ABSTRACT

Nontraditional students, typically defined as students over the age of 24 years old, comprise almost 40% of all college students; often, they possess intersecting social identities, such as being first generation college students, parents, and/or community college transfer students. While advisors are important resources in facilitating nontraditional student success, advising interactions by nature are interpersonal and accordingly are susceptible to social identity threats. Drawn from two New England women's colleges, participants were 12 nontraditional students, defined in this study as being over the age of 24 or as having children. Qualitative interviews focused on the advising experiences of nontraditional students in higher education, and the nuanced ways in which advisors positively facilitate and support as well as negatively discourage and hinder their success. Positive advising themes included: helped with course selection, considered student needs, provided validation, actively listened, shared personal connections, and provided constructive criticism. In contrast, negative advising themes included: advisors who exhibited indifference, lack of information, low expectations, invalidation, blocking, and microinsults. Beyond these themes, participants described a negative institutional climate for nontraditional students on campus. Implications focus on support for nontraditional student success in higher education.

Validation and Invalidation: Advising Interactions as Contexts for Understanding Nontraditional

Student Experiences in Higher Education

By

Elizabeth J. Auguste

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with your heart. Through the incredible strength, complexity, and grace of the love that you bring

to this world, you teach and inspire me daily.

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INTRODUCTION

Nontraditional students are a fast-growing population of students in the U.S. higher education system, at nearly 40% of all college students (Thomas, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2002, 2012). Typically defined as students ages 24 and older, nontraditional students often start their postsecondary pathways within community colleges and tend to be first-generation college students (Austin, 2007; Packard, Gagnon, LaBelle, Jeffers, & Lynn, 2011). Many nontraditional students balance work and parenting with their academics, and proportionally, many more students of color go back to school later in life (Austin, 2007).

Navigating college with a nontraditional student identity comes with challenges. For one, nontraditional students are scarce on many four-year campuses, particularly selective campuses (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). In these contexts, nontraditional students may feel marginalized and without necessary advising resources to succeed (Packard et al., 2011). Second, nontraditional students may face time pressures to complete school quickly and without delay because of their need to work and support their families (Packard & Babineau, 2009). Third, because many nontraditional students are also underrepresented people of color and first-generation college students, they may more frequently experience systemic and interpersonal oppression in their daily lived experiences (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Fogliati & Bussey, 2013; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). Collectively, these challenges mean that nontraditional students are particularly in need of support in order to thrive in four-year institutions.

Advising is one of the most important resources colleges currently offer that can help nontraditional students navigate challenges so they can successfully complete their degrees at

four-year institutions (Packard et al., 2011; Packard & Jeffers, 2013). Advising is defined as an interpersonal method by which students gain suggestions, information, and counsel to guide them in the planning and decision-making process (Shaffer, 2015). Advising can take place in on-line systems, rather than through interpersonal methods, but such mechanisms are critiqued by nontraditional students as limiting (Packard et al., 2011). More often, advisors take the form of a faculty member, staff member, peer, or another member of the institution who has knowledge about its navigation, and students meet with the advisors to gain this knowledge. Advising that is proactive and intentional is more effective than purely responsive advising (Hollis, 2009; Rajecki & Lauer, 2007). Specifically, Hollis (2009) recommended that advisors direct students to role models with whom they can identify, gain socio-emotional support, and help them forge connections on campus.

Although advising is typically studied for its positive contribution, advising can have negative effects on students, such as frustration or time delays in completing their education, when advisors do not possess accurate information or fail to provide appropriate referrals (Packard & Jeffers, 2013). Beyond this, advising interactions, because they are inherently interpersonal in nature, also have the potential for more complex intergroup challenges observed in other kinds of interpersonal interactions. For example, research has demonstrated that White advisors may withhold critical feedback about possible course overloads from Black advisees for fear of looking racist, much to the detriment of the students (Crosby & Monin, 2007). Advisees may also report stereotyping and other insults from their supervising faculty (Constantine & Sue, 2007). In other words, advising interactions are not immune to instances of discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization. While previous research has documented the experiences of microaggressions, or subtle, everyday instances discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization, as

experienced by students of color, women, and first-generation college students (e.g., Sue et al., 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), research is needed to examine the experiences of nontraditional students, many of whom are at the intersection of underrepresented identities, and yet may report unique expressions of such negativity (Cole, 2009).

