on the individual interview and prepare them for questions two through five. Question number two focused on sub-question one, which created a dialogue among the participants to discuss the recommendations to the institution, the assigned academic advisors, and other BIPOC students concerning building positive relationships among assigned academic advisors and advisees. Question four focused on sub-question two, creating another platform among the participants to discuss the advice they would give to other BIPOC students who may struggle to build a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor who is not BIPOC. Question five was designed to transition to

concluding the focus group but allowed the opportunity to gather any additional information that the participants may not have shared.

### **Protocol Writing**

This study's third data collection method was protocol writing. Protocol writing is the most straightforward way to ask participants to write about their experiences, allowing the researcher to investigate the shared experience among all participants further (van, Manen, 2016). Using protocol writing generated original texts from the participants, assisting me, as the researcher, with the proper collection and analysis of data for my study (van, Manen, 2016). Participants were asked to write about a personal experience of having an underdeveloped identifiable relationship with an assigned academic advisor. To produce a lived experience description from the participants, they were asked to focus on describing their feelings, moods, and emotions (van Manen, 2016). Using a minimum of 250 words, the participants explained in detail how they felt, the attitudes, and the emotions they experienced while trying to identify and develop a relationship with the assigned advisor.

### **Table 3**

#### *Protocol Writing Prompt*

In 250 or more words, describe your experience trying to identify and develop a relationship with an assigned academic advisor. Please explain in detail how you felt, your attitude, and the emotions you experienced while trying to identify and develop a relationship with your assigned advisor. Please include if race, ethnicity, or culture was a factor in forming a relationship with your advisor. Please remember to focus on describing your feelings, mood, and emotions concerning your experiences.

### **Data Analysis**



The collected data from this study was analyzed using the hermeneutical phenomenology framework established by van Manen (2016). I used van Manen's six-step interpretive phenomenological approach: (1) turning to a phenomenon of interest, (2) investigating experience as lived rather than conceptualized, (3) reflecting on the essential themes, (4) describing the phenomenon through writing and re-writing, (5) maintaining a focus on the phenomenon, and (6) balancing the research by considering the parts and the whole (van Manen, 2016). All data collected from this study was analyzed by organizing the collected data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and arranging themes, and creating an interpretation of the themes to ensure the data was appropriately represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, to generate a single set of themes amongst all data collected, I identified every participant's statement from the protocol writings, individual interviews, and the focus group to describe the experience shared (Saldana, 2021). I explained the structure of the experience and a textural-structural interpretation of the meanings and essential nature of the shared experience, using all data collected from this study's three data collection methods.

Data collected from individual interviews and focus groups was transcribed and filed using suitable software to keep all data organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data collected from interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed using Verbit Live Transcription for Zoom. Data analysis within qualitative research involves arranging and sorting data that will be analyzed into themes by coding and providing visual data using figures, tables, or discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are three approaches to thematic analysis: holistic, selective, and detailed (van Manen, 2016). I used the selective approach for thematic analysis and interpretation of synthesized data. I used van Manen's (2016) selective approach to mine textual

data for thematic meanings. Using van Manen's selective approach allowed me, the researcher, to review the texts or words several times and highlight statements as "clues to meaning" that were essential or revealed about the phenomenon. All thematic analyses were synthesized and addressed the Central Research Question and Sub-Questions. To remain mindful of the participants' lived experiences, I considered the four existential of the lived experience: lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality) (Van Manen, 2016). I used suitable software to assist in thematic assimilation to ensure the participants' responses addressed the Central Research Question and Sub-Questions. All data collection and analysis remained in order and stored correctly to ensure participant confidentiality.

### ***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan***

The individual interview data collected from this study was analyzed by organizing the collected data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and arranging themes, and creating an interpretation of the themes to ensure the data was appropriately represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first step in analyzing the data involved ensuring all data collected from the participants was transcribed and filed using suitable software to keep all data organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, a preliminary read-through of the database occurred to get a sense of each interview before breaking it apart (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After re-reading the data collected from the interviews, evaluating all statements and phrases to create coding and themes occurred (van Manen, 2016). According to van Manen (2016), I should consider evaluating all statements and phrases that appear essential or disclose the phenomenon or experience expressed. Selective coding was applied to identify the words or short phrases the participants used during the interviews. When using selective coding, the researcher should

identify the statement(s) or phrase(s) that appear to be essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience. (van Manen, 2016). After creating codes, the codes were grouped into categories (Saldana, 2021). The categories were re-evaluated before being finalized and then synthesized into themes (Saldana, 2021). Van Manen (2016) suggests three approaches to thematic analysis: holistic, selective, and detailed. I used the selective approach for this study. The final step was interpreting the themes, which involved making sense of the data collected and highlighting the lessons learned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

Identifying the individual leading the analysis was one of the steps in forming a plan to collect focus group data (Krueger & Casey, 2015). It is essential that this person observes the focus group and is well-informed about the information discussed and how it was shared (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In alignment with Krueger and Casey (2015), to complete the first step of the analysis plan for the collected focus group data, I identified myself as the moderator and analysis leader of the focus group for my study. Confirming that all of the questions for the focus group were identifiable took place, as explained by Krueger and Casey (2015). Keeping track of and identifying all the participants' names and the questions they answered in the focus group occurred.

Similar to the individual interview data collected from this study, I analyzed the data collected from the focus group by organizing the collected data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and arranging themes, and creating an interpretation of the themes to ensure the data was appropriately represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Selective coding was applied to identify the participant's words or short phrases used during the focus group interview (Saldana, 2021). After creating codes, the codes were grouped into categories

(Saldana, 2021). The categories were re-evaluated before being finalized and then synthesized into themes (Saldana, 2021). The final step was to prepare an abridged focus group transcript to capture the participants' conversations (Krueger & Casey, 2015), analyze every participant's statement to explain the experience shared and record all applicable comments (Moustakas, 1994).

### ***Protocol Writing Data Analysis Plan***

Similar to the individual interview data analysis plan, the protocol writing data collected from this study was analyzed by organizing the collected data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and arranging themes, and creating an interpretation of the themes to ensure the data was appropriately represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All writing samples collected were transcribed and filed using suitable software, keeping all data organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I listed relevant data gathered from the participants' experiences to maintain a focus on the phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). Using van Manen's (2016) selective approach, I can review the texts or words multiple times and highlight statements as "clues to meaning" that are essential or revealing about the phenomenon. After reflecting on the data collected from the protocol writings, all statements and phrases were evaluated to create coding and themes (van Manen, 2016). After creating codes, the codes were grouped into categories (Saldana, 2021). The categories were re-evaluated before being finalized and then synthesized into themes (Saldana, 2021).

### **Trustworthiness**

The standards established for the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, using terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were formulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a research study is

essential to evaluating its worth. In establishing trustworthiness in my study, I applied Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria and Creswell's and Poth's (2018) standards of validation and evaluation to establish validation and reliability within my study.

### **Credibility**

Extending engagement in the field and triangulation of data sources, procedures, and researchers are suggested techniques to establish credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility in my study, I used corroborating evidence through triangulation of my data sources within my research, sought participants' feedback, and prolonged engagement and observation in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used the seeking participant feedback technique to ensure that the participants' views of this study's findings were incorporated (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the participant feedback technique, I conducted a comprehensive *writ approach*, which gave the participants in my study the opportunity to evaluate the study's data and contribute feedback on the credibility and accuracy of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The seeking participant feedback technique is the most evaluative technique for creating credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the prolonged engagement and persistent observation of the field technique, I built a close relationship with the participants, studied the culture and surroundings, and identified any false information that may be disclosed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Transferability**

A thick description is needed to ensure that research findings are transferable between the study's participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To show transferability, I described how my study's findings have relevancies in future studies differing in settings and

context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and explained my research findings in great detail. However, as the researcher, I can only establish the conditions for transferability. Understanding that only the research reader can decide if transferability is displayed within my study is vital.

### **Dependability**

Dependability within a study shows that research findings are stable and available to be reproduced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To show dependability in my research, I provided a detailed and constructive explanation of my study's procedures while describing how my research findings can be repeated at another higher education institution. In addition, my dissertation committee and Qualitative Research Director managed an inquiry audit to ensure dependability was accomplished within my study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability in a research study is a level of non-bias in research findings created by the participants and not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A realistic researcher seeks confirmability instead of objectivity in organizing research data's benefits (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the following techniques to establish confirmability in my study: confirmability audits, audit trails, triangulation, and reflexivity. The audit trail managed relevant and accurate data records described in the study's results (see Appendix I). (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used a journal to track the daily logistics, methods for my resolutions and actions, and my thoughts during my study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also identified all negative analyses to produce a realistic assessment of my study's phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure that ethical consideration takes place in my study, I explained how I obtained

access to the higher education institutions attended by the participants in my research. I informed my participants that participation in this research was voluntary, and they could remove themselves from the study anytime. All participants fully understood the purpose of the study and the role they played as participants. Confidentiality was explained to all participants in this study. I explained that all data used in this study will be filed electronically, secured with a password, and deleted after three years of collection unless a decision is made to extend the study, in which the participants should be notified. All risks and benefits were explained to the participants, and an assessment of the possible dangers they may encounter. Since I served as an advisor and a mentor at the site used in this study, I ensured that none of the participants selected in this research served as one of my advisees or mentees. I ensured I had IRB approval and any other approvals necessary before conducting any data collection for my study.