The goal of this study is to explore the advising experiences of nontraditional students, with a focus on advising interactions as locations for such negative interactions as microaggressions (e.g., invalidation), as well as how advisors demonstrate to nontraditional students they are supporting them (e.g., validation). In the next section, I begin with a social identity framework, and explain how decreased sense of belonging can contribute to identity challenges for underrepresented students, including nontraditional students. Then, I review the literature on social identity threat, stereotype threat, microaggressions, and marginalization, and their relevance for students from underrepresented groups. Finally, I review the literature on advising and how advising interactions may serve as contexts for support or invalidation experiences among nontraditional students.

Social Identity and Belongingness in Higher Education

All people have multiple social identities; social identity categories include race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007). Turner (1996) described social identity theory as a way to "integrate the psychological core with the macro-social realities of group life in societies stratified by power, wealth and status" (p. 18). The nontraditional student identity is often comprised of diverse and intersecting social identities such as first-generation college student, working student, and parent.

The salience of a social identity is often dependent upon environmental cues and the level of stigmatization in a setting (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). As academic institutions are

often comprised of traditional students ages 18 to 22, nontraditional age becomes an important and salient social category as does being a parent, particularly in an environment where most students are traditional-aged and childless. Nontraditional student status can also intersect with being a working student or the first generation of a family to attend college, rendering these social identities more salient.

Although all people have multiple social identities, often social identity variables are isolated one at a time in studies of students' educational experiences and learning outcomes (Cheryan, Davies, Plaut, & Steele, 2009; Cohen, Steele, & Ross., 1999; Constantine & Sue, 2007). In addition to isolating individual social identity variables to conduct an in-depth study of facets of lived experiences, it is important to study the interactions of these variables in order to engage in equally in-depth analyses on the possible ways in which multiple lived experiences influence each other simultaneously (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Ro & Loya, 2015). This approach to social identity theory is called intersectionality, a critical race theory term created by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 2005; Ro & Loya, 2015). For example, Crenshaw (1989) wrote about intersectional experiences of discrimination for Black women:

> Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet, often they experience double-discrimination - the combined effect of practices that discriminate on the base of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women - not as the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women (p. 44).

An intersectionality framework of social identity theory can be applied to combinations of social identities, such as gender and race (Ro & Loya, 2015), class, race, and gender (Penner &

Saperstein, 2013), sexuality, gender, and race (Warner & Shields, 2013), and other possible combination of social identities. Nontraditional students provide a rich opportunity to study social identity through multiple frameworks: that of the singular social identity of nontraditional student, that of the many singular social identities that may be within the nontraditional student identity, such as first generation status, parent, or veteran status, and also of the interactions of these many social identities as unique experiences.

Ro and Loya (2015) provided an example of how an intersectional framework can be applied to study social identity in an educational context. The researchers studied the effects of gender and race-ethnicity on the learning outcomes of over 5,000 students by analyzing the variables of Black, Asian, Latino/a, White, women, and men, and in all possible combinations. They conducted analyses of gender and race-ethnicity differences, such as differences in parental education between White and Latino/a students; and then they used an intersectional framework to look at these differences in combinations, such as those between the GPAs of Latina women and those of Black women. By finding differences that would not have been discovered without isolating these combinations of variables, the researchers highlighted the importance of an intersectional framework in contributing to a thorough analysis of social identity.