### ***Permissions***

Before conducting any research, I ensured I received all the permissions needed to complete the study. I had informal conversations with prospective sites that were a part of the study. I received permission from Liberty University by getting IRB approval (see Appendix A). I secured all the necessary approvals and permissions from the site where I conducted the research (see Appendix B). I ensured all participants agreed to be participants, understood their role within the study, and gave permission to participate (see Appendix C).

### ***Other Participant Protections***

An explanation of the research, including the purpose of the study, was distributed via email to all prospective participants to ensure they understood the study, were interested in the study, and were willing to participate in individual interviews, a focus group interview, and protocol writing, and were aware that all information received from participants would be

published data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I informed all participants that participation in this research was voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time. A statement explaining the nature and purpose of the study was prepared and distributed to students enrolled at the higher education institution associated with this research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The statement recruited all students interested in participating in the study. Pseudonyms were used for the site, city, and participants' names to ensure the site's and participants' confidentiality. All data used in this study was filed electronically, secured with a password, and will be deleted after three years of collection unless a decision is made to extend the study, in which the participants will be notified. Participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study. However, this was an opportunity for BIPOC students to share their experiences of having an underdeveloped relationship with assigned academic advisors. Participants may also experience a positive change in their university's campus environment if findings from this study prompt changes at their institutions to investigate further the experiences of BIPOC students who are unable to develop relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. In Chapter Three, I explained the research design, procedures, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis plans related to this study. The research design I chose for my study was a phenomenological study, which explained a shared understanding of a group of human beings' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Protocol writing, individual interviews, and focus groups were discussed as my study's three data collection



methods. Data analysis from this study was aligned with van Manen's (2016) hermeneutical phenomenology research design. In conclusion, Chapter Three discussed the standards established for the trustworthiness of this study, the established credibility, transferability, and dependability relating to this study, and this study's ethical considerations.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study is to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) attending a public higher education institution. This chapter will provide participant descriptions through narrative themes and subthemes. The chapter concludes with the central research question and sub-questions, with participant responses to those questions followed by a chapter summary.

### Participants

The participants for this study were students who identified as BIPOC, were between the ages of 18 and 25, and enrolled at Lemons University, a public four-year research university in the United States. A purposeful sampling method was used to identify the 15 candidates who met the age, race, and ethnic background requirements of this study and showed traits of experiencing the same phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). Seven participants were African Americans, three were Asians, four were Hispanics, and one identified as multi-racial (Guyanese, Indian, Chinese, and African American). Nine participants were females, five were male, and one identified as nonbinary. Out of the 15 candidates, one was a freshman, nine were sophomores, two were juniors, and three were seniors. Refer to Table 4 below and Appendix J for participant information.

**Table 4**

*Participants*

Participant Name	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Class Status
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Addie	Female	Guyanese/Chinese/Indian/African American	Sophomore
Adelina	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	Sophomore
Ashanti	Female	African American/Black	Senior
Celeste	Female	African American/Black	Junior
Davina	Female	African American/Black	Sophomore
Gabriel	Male	Hispanic/Latinx	Sophomore
Gunav	Male	Asian	Freshmen
Jabari	Male	African American/Black	Sophomore
Jose	Male	Hispanic/Latinx	Junior
Liz	Nonbinary	African American/Black	Sophomore
Mai	Female	Asian	Sophomore
Maria	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	Sophomore
Maya	Female	African American/Black	Senior
Naomi	Female	Asian	Senior
Rey	Male	African American/Black	Sophomore

### **Addie**

During Addie's first year as a chemistry major, she had an unsuccessful experience building and forming a relationship with her assigned academic advisor. After switching her major to psychology, she found support through drop-in advising sessions with a specific advisor in the psychology department, who was helpful and motivational. The relationship with her

current academic advisor in the psychology department positively influenced Addie's sense of well-being and safety, which helped her recover from a challenging year and supported her academic progress. Addie believed it is essential for students to have a say in choosing their academic advisors and suggested that a shared racial or cultural background can be significant for BIPOC students. She believed that the ability to choose an advisor could enhance comfort and support for BIPOC students.

### **Adelina**

Adelina initiated building a relationship and a connection with her assigned academic advisor after experiencing a transactional advising relationship experience. Her relationship with her assigned academic advisor became a more positive and comfortable experience after she formed a connection, identified shared similarities, and met frequently with her academic advisor. Adelina believed that having a shared cultural background could benefit some BIPOC students but felt it was not necessary for a successful advisor-student relationship.

### **Ashanti**

Ashanti's experience with her assigned academic advisor was more negative than positive. Her negative experience with her assigned academic advisor was discouraging but also served as a driving force to push her harder in her academic studies. Ashanti received no encouragement or contribution to her sense of well-being or safety. She believed it was essential to consider an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture when assigning them to BIPOC students. Ashanti felt that having an advisor of the same race could provide a sense of familiarity and understanding but also acknowledged the importance of interacting with people from different backgrounds to prepare for the real world. Due to Ashanti's negative academic advising

experiences, her desire to build a further connection within her advisor-student relationship did not increase but instead decreased due to the negative experiences.

### **Celeste**

As a nursing major, Celeste felt her relationship with her assigned academic advisor needed additional support. She described her advisor as not resourceful and tended to forward issues rather than address them directly, leading to a minimal relationship. After a pessimistic encounter where her advisor suggested she consider other careers after struggling with a chemistry class, Celeste almost quit the nursing program. This interaction lacked empathy and support, undermining her confidence and sense of personal worth. She felt her Hispanic advisor needed to gain experience with African American students, leading to a dismissive attitude. Celeste built a positive relationship with a second assigned academic advisor through the Educational Opportunity Funding (EOF) program and has accepted that her relationship with her nursing advisor will remain strictly professional.

### **Davina**

Davina had a positive relationship with her assigned academic advisor. She built a positive relationship with her academic advisor during her first year as a college student. However, she felt her relationship with her academic advisor could be more robust if her advisor had more availability and a personal connection with advisees. Davina needed constant positivity and motivation from academic advisors to approach challenges more confidently. She felt that sharing the same race, ethnicity, and culture with an advisor can contribute to a better understanding of each other's experiences. However, there were other factors that helped build a positive relationship with Davina.

### **Gabriel**

Gabriel had a positive experience building a positive relationship with his assigned academic advisor, who understood and supported his aspirations to study abroad. Sharing experiences and having encouragement from an academic advisor was essential to Gabriel. Having a developed relationship with an academic advisor assisted Gabriel in feeling reassured about his academic standing and planning and contributed to his overall well-being. Although Gabriel has not had an academic advisor with the same race, ethnicity, and culture as him, he believed that having an advisor who shared these aspects would be more relatable and understanding of his experiences.

### **Gunay**

Being able to provide real-life solutions to problems and guidance are some qualities Gunay desired from an assigned academic advisor. Gunay had a big personality, great humor, and high energy levels, which he felt should be a joint interest between an advisor and advisee. Although Gunay was of Indian descent, he found connecting with an advisor from a different race/ethnicity easier than with an American Indian advisor. According to Gunay, the comfort level with an advisor's race/ethnicity varied from person to person.

### **Jabari**

Jabari had many experiences as a student within predominantly white environments. He experienced feeling unsafe, unsupported, and discriminated against as a student of color. Although Jabari felt that some of his assigned academic advisors may have unintentionally shown biases and were unintentionally offensive, he appreciated his advisor's reliability and assistance in resolving issues and discussing his academic concerns. Having never experienced having an academic advisor of the same race, Jabari felt that having an advisor who shared the

same race, ethnicity, and culture could provide a safe space for students, especially in underrepresented environments.

### **Jose**

Jose grew up in an urban community where he experienced being around crime and unsafe environments. Feeling a sense of safety was vital to Jose. His academic advisor needed to improve his mental safety by providing reassurance and realistic expectations about his academic journey, which included GPA requirements and course selection. Switching academic programs numerous times and finally deciding to pursue mathematics as a college major resulted in Jose having multiple academic advisors. His current assigned academic advisor was helpful and had a straightforward approach to advising. Jose valued the responsibility placed on him by his academic advisors and appreciated and found their directness and realistic perspective on his academic progress influential, particularly in his mathematics major. While Jose's assigned academic advisor was of a different race, his understanding and inclusivity have benefited Jose, allowing him to learn from different perspectives.

### **Liz**

Liz, identified as nonbinary, and pronouns were they, them, and theirs, experienced a relationship with their academic advisor initially marked by nervousness and cultural disconnect. The relationship transformed into a supportive and communicative bond over two years, emphasizing the assigned academic advisor's role in wanting the best for them. Reassurance provided by an academic advisor was vital for Liz amidst global and local safety concerns. Liz felt that while sharing race, ethnicity, and culture with an advisor could be refreshing and help connect with one's roots, it was not the sole factor in building a positive relationship, as human connection transcended these aspects. Representation in academic advising for BIPOC students

was vital for Liz. Liz believed that while individual needs vary, having advisors who shared a student's ethnicity and culture could be beneficial.

### **Mai**

Mai had mixed experiences with assigned academic advisors, which initially made her feel intimidated, forcing her to find support elsewhere. Having dealt with personal challenges, Mai desired to be understood and supported by her assigned academic advisors. Mai felt that some of her assigned academic advisors positively influenced her sense of capability and well-being, resulting in her celebrating and encouraging her achievements. Safe spaces were essential for Mai since they helped her to manage her academic and personal life more effectively. It was complex for Mai to relate to most of her assigned advisors based on shared race, ethnicity, and culture because of both the comfort and the challenges of race, ethnicity, and culture to the advisory relationship.

### **Maria**

Majoring in musical therapy, Maria had a positive experience with her assigned academic advisors. Maria was a student who needed a comforting environment and desired to feel encouraged and supported by her academic advisors. She struggled with organization and being proactive, especially in challenging classes. Therefore, promoting organizational skills and assisting her with time management will give her a sense of well-being. Having an academic advisor of the same race and ethnicity has contributed to Maria's comfort and a sense of belonging, allowing her to communicate openly without judgment. Maria believed it was essential for academic advisors to understand cultural backgrounds to foster openness and relatability in the advisory relationship.

### **Maya**



Maya had experiences with two assigned academic advisors. She experienced having a transactional academic advisor who focused on keeping her on track with completing her degree but had no intentions of building a developed personal, meaningful relationship. In contrast, her current advisor was more supportive and involved in her personal and professional life. Maya admitted to not always taking advantage of her academic advisor's assistance but appreciated that her current advisor was always there for her if she needed anything. As an art major, Maya's advisor has encouraged her creativity to some extent, but he mainly helped her stay focused on the logistics of her projects. Maya, a young black woman, had an older white male advisor. She believed that their relationship took time to develop due to their cultural differences. However, spending time together outside a traditional academic setting, such as on her study abroad trip, helped strengthen their connection.

### **Naomi**

Naomi pursued an academic program in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field and had a positive experience with her assigned academic advisor. She received guidance beyond the curriculum that suggested specific minors that complemented her major. Naomi identified as Asian and was inspired by Asian academic advisors and faculty. She felt the representation of Asian faculty and staff gave her a sense of well-being and self-perception in STEM careers. Naomi's admiration for her Asian faculty advisor left a lasting impact on Naomi's study habits and retention of the material. Naomi felt a cultural connection with her advisor, which made it easier to relate to her advice, drawing parallels to the guidance from her parents and sharing the same race and ethnicity as her academic advisor provided comfort akin to receiving help from an "auntie."

### **Rey**

Rey had a good experience with his assigned academic advisor, who shared a different race than Rey. Although Rey's assigned academic advisor did not share the same race, Rey felt more comfortable sharing experiences with an assigned academic advisor of the same race, ethnicity, and culture. Rey shared that having an academic advisor with the same race and culture would allow him to better understand and relate to his academic advisors. His point of view of considering an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture was critical when assigning them to BIPOC students. He explained that when BIPOC students are assigned to BIPOC advisors, this can create a safe environment for open communication. Rey felt fortunate to have had positive experiences with advisors of different backgrounds. He highlighted the importance of understanding and agreement between different races.

### Results

The thematic results of this study described the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. The hermeneutical framework developed by Van Manen (2016) was used to ascertain themes according to this study's theoretical framework. The participants completed a protocol writing prompt and a semi-structured interview and participated in a focus group discussion. The themes are the students' lived experiences and can be visualized below in Table 5 (see Appendix J).

**Table 5**

#### *Themes & Subthemes*

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
Lack of Relationships		
Positive Advising Experiences		

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Motivation and Encouragement

Lack of Empathy

Creative Problem-Solving

Importance of Culture

Sense of Comfort

Relatability

Race is Not a Primary Factor

Shared Experiences

Creating Friendships

**Frequent Communication**

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### **Lack of Relationships**

Many of the participants in this study disclosed that they experienced a lack of a relationship with their assigned academic advisor. Eight out of the 15 participants interviewed stated that they had no relationship with their assigned academic advisor, and four discussed having a bad relationship. Addie discussed how she never met her assigned academic advisor. Addie shared, "This year, I changed my major to psychology, and I have not met with my assigned advisor. I actually go to the psychology department and do drop-ins with a specific person there with whom I have a good connection." Adelina explained how she tried to connect with her advisor but was unsuccessful. "I tried my best to connect with my advisor," Adelina shared, "it was kind of hard...and I was really nervous. He was kind of nice in the beginning, but he never checked on me. I know it is hard to be an advisor because you have so many students, but you need to deal with them and help as much as you can." Many participants noted the importance of advisors trying to connect and remember details about their advisees. The notion of BIPOC students lacking relationships with their assigned academic advisors reflected upon the phenomenon of BIPOC students having underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Positive Advising Experiences**

Although many participants explained that they lacked a relationship with their assigned academic advisors, data from all three data collection sources revealed that some participants had positive advising experiences. The positive advising experiences discussed within individual interviews included the experience of building a positive relationship with their advisor, who was extremely helpful and always seemed to know exactly who they were and what they needed. During an individual interview, Davina described her feelings about her relationship with her assigned advisor. "We had a positive relationship because I had to speak to her so much. I always felt like she knew exactly who I was and what I needed," Davina explained. Naomi discussed during her interview, her positive experience with her current academic advisor, who provided guidance beyond the curriculum and suggested a minor to complement her major. "The very first time I met with my advisor, she spoke to me about not just what is on my degree works but also gave me suggestions on how I can pursue a minor. My advisor was trying to pave another direction for me that I did not even know existed. So, I really appreciated her for that!"

### **Motivation and Encouragement**

An academic advisor who is motivational and encourages their advisee is a characteristic that many of the participants admired and appreciated within an academic advisor. Twelve out of the 15 participants mentioned the importance of experiencing a motivational academic advisor. Many participants in this study related having a motivational advisor to achieving a sense of well-being and safety within themselves. Gunay spoke about a difficult moment when he thought about dropping out of college. Gunay explained how his academic advisor motivated him to remain at the university and how this motivational moment changed his life. Gunay shared, "I was at a point in my life where I wanted to come up out of courses and just drop out of college."

Gunay continued, "But he made me understand that this is not an outcome for me because if you do that, then you are just wasting your life." Gunay further explained how his academic advisor has become one of the most trustworthy and motivational people he has ever met. His academic advisor was not just someone he could rely on to advise him on academic-related issues but became someone he admired and motivated him to do better. Gunay explained how he depended on his advisor, "Every time I have a problem, I go to him, and he tells me that I am someone who can overcome any difficulty in my life...he helped me remove bad habits from my life!"

Mai's academic advisor encouraged her to explore her interests, such as gardening, and to participate in social activities, which helped her to be more creative and feel acknowledged. Nine of the 15 participants mentioned encouragement during their interview. The participants in this study revealed that encouragement plays a significant role in advisors who assist in achieving a sense of well-being and safety. Mai shared, "Talking to my advisor allowed me to develop an interest in gardening and join the gardening club for the summer... they always push me to do more social stuff." Mai continued and expressed, "They are always ready to tell me they are proud of me... they acknowledge and encourage me and say I am so proud of you...hearing this makes me feel good!"

Ashanti had a different motivational experience from the rest of the participants in this study. Ashanti, a jurisprudence, law, and society major, shared her negative experience meeting with her academic advisor. She explained that her assigned academic advisor did not provide encouragement or contribute to her sense of well-being. However, Ashanti described how she found the motivation to prove her advisor wrong and excel in her studies. Ashanti shared, "My academic advisor told me that he did not see me as a competitive candidate to get into law school....this was really hard for me to hear and demeaning in a way. Ashanti further discussed

how this experience with her academic advisor motivated her to excel. Two years after conversing with her advisor, Ashanti explained how she received As and Bs and became a competitive candidate for law school. "An academic advisor is supposed to advise you, not discourage you," Ashanti shared. "I felt disrespected because I came asking for help, but instead, he gave his opinion of me, and that was something I did not ask for." Ashanti described her advisor's words as really hurtful. She felt that since he was of a dominant race and her being a minority, this made her feel like biases were present.

### **Lack of Empathy**

As many participants explained during their interviews, receiving constructive criticism from academic advisors can be challenging. Almost half of the participants in this study mentioned that their academic advisors lacked empathy. Celeste described her relationship with her assigned academic advisor as lacking support, particularly as a nursing major. She felt her advisor could be more resourceful and tended to forward issues rather than address them directly, leading to a minimal relationship. Celeste explained how she stopped seeking her advisor's help, preferring to communicate directly with the director of nursing because her advisor "tends to be very negative and very pessimistic."

Celeste shared one of her experiences meeting with her academic advisor and feeling as if her advisor did not care. Celeste discussed how she was failing a chemistry course and asked her advisor for advice. "I was not passing my chemistry class at the time, so I went to her asking, what do you think I should do because I really did not want to fail out of the program," Celeste shared. Celeste continued to explain and shared, "She told me, well, maybe you should consider other careers because if you cannot pass chemistry, what makes you think you will be able to pass other nursing courses?". Celeste described how she started to cry, and in the moment of her

crying, Celeste shared that her advisor said in the most unempathetic manner, "Do you need a minute?" Celeste shared how she almost dropped out of the nursing program and felt an advisor should be encouraging not unhelpful. Celeste continued to explain her frustration, discussing her negative experience with her academic advisor. She explained how she was able to retake the chemistry course at her community college, successfully passed the course, and is excelling as a nursing major! Celeste felt that her academic advisor should have provided other alternatives but failed to provide those options.