Social identities and their salience influence the experiences, perceptions and beliefs of individuals and systems including colleges and universities (Crenshaw, 2005). Systemic and interpersonal oppression shape the experiences of those with multiple underrepresented and/or stereotyped identities (Ro & Loya, 2015). In particular, these identities are important because the validation of identity and experiences or invalidation of identity and experiences can impact a student's sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is "a fundamental human motive," defined as the feeling that one belongs to a community as an insider as opposed to on the periphery, and

may include feeling that the self and one's work are valued by other members of the community (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004, p. 701). Kinzie, Thomas, Plamer, Umback, and Kuh (2007) found that student involvement was a predictor of sense of belonging. Additionally, researchers found that for college students, a sense of belonging was positively influenced by reminiscing about previous parental support and participation in school (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002).

Sense of belonging can influence a student's affect, trust level, and engagement within a particular community (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012; Ostove & Long, 2007). After studying the validity and effects of sense of belonging impact on math achievement for women, Good et al. (2012) concluded that sense of belonging has salient consequences on participants' careers and achievements. Performance on a sense of belonging scale predicted both academic achievement measures and intent to pursue the academic discipline in the future. Sense of belonging remained a consistent predictor of participation in future academic communities even when the variables of general sense of belonging, awareness of stigma, anxiety, and awareness of rejection based on sexism were controlled, and is therefore an important factor in discussing the experiences of students with underrepresented identities, such as nontraditional students.

Threats to Social Identity and Belongingness

Unfortunately, nontraditional students may experience a decreased sense of belonging due to social identity threat, stereotype threat, microaggressions, or other experiences of marginality in institutions within which they are the minority and are stigmatized. In this section, I review this literature, to illustrate the ways in which both interpersonal interactions and environmental cues can serve to threaten social identity and impede belongingness. This literature is relevant to nontraditional students even though much of the work is focused on other

social identity groups, as nontraditional students have singular, multiple, and intersectional social identities.

      Social Identity Threat and Stereotype Threat. Social identity threat and stereotype threat are situational threats created by stereotypes or environments that have historically included prejudice that lead to harmful effects such as a decrease in motivation or performance (Biernat & Donaher, 2012; Emerson & Murphy, 2015). People of color are specifically susceptible to social identity threats, or instances when their social identities appear less valued, particularly because the legacy of overt historical racism has long lasting effects in U.S. society, psychologies and systems (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Constantine & Sue, 2007). In a study by Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp (2008), African American students questioned whether they belonged at mostly White institutions that have a history of exclusion based on race. Social identity threat can decrease trust, executive functioning, and a sense of belongingness (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Johns, Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2008; Murphy et al., 2007). Social identity threat is a useful framework for understanding why non-traditional students, as an underrepresented group or at the intersection of underrepresented groups, may report similar feelings in their experiences on college campuses.

      Environmental cues can enhance one's awareness of their social identity, and ultimately their feelings of belonging or susceptibility to social identity threat (Cheryan et al., 2009; Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Murphy et al., 2007). When women viewed a video in which they were underrepresented in a science field, they experienced increased cognitive and physiological reactions; they reported decreased sense of belonging and desire to participate in comparison to women who viewed a video with equal gender representation (Murphy et al., 2007). The researchers explored a cues hypothesis: the idea that environmental signals can lead to objective

and subjective social identity threat experiences. This threat is possible for groups who are vulnerable to stereotypes regardless of explicit prejudice or experience. Interestingly, both men and women were more likely to want to participate in the conference when it was portrayed as gender balanced. The researchers proved that while a body of research has focused on attributing social identity threat as endemic to the participant, the cause of the threat may be attributable to environmental cues regardless of the personal merits of the subject. Cheryan et al. (2009) continued this line of work, and found that women reported lower interest in computer science than men in a room with stereotypically masculine cues (e.g. Star Trek poster, video games). However, environmental cues are adaptable: when the masculine cues were replaced with gender-neutral cues (e.g. nature poster, phone books), women reported the same amount of interest in computer science as men.