### **Creative Problem-Solving**

Some of the participants in this study shared that their academic advisors introduced creative techniques relating to problem-solving skills. Seven participants discussed how their academic advisor assisted them in coming up with solutions to some of their problems, while five participants highlighted how creative the approaches were. Jose spoke about how his academic advisor encouraged him to think creatively in his approach to teaching mathematics, emphasizing the importance of understanding concepts over memorization. "I am a mathematics major, and I am interested in teaching math," Jose explained that his academic advisor taught him, "Teaching is all about learning about yourself and then switching it in a way to teach others." Jose learned to teach others in a creative way that did not require him to teach from a textbook. Taking his advisor's advice, Jose creatively changed some formulas and created unique ways for people to remember and learn.

Liz, whose pronouns are they/them/theirs, discussed how their advisor encouraged them to explore various aspects of art beyond their initial interests, aiding their development within the arts industry and providing a creative way of thinking and problem-solving in their major declaration journey. Liz, a theater studies major with a minor in film, shared, "My advisor

encouraged me to pursue not one aspect of art but multiple. She has influenced me to explore outside of my interests, which helps me develop tools that I feel are very beneficial within the arts industry.”

### **The Importance of Culture**

Race, ethnicity, and culture contributed to the participants' experiences in building relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Data from all three data collection sources discussed how participants shared the feelings, attitudes, and emotions they experienced while trying to identify and develop a relationship with their assigned academic advisor. Eleven out of 15 participants mentioned during their individual interviews and protocol writing samples that race and culture play a significant role in building connections with assigned academic advisors. Maya, who has an older White male advisor, believed that their relationship took time to develop due to their cultural differences. Maya shared during her interview, "It took a while to develop a relationship, I think, because of my general comfortability." Maya further explained that she tried to develop a relationship by opening up to her advisor and understanding that he may struggle to understand many of the things she experienced. Maya shared, "He will not always be able to support me when it comes to situations regarding race and ethnicity the way that a Black woman or a Black advisor in general could." Maya experienced uncomfortable situations due to her racial and cultural differences with her academic advisor. Maya explained that things would sometimes get awkward when cultural differences came up. "I sometimes feel uncomfortable answering questions or having to acknowledge/correct certain assumptions or insensitivities," Maya shared.

Jabari believed that an advisor with the same race, ethnicity, and culture as their advisee could provide a safe space for students, especially in underrepresented environments. During his



interview, Jabari, a Black male student, discussed his experience of being the only student of color in an all-White environment. He felt that students of color would always experience some microaggression from advisors who were not of the same ethnic background. Jabari explained, “Not having an advisor who does not share my ethnic background, even if they consider themselves to be liberal-leaning...there is always something that is going to bleed out with a bias or something that is said wrong in a way where it is offensive to me or to someone that shares my ethnic background.”

Participants highlighted across all three data sources the importance of having advisors of color in academic positions, acknowledging that while all advisors should support students of color, seeing someone of one's race and ethnicity in an advisory role can be particularly inspiring. Some participants argued that considering an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture is very important when assigning them to BIPOC students, as it creates a safe environment for open communication. Overall, many participants felt that the advisor's culture and background could impact advisors' understanding and relating to the experiences of students of color.

### ***Sense of Comfort***

Feeling a sense of belonging and being comfortable around their advisor was the most discussed topic among the participants in this study. All participants, except one, discussed how they would be more comfortable with an advisor with whom they shared the same culture. Naomi felt a cultural connection with her advisor, which made it easier to relate to her advisor's advice, drawing parallels to the guidance from her parents. Naomi explained, “I definitely feel like it is easier to connect with my advisor.” Naomi discussed how she understood her advisor's sense of humor and explained how her advisor says certain things that relate to her culture. There

was a reminder of family and culture from Naomi's advisor. Naomi continued to share, "The advice my family gives is very similar to my advisor...so I kind of connected in that aspect culturally as well."

Sharing the same race and ethnicity as the advisor provided a sense of comfort for Naomi, akin to receiving help from an 'auntie.' Naomi shared the following about her advisor, "Being the same race and ethnicity as me, definitely felt more comfortable...it felt like an auntie helping me...that definitely helped in terms of feeling comfortable." Maria discussed that having an academic advisor of the same race and ethnicity provided comfort and a sense of belonging, facilitating open communication without judgment. Maria explained how it is more comforting when she is able to talk more and to see that her academic advisor understands her point of view. Maria continued to explain how she does not feel judged when she speaks to her advisor, which she really enjoys.

### ***Relatability***

The participants discussed how academic advisors must understand cultural backgrounds to foster openness and relatability in the advisory relationship. Naomi shared, "My advisor is Asian, and I am also Asian, so it is inspiring to see someone as an authority figure I can look up to and is also faculty." Naomi felt she could relate to her advisor, who shared the same ethnic background. Naomi further explained that her advisor's role as a faculty member inspired her and gave her inspiration that she could be an Asian female professor if she desired to do so. Gabriel's experience was slightly different from some of the other participants. He had never experienced having an academic advisor of the same race. Sharing the experience of having all White advisors, Gabriel described his advising experience as unrelatable. "Unfortunately, I never had that experience...all of my advisors were White", Gabriel explained. Gabriel discussed how his

relationship with his advisors was "surface level." They discussed general topics such as financial aid and academics, but nothing formed a connection and felt meaningful to Gabriel.

"There were no familiar emotions ...because of culture", Gabriel shared. " There are things I have not spoken about to my advisor because of my background; there is a disconnect." Gabriel concluded his thoughts and stated, "Advisors should understand; that would make me feel secure."

### **Race is Not a Primary Factor**

Although many participants mentioned that culture played a role in building connections with assigned academic advisors, data from all three data collection sources revealed that some participants discussed that the academic advisor's race is not the primary factor. Some participants discussed during their interviews and protocol writings that having an academic advisor of the same race and culture may be a personal preference and beneficial. However, within the individual interviews, the focus group, and protocol writing samples, some participants noted a positive experience with advisors of different backgrounds, highlighting the importance of understanding and agreement between different races. Rey argued that considering an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture is very important when assigning them to BIPOC students, as it creates a safe environment for open communication. However, Rey also explained during his interview that "building a positive relationship with an advisor of a different background could be possible...this relationship would involve understanding and agreement to understand each other better." Rey shared his experience building a relationship with an advisor with whom he did not share the same race, "My experience trying to identify and develop a relationship with my advisor was not as difficult as I expected it to be," Rey explained that he used the word difficult because, at first, he thought as a student of color, he would be neglected

in a certain way or misunderstood on some things due to racial differences. However, Rey discussed how his relationship with his advisor went really well. “I built this relationship by having this understanding between each other and trying to understand our different races. We had to come to this agreement to understand each other better,” Rey explained.

### ***Shared Experiences***

Some participants discussed their experiences of having an academic advisor with whom they shared a different race. They discussed how they formed a relationship with them due to their shared experiences and similarities outside of race. Gunay has not experienced an academic advisor with the same race, ethnicity, and culture as him. However, he believed that having an advisor who shares the same experiences and interests would be more relatable and understanding of his experiences. Gunay had the following things to say about developing a relationship with his academic advisor, who identified as African American. “To build a nice relationship with your academic advisor, you need to open up to them and understand how to develop trust and build a bond if you need help,” Gunay mentioned. “In my opinion, race, ethnicity, and culture were not a factor for me in developing a nice relationship with my advisor because in real life, if you want to build a relationship with somebody, you do not check the person's race, ethnicity and culture, you decide by analyzing their nature, knowledge, skills and my personal favorite, sense of humor,” Gunay shared.

### **Creating Friendships**

Participants discussed how creating a friendship with their academic advisor could assist in establishing and maintaining positive connections and relationships. Adelina emphasized the importance of keeping in touch with an academic advisor through emails and meetings and building a personal connection by asking about the advisor's well-being and shared experiences.

She discussed creating a friendship as one of the necessary steps in maintaining a relationship. Adelina explained some things she should have initiated with her academic advisor, "maybe we should have met up and talked a little bit more and tried to have a friendship or connection. I will probably be in touch with my advisor more often moving forward." Gabriel discussed how he likes to meet with his advisor in non-academic settings to assist him in forming a friendship and connection with his advisor. Gabriel shared, "I usually communicate with them outside of academic environments. This is how I build a positive relationship." Gunay laughed and discussed how he was once embarrassed by how often he would visit his advisor after they formed a friendship. Gunay explained, "For a few days, I would just barge into his office and start talking to him, which continued for six to seven days. Then he smiled and told me that I had to make appointments. I was so embarrassed." Eleven out of 15 participants mentioned creating and establishing friendships with their academic advisors. This highlights the participants' awareness that having more than a professional connection with their advisor assists in establishing and maintaining positive relationships and connections.

### **Frequent Communication**

Good communication involving check-ins and follow-up emails assisted many of the participants in establishing and maintaining a positive connection with their academic advisor. Many participants mentioned during the focus group and individual interviews that receiving assistance from their academic advisor was a part of their experience in establishing or maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors. Data from all three data collection sources revealed that many participants received help from their advisors through emails, meetings, check-ins, and follow-up communication. Davina discussed during her interview how follow-up emails and regular check-ins were essential and meaningful. Davina

shared, "My academic advisor would send follow-up emails, which I know is her job, but it meant a lot to me. I felt like she was going out of her way, and I love that!" Jose also appreciated follow-up emails and check-ins from his academic advisor. Jose explained during his interview that his advisor checks in with him so often that he ensures he responds because he wants his advisor to know that he appreciates him. Jose shared, "We send emails, he assists me and reminds me to register for classes, saying make sure you are doing this and registered for this class...as much as he checks up on me, I make sure to respond promptly because I want to show that I appreciate his opinion." Adelina emphasized during her interview the importance of keeping in touch with her academic advisor through emails and meetings. Adelina regretted not communicating better with her advisor and felt better communication could have improved their connection and relationship. Adelina shared, "It made me realize I should have talked a bit more with him, and maybe this could have built a better relationship."

### Research Question Responses

This section will address the central research question and the three research sub-questions. The research questions provided a foundational implication for the overall success of a qualitative research study. Each research question for this study aligned with the theoretical model. A table of thematic alignment to each research question is exhibited below in Table 6 (see Appendix K). This section details the responses for each research question with supporting information for each sub-question.

**Table 6**

#### *Research Questions Thematic Alignment*

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Research Questions
Lack of Relationships			Central Question

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Positive Advising Experiences			Central Question
Motivation and Encouragement			Sub Question 1
Lack of Empathy			Sub Question 1
Creative Problem-Solving			Sub Question 1
The Importance of Culture	Sense of Comfort	Relatability	Sub Question 2
Race is Not a Primary Factor	Shared Experiences		Sub Question 2
Creating Friendships			Sub Question 3
<b>Frequent Communication</b>			Sub Question 3

### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students building positive relationships with assigned academic advisors? Many of the participants in this study disclosed that they experienced a lack of a relationship with their assigned academic advisor. Maya shared, "I did not have any sort of relationship with my academic advisor. I met with him for registration purposes only and never developed a relationship with him further." Although many participants explained that they lacked a relationship with their assigned academic advisors, some discussed their positive advising experiences. Gunay shared, "My academic advisor has been one of the nicest people I have ever met. He is literally like my older brother. He gives me real-life solutions to problems. He guides me to every path that I want to take. Whenever I ask him questions, he will answer five different ways to solve the problem."

### **Sub-Question One**

How are assigned academic advisors assisting BIPOC students in achieving a sense of well-being and safety through growth-fostering relationships? Many participants in this study explained that having a motivational advisor who encourages them helps them achieve a sense of

well-being and safety. Jose shared, "My advisor practically saved me from switching my major, which influenced me to build a stronger relationship with him." This statement motivated Jose and pushed him to finish college.

Participants in this study mentioned that their academic advisor lacked empathy, resulting in a negative outcome, achieving a sense of well-being and safety. Celeste discussed how her academic advisor was not very welcoming. During Celeste's second semester as a first-year college student, she did not do well in her chemistry course. Celeste decided to meet with her academic advisor to adjust this concern. Celeste shared the following about her encounter with her advisor. "I went to my advisor for advice, and she immediately discouraged my continuation in the Nursing program." Celeste continued to share that her advisor did not discuss any solutions but instead suggested that Celeste consider other careers because it was very clear that Celeste could not succeed in the nursing program. According to Celeste, her academic advisor asked in a slightly rude manner, "How will you pass your nursing classes if you cannot even pass the pre-requisites?" "With tears streaming down my face, she had no empathy for me. She made me feel inadequate, and I almost gave up that day," Celeste shared. After the encounter with Celeste's academic advisor, Celeste decided to meet with the Director of Nursing, where she later found out that there were other options her academic advisor failed to mention. Celeste shared her feelings about this incident and stated, "The fact that my advisor immediately jumped to the conclusion that I could not handle my future nursing courses over one class that I struggled with speaks volumes. It was a microaggression that reeked of a negative stereotype that a black student could not handle the pressure of nursing school."

Participants in this study discussed how their academic advisors introduced creative problem-solving techniques, which assisted in achieving a sense of well-being and safety



through growth-fostering relationships. Jose shared, "I am a mathematics major, and I am interested in teaching math. Teaching is all about learning about yourself and then switching it in a way to teach others." Jose continued to explain that his academic advisor taught him that he did not need to follow the book all the time and suggested ways to be creative and think outside of the box. "Taking my advisor's advice, I was able to creatively change some formulas and create little ways for people to remember," Jose discussed.

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to the experience of building positive relationships between BIPOC students and assigned academic advisors? Race, ethnicity, and culture contributed to the participants' experiences in building relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Maya shared, "I have experienced uncomfortable situations due to our racial and cultural differences. Sometimes, things get awkward when cultural differences come up, and I sometimes feel uncomfortable answering questions or having to acknowledge/correct certain assumptions or insensitivities."

Feeling a sense of belonging and being comfortable around their academic advisor was the most discussed topic among the participants in this study. All participants, except one, discussed how they would be more comfortable with an advisor with whom they shared the same culture. Maria shared, "It is more comforting, and you are able to talk more because you know that they understand where you come from. You do not feel judged when you talk to them, and I really like that".

Participants also felt that academic advisors must understand cultural backgrounds to foster openness and relatability in the advisory relationship to build a positive relationship. Naomi shared, "My advisor is Asian, and I am also Asian, so it is inspiring to see someone as an

authority figure I can look up to and is also faculty." Although many participants mentioned that race, ethnicity, and culture played a role in building connections with assigned academic advisors, some stated that the academic advisor's race is not the primary factor. Mai shared, "Race and gender are not the most key factors for me, but they do have an impact on my experience." Some participants discussed how they formed a relationship with their academic advisor based on their shared experiences and similarities, not race. Gunay explained how to build a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor. Gunay shared, "You need to open up to them and understand how to develop trust and build a bond if you need help...race, ethnicity, and culture were not a factor for me in developing a nice relationship with my advisor...if you want to build a relationship with somebody, you do not check the person's race, ethnicity and culture, you decide by analyzing their nature, knowledge, skills, and sense of humor."

### **Sub-Question Three**

What are the experiences of BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive connections with assigned academic advisors? Participants discussed how creating a friendship with their academic advisor could assist in establishing and maintaining positive connections and relationships. Adelina shared, "We should meet up and talk a little bit...we try to have a friendship or connection...I will probably be in touch with my advisor more often." Good communication involving check-ins and follow-up emails also assisted many of the participants in establishing and maintaining a positive connection with their academic advisor. Davina shared, "My academic advisor would send follow-up emails...and though I know that is her job, it meant a lot to me...I felt like she was going out of her way, and I love that!" Jose shared, "We send emails, and he assists me and reminds me to register for classes. As much as he checks up

on me, I make sure to respond in a timely manner because I want to show that I appreciate his opinion."

### **Summary**

Chapter Four allowed the participants to share their lived experiences building relationships with assigned academic advisors. Data analysis utilizing the hermeneutical framework provided the identification of nine themes, which are lack of relationships, positive advising experiences, motivation and encouragement, lack of empathy, creative problem-solving, the importance of culture with subtheme sense of comfort and relatability, race is not a primary factor with subtheme shared experiences, creating friendships, and frequent communication. Each participant shared stories that deepened our understanding of the phenomenon. The thematic findings of this study were aligned with the research's central question and sub-questions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. Fifteen participants, currently enrolled at a public higher education institution, discuss their relationship experience with their assigned academic advisor. This chapter will examine the findings of the study, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion**

After conducting a hermeneutical phenomenology data analysis to identify themes and sub-themes, this section discusses the study's findings. The findings are supported by empirical and theoretical sources acquired from the study's data and analyzed using Saldaña's (2021) two-cycle method. The findings, implications for practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research are addressed in this section.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The thematic results of this study described the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. Fifteen participants shared their lived experiences building relationships with their assigned academic advisor. The nine primary themes that emerged from this research study were (1) lack of relationships, (2) positive advising experiences, (3) motivation and encouragement, (4) lack of empathy, (5) creative problem-

solving, (6) importance of culture, with subthemes, sense of comfort and relatability (7) race is not a primary factor with subtheme shared experiences, (8) creating friendships, and (9) frequent communication.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The hermeneutical framework postulated by Van Manen (2016) was used to guide this study's data collection and analysis. The relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976) was used as a guiding theoretical framework for the findings. The participants shared lived experiences through a protocol writing prompt, semi-structured interview, and a focus group. A total of 15 college students who identified as BIPOC were recruited for this study. The participants were recruited using purposeful and convenience sampling methods. This type of sampling was appropriate to ensure that only individuals meeting the criteria and having the necessary experience with the phenomenon were recruited to maintain validity. The data were collected using the hermeneutical approach proposed by Van Manen (2016). The collected data were individually coded and organized into themes and sub-themes. Themes were organized to provide an ability to interpret the participants' lived experiences in building relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### ***Developing Meaningful Relationships***

This study's first finding revealed that BIPOC students attending a higher education institution lacked developing meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Although some BIPOC students have had positive advising experiences with their assigned academic advisors, BIPOC students are not developing identifiable relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Experiencing a lack of empathy and support and being discouraged by their assigned academic advisors are some of the experiences BIPOC college students

encounter. Having an assigned academic advisor who is motivational and encouraging is essential for BIPOC students. BIPOC students who have had positive advising experiences have been assigned academic advisors who are resourceful and motivate and encourage them as students. Having a motivational advisor relates to achieving a sense of well-being and safety among the BIPOC student population.

According to the relational cultural theory, RCT (Miller, 1976), people grow through and towards connections. Humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Building positive relationships can achieve a sense of well-being and safety (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022; Miller & Stiver, 1997). The lack of BIPOC students building meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors impacts BIPOC students achieving a sense of well-being and safety.

### ***Importance of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture***

The second significant finding of this study revealed that race, ethnicity, and culture can contribute to the experiences of BIPOC students in building identifiable relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Having a sense of belonging and feeling comfortable around assigned academic advisors are essential components needed for BIPOC college students to build meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors. BIPOC students can make quicker connections and feel more relatable to an assigned academic advisor if they share the same race, ethnicity, and culture. It is important to note that BIPOC students do not feel that the race of their assigned academic advisor is the primary factor in building meaningful relationships. However, BIPOC students feel that they have better opportunities to connect,

relate, and self-identify with an assigned academic advisor who shares the same race, ethnicity, and culture.

The relational cultural theory explains how the power dynamics in culture can affect the well-being of individuals (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Power dynamics can result in silencing, isolating, and humiliating people (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). This is important to note because when BIPOC students are assigned to non-BIPOC academic advisors, there is a possibility that BIPOC students may feel that there is a power dynamic between them, impacting the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with their academic advisors.

### ***Establishing and Maintaining Positive Connections***

Finally, the study revealed that when BIPOC students create a friendship with their assigned academic advisor and have frequent communication with each other, this results in BIPOC students having a desire to establish and maintain a positive, meaningful relationship with their assigned academic advisor. Having more than a professional connection with an academic advisor assists BIPOC students with establishing and maintaining positive relationships and connections. Discussing topics outside of academics, such as personal interests, hobbies, and future goals, is an element that can assist BIPOC students in establishing and creating a desire to maintain these relationships with assigned academic advisors. Meeting frequently and communicating via email are top components of BIPOC students' establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. Unfortunately, some BIPOC students do not yearn to maintain a relationship with their assigned academic advisor due to not establishing and developing a meaningful connection with their advisor.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

This section provides an opportunity to discuss the implications for practice and policy. The findings from this study were utilized to discuss practice and policy implications. These implications pertain to assisting BIPOC students in building meaningful and identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors and higher education institutions, having the ability to create welcoming academic advising environments for the BIPOC student population.

### ***Implications for Policy***

When discussing implications for policies about assisting BIPOC students in building meaningful and identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors at higher education institutions, it is crucial to recognize that there is no current policy at the institution where this study occurred requiring that the relational cultural theory RCT, be incorporated into academic advising models. Creating an environment where BIPOC students can develop meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors could begin with implementing RCT into academic advising core values at higher education institutions. Requiring RCT to be a core value in academic advising structures at higher education institutions may assist all academic advisors in understanding the foundation needed for not only BIPOC students but, possibly, all students in building relationships with academic advisors. RCT explains how humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Implementing this policy could ensure that all academic advisors have the essential training and resources to carry out RCT within their academic advising practices.

### ***Implications for Practice***

The findings of BIPOC students' lived experiences helped provide implications of practice to assist BIPOC students in developing meaningful relationships with their assigned



academic advisors. In order to address the lack of a relationship between BIPOC students and their assigned academic advisor, it may be helpful for more higher education institutions to develop and implement practices that will allow opportunities to recruit more BIPOC faculty. Many BIPOC students feel that race and culture are significant factors in building connections with their assigned academic advisors. Suppose there are more opportunities for BIPOC faculty and staff to serve as academic advisors. In that case, this may assist BIPOC students in creating meaningful and identifiable relationships with their assigned academic advisors.

Higher education institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison created Target of Opportunity Programs (TOPS). TOPS is a program designed to hire faculty who are known to be associated with underrepresented groups (Baloch, 2020; Johns Hopkins University, 2023; Huff, 2021). Programs such as TOPS have a funding budget specifically used to recruit outstanding, diverse future BIPOC faculty (Baloch, 2020; Huff, 2021). Since BIPOC students are twice as likely to report a hostile racial campus climate compared to non-BIPOC peers (Hernández & Harris, 2022; Rise, 2021) and would feel more comfortable with an academic advisor with whom they share the same culture, it may be beneficial for some BIPOC students to be assigned to BIPOC academic advisors. Establishing programs such as TOPS among higher education institutions may allow institutions to provide a welcoming advising environment for BIPOC students, which may result in more BIPOC students establishing and maintaining positive relationships with their academic advisors.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

This section will discuss the empirical and theoretical data of the study's findings. I discuss the study's empirical alignment with the findings of this study. Furthermore, the findings of this study will be correlated to the theoretical framework.

### ***Empirical Implications***

The empirical literature provided evidence of how beneficial relationships are between BIPOC students and their advisors. Much of the empirical data discussed the relationship experiences among BIPOC students and advisors, the sociocultural gap among BIPOC students and advisors, and student development among BIPOC students. The focus of this study was the lived experiences of BIPOC students building relationships with their assigned academic advisor while attending a public higher education institution. There was a significant amount of empirical literature that was consistent with the findings from this study. This study further explored the literature by examining the lived experiences of BIPOC students building relationships with their assigned academic advisor while attending a higher education institution.

**Student, Advisor, and Mentor Relationships.** Transitioning to college can be a difficult transition for many BIPOC students. BIPOC students may solely rely on their academic advisor for additional support. The empirical literature explained how the student-advisor relationship plays a significant role in the BIPOC students' college experience (Ijoma et al., 2022; Park & Bahia, 2022). However, the literature also discussed that these students need help connecting with academic advisors (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). The thematic findings from this study confirmed that BIPOC students are struggling to connect with their academic advisors, resulting in BIPOC students experiencing a lack of relationships with their advisors.

Although many participants explained that they lacked a relationship with their assigned academic advisors, the thematic findings from this study confirmed that some BIPOC students experienced positive advising experiences with their academic advisors. However, the thematic findings also confirmed that some BIPOC students could experience a positive advising experience with their academic advisor but did not have a growth-fostering relationship with

their assigned academic advisor. According to the thematic findings of this study, many academic advisors showed a lack of empathy towards BIPOC students, resulting in BIPOC students feeling a lack of support and being dismissed by their academic advisors. The empirical literature confirms that BIPOC advisees feel a lack of respect and neglect from academic advisors (Park & Bahia, 2022). Due to these experiences, BIPOC students cannot gain trust and build meaningful relationships with academic advisors, resulting in BIPOC students questioning the advisors' role and purpose (Sifuentes, 2021). All of this is consistent with the findings of this study.

**Race and Culture.** Race and culture play a significant role in the advisor-advisee relationships among BIPOC students. The thematic findings of this study revealed that race, ethnicity, and culture contributed to the experiences of BIPOC students building relationships with their assigned academic advisors. The literature confirms that students identifying as BIPOC have more positive experiences forming student-advisor relationships with other BIPOC advisors (Lee, 2018; Park & Bahia, 2022). Many students who identify as BIPOC have expressed that they feel forced to build relationships with advisors to whom they cannot relate and then left to find a new academic advisor that is more relatable (Park & Bahia, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). According to the thematic findings, most BIPOC students must feel a sense of belonging and be comfortable with their academic advisor to develop meaningful relationships. Most BIPOC students would be more comfortable with an advisor with whom they share the same culture, according to this study's findings. Consistent with the empirical literature, when BIPOC students can build relationships with other BIPOC advisors, BIPOC students feel security, comfort, and connection (Santa-Ramirez, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021).

It is vital to highlight this study's thematic finding that although culture played a role in

BIPOC students building connections with assigned academic advisors, some BIPOC students stated that the academic advisor's race was not the primary factor. Based on this study's findings, some BIPOC students agreed that having an academic advisor of the same race and culture may be a personal preference and beneficial. However, the importance of understanding and agreement between the different races can result in a positive experience with advisors of different backgrounds. The empirical literature discussed how academic advisors can apply culturally engaging advising practices, which will broaden advisors' advising philosophies, resulting in a more diverse approach when advising BIPOC students (Lee, 2018). Cultural competency is a foundational skill for academic advisors (Lee, 2018), which benefits BIPOC students—making it transparent why the importance of culture was a thematic finding within this study.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The theoretical framework for this study was the relational cultural theory (Miller, 1976), which was used as a guiding lens to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC students in creating meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors while attending a public higher education institution. The results of this theory explored the students' ability to build positive relationships with their assigned academic advisors, achieve a sense of well-being and safety through growth-fostering relationships with their assigned academic advisors, establish and maintain positive connections with their assigned academic advisors, and the possible impact of race, ethnicity, and culture having an impact in building positive relationships with assigned academic advisors. The study findings demonstrated areas of concern about the BIPOC students' experiences developing positive relationships with their academic advisors and the desire to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. More so, the

study findings revealed how race, culture, and ethnicity contributed to BIPOC students establishing growth-fostering relationships with assigned academic advisors. Table 7 demonstrates the implication of thematic findings with the theoretical lens guiding this study.

**Table 7**

*Theoretical Applications*

Develop Through Relationships	A Sense of Well-Being and Safety	Power Dynamics in Culture	Establishing and Maintaining Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Relationships</li> <li>• Positive Advising Experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation and Encouragement</li> <li>• Lack of Empathy</li> <li>• Creative Problem-Solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Importance of Culture</li> <li>• Sense of Comfort</li> <li>• Relatability</li> <li>• Race is Not a Primary Factor</li> <li>• Shared Experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating Friendship</li> <li>• Frequent Communication</li> </ul>

**Develop Through Relationships**

The theoretical framework explains how humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). The findings of this study reveal that although some BIPOC students had positive advising experiences, many BIPOC students have not developed growth-fostering relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Some BIPOC students never met their assigned academic advisor and have chosen to meet with an academic advisor initially not assigned to them. Some students were unsuccessful in connecting with their assigned academic advisor, resulting in

meeting with a different academic advisor. To develop growth-fostering relationships, according to the theoretical framework, "five good things" are needed: (1) a sense of zest, (2) clarity about oneself, the other, and the relationship, (3) a sense of personal worth, (4) the capacity to be creative and productive, and (5) the desire for more connection (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010, p. 2; Lértora et al., 2022). This study's findings disclose a lack of enthusiasm among some participants in building relationships with their academic advisors, a lack of a sense of worth, and the desire to connect further with their assigned academic advisors.

**A Sense of Well-being and Safety.** According to the theoretical framework, a sense of well-being and safety can be achieved by building positive relationships throughout an individual's life (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022; Miller & Stiver, 1997). This study confirms that in addition to many BIPOC students unable to develop a positive relationship with their assigned academic advisors, some BIPOC students also have not gained a sense of well-being and safety from their advisor-advisee relationships. Most BIPOC students, according to the findings, desire academic advisors who are motivational and encouraging, which can lead them to feel a sense of well-being and safety. The theoretical framework unfolds that failure to build growth-fostering relationships will decrease the sense of worth and withdrawal from all relationships, which some of the participants from this study have experienced.

**Power Dynamics in Culture.** The findings of this study confirm that race, ethnicity, and culture contributed to the participants' experiences building positive relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Most BIPOC students from this study would be more comfortable with an academic advisor with whom they share the same culture. Having an academic advisor with whom these BIPOC students connect culturally creates a sense of comfort. The findings

reveal that academic advisors must understand cultural backgrounds to foster openness and relatability in the advisory relationship of most BIPOC students. The theoretical framework reveals that the power dynamics in culture can affect the well-being of individuals (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Rector-Aranda, 2019). The cultural component of the theoretical framework highlights and focuses on the impact of a larger culture and the difference in status on the quality and nature of relationships and the succeeding effects on healthy coexistence (Jordan & Hartling, 2008; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Power dynamics can result in silencing, isolating, and humiliating people, weakening the representation of reality in the dominant discourse (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). The theoretical framework can assist with understanding relationship needs among BIPOC students when focusing on the differences in human culture.

Although many participants mentioned that culture played a role in building connections with assigned academic advisors, some stated that the academic advisor's race is not the primary factor. Most of the participants in this study wanted the researcher to understand that having an academic advisor of the same race and culture may be a personal preference and beneficial to many BIPOC students. However, the findings confirmed that having a positive experience with academic advisors of different backgrounds is possible, highlighting the importance of understanding and agreement between different races. The findings from this study show that some BIPOC students believe it may be possible to have positive experiences with academic advisors of different backgrounds while focusing on the importance of understanding each other and their shared experiences and similarities, regardless of differences. This particular finding in the study can relate to a terminology created by the theoretical framework called a movement-in-relationship. The theoretical framework explains creative moments resulting in a new creation of

growth-fostering relationships that guide the relationship in a positive and expanding direction is identified as a movement-in-relationship (Hershberger, 2021; Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022). Movement-in-relationship is when the relationship develops powerfully and meaningfully and broadens while every participant does as well (Jordan, 2010; Lértora et al., 2022).

**Establishing and Maintaining Relationships.** For many BIPOC students to establish and desire to maintain relationships with their assigned academic advisors, creating friendships and having consistent communication with each other is needed, according to the findings of this study. The findings of this study confirm that building a personal connection with academic advisors includes discussing each other's well-being and sharing experiences, which is a component many BIPOC students seek to maintain positive relationships with their advisors. When friendships are created among BIPOC students and their academic advisors, a sense of zest and personal worth, clarity about oneself, the other, and the relationship, and the desire to build a further connection develops, which the theoretical framework applied to this study demonstrates are all needed to build positive and growth-fostering relationships.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses typically outside the researcher's control and closely linked to the research design (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Delimitations are the limitations intentionally set by the researcher, usually to make the study's goals practicable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This section will discuss both the limitations and delimitations of this study.

#### ***Limitations***

The limitation of this study included the failure to recruit participants who identified as Indigenous. The participants in this study were expected to identify as Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color. The sample of participants in this study identified as African American, Asian,



Hispanic, and multi-racial (Guyanese, Indian, Chinese, and African American). Purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to identify the 15 candidates who met the age, race, and ethnic background requirements and showed traits of experiencing the same phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). Unfortunately, there were no participants in the sample who identified as Indigenous. It is possible that the public institution chosen to conduct the study had a small amount or no representation of students who identified as Indigenous. Within the undergraduate student body at the chosen site of this study, 37% of students identify as White, 36% as Hispanic/Latino, 13% as Black/African American, 7% as Asian, 3% as two or more races, 1% as Non-Resident Alien, and 3% were unknown.

### ***Delimitations***

The delimitation of this study included limiting the participants to students who identified as BIPOC and met the age requirement of 18-25. The limitation to only BIPOC participants was required to explore further the problem of BIPOC students having underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors. Allowing participants over 25 could have provided a different lived experience that differed from this study's selected pool of participants.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study revealed a need for further research to ensure BIPOC students are developing meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Further research is needed to explore the necessary tools and resources that may assist BIPOC students in feeling a connection with their advisors. Many BIPOC students struggle to build connections with their assigned academic advisors, but there is limited literature that provides solutions to this problem. Exploring all possible essential methods, BIPOC students may need to form these connections, which could lead to the development of growth-fostering relationships.

Further research is also needed to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous students developing meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors. This study was unable to explore the lived experiences of Indigenous students building relationships with assigned academic advisors due to the lack of recruitment of Indigenous students for this study. Exploring this population of students will provide the opportunity to understand their lived experiences, which may differ from the other populations in this study.

According to this study, race and culture played a significant role in BIPOC students building connections with their academic advisors. Some BIPOC students gained a sense of trust and safety due to sharing the same race and culture as their academic advisor. However, some BIPOC students explained that their academic advisor's race was not a primary component but preferred focusing more on culture, genuine connections, and shared interests when forming a relationship. Further research on incorporating culturally engaging advising practices should be explored. Applying culturally engaging advising practices will broaden advisors' advising philosophies, resulting in a more diverse approach when advising BIPOC students (Lee, 2018). BIPOC students will not always and should not be limited to being assigned to only BIPOC academic advisors. Further research on culturally engaging advising practices can assist BIPOC students to connect with their assigned advisors regardless of race. It will also assist non-BIPOC advisors in building positive relationships with BIPOC students.

Exploring incorporating relational culture theory in academic advising practices to assist students in building meaningful relationships with academic advisors is needed. There is limited research on how this theory is applied to advising practices at higher education institutions. Applying the relational culture theory in advising practices can develop relationships between an advisor and advisee to achieve a sense of well-being and safety.

Although this study examined the lived experiences of BIPOC students developing meaningful relationships with assigned academic advisors, further research should include exploring the lived experiences of non-BIPOC students. Exploring non-BIPOC students' lived experiences could detect additional findings. Further research is needed to explore applying the relational culture theory in academic advising practices to assist non-BIPOC students. The relational cultural theory demonstrates that humans develop through relationships established throughout individual lives, and growth-fostering relationships are the origin of meaning and empowerment (Jordan, 2010; Jordan, 2018; Lértora et al., 2022; Rector-Aranda, 2019). Further research is needed to explore how the relational cultural theory can be applied in advising practices and whether it can benefit all students in building positive relationships with assigned academic advisors.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color attending a public higher education institution. The use of the relational cultural theory and the hermeneutical phenomenology qualitative methodology aided in identifying and interpreting the lived experiences of the 15 participants. Nine themes emerged from this study following data analysis and coding. The themes are (1) lack of relationships, (2) positive advising experiences, (3) motivation and encouragement, (4) lack of empathy, (5) creative problem-solving, (6) importance of culture, with subthemes, sense of comfort and relatability (7) race is not a primary factor with subtheme shared experiences, (8) creating friendships, and (9) frequent communication. The shared stories and lived experiences of BIPOC students developing meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors provided a deeper understanding

of the phenomenon. They provided insight into possible matters of concern for BIPOC students, building connections with assigned academic advisors.

This study's first finding revealed that BIPOC students attending a higher education institution lacked developing meaningful relationships with their assigned academic advisors. The second finding revealed that race, ethnicity, and culture can contribute to the experiences of BIPOC students in building identifiable relationships with their assigned academic advisors. Lastly, the study revealed that when BIPOC students create a friendship with their assigned academic advisor and have frequent communication with each other, this results in BIPOC students having a desire to establish and maintain a positive, meaningful relationship with their assigned academic advisor.

Many BIPOC students struggle to build connections with their assigned academic advisors, but there is limited literature that provides solutions to this problem. Exploring all possible essential methods to assist BIPOC students in identifying with their assigned academic advisors could form connections that could develop growth-fostering relationships. BIPOC students gained a level of comfort, a sense of trust, and safety due to sharing the same race and culture as their academic advisor. However, BIPOC students do not always consider race a primary component; they prefer to focus on culture, genuine connections, and shared interests when forming relationships with academic advisors. Therefore, it is vital to note that applying the relational culture theory and culturally engaging advising practices into advising structures can assist BIPOC students in connecting with their assigned advisors of all races and assist both BIPOC and non-BIPOC academic advisors in building positive relationships with BIPOC students.

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[based-institutional-support-by-deja-trammell/](https://www.ajeforum.com/reframing-the-narrative-strengthening-professional-identity-development-of-students-of-color-through-asset-based-institutional-support-by-deja-trammell/)

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 21, 2023

Temeshia Lemons  
Breck Perry

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-571 Representation Matters: The Importance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Students Identifying with Academic Advisors.

Dear Temeshia Lemons, Breck Perry,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: November 21, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

**For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B

### Site Approval

2/17/24, 6:14 PM

[REDACTED] - Initial: Expedited Review

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] - Initial: Expedited Review

1 message

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Nov 29, 2023 2:33:55 PM EST

Ms. Temeshia Lemons

[REDACTED]

Re: IRB Number: IRB-FY23-24-3114

Project Title: Representation Matters: The Importance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Students Identifying with Academic Advisors

Dear Ms. Lemons,

After a review to federal regulations, 45CFR46, category:

- 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural behavior, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.)

[REDACTED] Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this protocol on **November 22, 2023**. Your study will require an Administrative Check In (ACI) every two years, update reminder prior to that date. Please note if your study has gone 90 days past the ACI, with no response from the research team it will be administratively closed.

All active study documents, such as consent forms, surveys, case histories, etc., should be generated from the approved Cayuse IRB submission.

When making changes to your research team personnel, you will no longer be required to submit a Modification unless it is to change the PI or PC or if you are about to submit an administrative change. As Principal Investigator, you are required to make sure all of your Research Team members have appropriate Human Subjects Protections training, prior to submission.

If you are changing your study protocol, study sites or data collection instruments, you will need to submit a Modification.

When you complete your research project you must submit a Project Closure through the Cayuse IRB electronic system.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB requirements, please contact me [REDACTED], or the Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely yours,

[REDACTED]

IRB Chair

## Appendix C

### Information and Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant

You are invited to participate in a study titled “Representation Matters: The Importance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Students Identifying with Academic Advisors”. The principal investigator for this study is Temeshia Lemons, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University. To participate, you must be 18-25 years of age, identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC), and currently enrolled at Montclair State University. Taking part in this research is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to describe the underdeveloped identifiable relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) attending Montclair State University

**What will happen while you are in the study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an individual, virtual, audio- and video-recorded interview that will take no more than 30 mins.
2. Participate in a virtual audio- and video-recorded group interview that will take no more than 30 mins.
3. Write about a personal experience (250 words or less in length) describing your experience trying to identify and develop a relationship with an assigned academic advisor. This will take no more than 5-15 minutes.

**Benefits:**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. However, this is an opportunity for BIPOC students to share their experiences of having an underdeveloped relationship with their assigned academic advisors. Participants may also experience a positive change in their university’s campus environment if findings from this study prompt changes at their institutions to further investigate the experiences of BIPOC students unable to develop relationships with their assigned academic advisors.

**Risks:**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Data will be collected using the Internet; we anticipate that your participation in this research presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. Please note that email communication, in general, is neither private nor secure. Though we are taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through email or the Internet could be read by a third party.

**How will personal information be protected?**

You will not be linked to any presentations. We will keep who you are confidential.

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Liberty University IRB-FY23-24-571 Approved on 11-20-2023
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- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Compensation:**

To compensate you for the time you spend in this study, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card via email. Participants will be compensated at the conclusion of all three procedures, which include an individual interview, a focus group interview, and one protocol writing sample.

**Do you have to be in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Do you have any questions about this study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Temeshia Lemons. You may ask questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Breck Perry, at [REDACTED].

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED]; our phone number is 434-[REDACTED], and our email address is [REDACTED].

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Consent:**

Liberty University  
IRB-FY23-24-571  
Approved on 11-20-2023



By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☒ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

Liberty University IRB-FY23-24-571 Approved on 11-20-2023
---

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Email

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to describe the underdeveloped relationships with assigned academic advisors for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) attending a public higher education institution. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be currently enrolled at [REDACTED] identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC), and be between 18 – 25 years of age. Participants will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in a focus group, a video-recorded group interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Write about a personal experience (two–three paragraphs in length) of having an underdeveloped identifiable relationship with an assigned academic advisor.

It should take approximately two and a half hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed. To participate, please [click here](#) to complete the screening survey to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview. A consent document will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign the consent document and return it to me via email at [REDACTED] before your scheduled interview.

Sincerely,

Temeshia Lemons  
Doctoral Candidate



**Appendix E**  
**Online Screening Survey**

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Your Ethnicity. Please choose from the following: (1) African American or Black, (2) American Indian or Alaska Native, (3) Asian, (4) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, (5) Hispanic or Latino, or (6) Other. If Other was chosen, please specify:
4. Class Status:
5. Do you currently have an Assigned Academic Advisor at [REDACTED] ?

## **Appendix F**

### **Individual Interview Questions**

1. What has been your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor?
2. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you in achieving a sense of well-being (well-being relating to how you feel about yourself and your life)?
3. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor assisted you with achieving a sense of safety?
4. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you to approach a situation, or life in general, with excitement and energy, which made you avoid approaching tasks or activities halfway?
5. How has your assigned academic advisor encouraged you to gain a sense of personal worth?
6. How has your relationship with your assigned academic advisor influenced you to be more creative?
7. How does your assigned academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to building a positive relationship?
8. What has been your experience having an academic advisor with whom you share the same race, ethnicity, and culture?
9. What has been your experience having an academic advisor with whom you do not share the same race, ethnicity, and culture?

10. Explaining the experience: How did you build a positive relationship with an academic advisor with whom you shared the same race, ethnicity, and culture?
11. Explaining the experience: How did you build a positive relationship with an academic advisor with whom you did not share the same race, ethnicity, and culture?
12. How would you describe the importance of considering an academic advisor's race, ethnicity, and culture when assigning them to a BIPOC student?
13. Explaining the experience: How did you establish and maintain a positive connection with your assigned academic advisors?
14. How has your assigned academic advisor increased your desire to build a further connection within your advisor-advisee relationship?

## **Appendix G**

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. During our one-on-one interviews, we discussed your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor. Can you discuss how you felt during the interview and your experience building a positive relationship with your assigned academic advisor?
2. How would you describe the best practices an institution should implement to assist BIPOC students in building a positive relationship with assigned academic advisors?
3. Can you discuss the advice you would give to another BIPOC student who may struggle to build a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor who is not BIPOC?
4. How would you describe how a BIPOC student should establish and maintain a positive relationship with an assigned academic advisor?

As we conclude this focus group, is there anything else you wish to discuss that you have not yet had the opportunity to share?

## **Appendix H**

### **Protocol Writing Prompt**

In 250 or more words, describe your experience trying to identify and develop a relationship with an assigned academic advisor. Please explain in detail how you felt, your attitude, and the emotions you experienced while trying to identify and develop a relationship with your assigned advisor. Please include if race, ethnicity, or culture was a factor in forming a relationship with your advisor. Please remember to focus on describing your feelings, mood, and emotions concerning your experiences.

## Appendix I

### Audit Trail

Themes	Theme Counts
Sense of comfort	14
Motivational	12
Creating friendships	11
Importance of culture	11
Race is not a primary factor	10
Relatability	10
Encouraging	9
Shared experiences	9
Disconnection	8
Lack of relationships	8
More understanding	8
Vulnerable with same race	8
Frequent communication	7
Good relationship	7
Lacked empathy	7
Positive advising experiences	7
Advisor had no influence	6
Advisor was resourceful	6
Creative problem-solving	6
Communication skills	5
Creative thinking	5
No Sense of safety	5
Received emails	5
Bad relationship	4
Good communication	4
Multiple meetings	4
Negative experiences	4
Nice personality	4
No desire to maintain	4
Race has an impact	4
Advisor showed empathy	3
Advisor was always available	3
Check-ins/follow-ups	3
Hard to build a relationship	3
Nervous to build	3
Transactional advising	3
Transactional relationships	3

## Appendix J

### Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
Lack of Relationships		
Positive Advising Experiences		
Motivation and Encouragement		
Lack of Empathy		
Creative Problem-Solving		
Importance of Culture	Sense of Comfort	Relatability
Race is Not a Primary Factor	Shared Experiences	
Creating Friendships		
Frequent Communication		

## Appendix K

### Research Questions Thematic Alignment

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Research Questions
Lack of Relationships			Central Question
Positive Advising Experiences			Central Question
Motivation and Encouragement			Sub Question 1
Lack of Empathy			Sub Question 1
Creative Problem-Solving			Sub Question 1
The Importance of Culture	Sense of Comfort	Relatability	Sub Question 2
Race is Not a Primary Factor	Shared Experiences		Sub Question 2
Creating Friendships			Sub Question 3
Frequent Communication			Sub Question 3