Additionally, Emerson and Murphy (2015) conducted a theoretical review of environmental social identity threat cues, and divided them into four categories: cues that signal representation through a lack of diversity, cues that evoked stereotypes, physical environments that have produced exclusionary or stereotypical effects, and cues embedded within an organization's foundational values. These cues may produce identity threatening environments individually or in combination. The researchers explained that identity threat is preventable through the modification of situational cues. Although this review focused on work settings, a college or university is often the place of work for a student academically, and may also be their place of employment.

Members of a social identity minority, or an underrepresented group, may face negative stereotypes, which can negatively impact performance (Inzlicht & Good, 2006). In this line of research, stereotype threat is defined as the awareness of negative stereotypes of one's group

which then can negatively impact performance in high-performance settings (Palumbo & Steele-Johnson, 2014). Studies had shown that exposure to stereotype threat can decrease performance and motivation (Biernat & Donaher, 2012; Fogliati & Bussey, 2013). The effects of stereotype threat have been shown in studies that focused on the social identities of women in academic contexts (Fogliati & Bussey, 2013). In fact, even White men, when in a context where their math abilities are negatively stereotyped in contrast to Asian men, are vulnerable to this "stereotype threat" in ways that poorly affect their performance (Aronson et al., 1999). Although stereotype threat is different than social identity threat, these collectively help to illustrate why being a member of an underrepresented group can decrease feelings of belonging as well as performance.

Microaggressions. A growing body of work has demonstrated that beyond social identity cues, stereotypes, and overt discrimination, underrepresented groups may face interpersonal interactions that threaten belongingness and performance referred to as microaggressions. Microaggressions are "subtle statements and behaviors that unconsciously communicate denigrating messages to people" in a social identity group that signify prejudice, stereotypes, and bias (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). They are subtle or coded and yet harmful acts of bias based on social identities, and they can be either interpersonal or systemic (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Common themes of microaggressions include color blindness (the refusal to acknowledge race), myths of meritocracy (the false belief that race does not factor into success), and second-class citizenship (when a person of color is treated as less than a White person). Much of this literature has focused on race, which is directly applicable to a nontraditional student population that includes higher percentages of people of color. The literature also expands to include gender, class, and other identities in contexts of

underrepresentation and heightened salience, and together these phenomena of underrepresented identities may be extended not only to categories within the nontraditional student experience, but as phenomena that may occur with this population as an intersectional identity.

Sue and colleagues (2007) provided a typology of commonplace microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, or microinvalidations. Microassaults are purposefully harmful denigrating verbal or behavioral aggressions based on a person's social identity, such as serving a White patron prior to a patron of color. Microinsults are subtle, rude insults based on social identity that often contain a hidden meaning. An example of a microinsult is the expression of a false compliment to a person of color such as "You are so articulate," which assumes that the person of color would not be intelligent (Sue et al., 2007, p. 276). A microinvalidation is when the lived experience or emotions of person in an underrepresented group are ignored, discredited or diminished as unimportant. An example of a microinvalidation is when a person of an underrepresented social identity is assumed to be born in another country, perhaps signified by the question "Where are you from?" (p. 276). Claiming to have Black friends as proof that an individual is not racist is another example of a microinvalidation. Constantine and Sue (2007) provide further examples of commonplace microaggressions, such as when Black drivers are stopped by police officers due to their skin color, a person of color notices an absence of people of color in higher positions at their company, and statements that show colorblind ideology in settings such as job interviews.

Microaggressions can be either interpersonal or systemic. The previous examples of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations are interpersonal. The work of Yosso et al. (2009) and Solórzano et al. (2000) described institutional microaggressions for students of color

on predominantly White campuses. Institutional microaggressions may be within the climate of a campus, and can lead to isolation, alienation, and marginalization.

Microaggression research has focused on gender, sexual orientation, and race. Constantine and Sue (2007) explained that "over the years, traditional (overt) forms of racism (e.g., cross burning and lynching) have changed into less obvious behaviors that are likely to occur outside the awareness of 'progressive' and well-meaning White individuals" (p. 142). Because they happen more regularly within the daily lived experience of an underrepresented person, and can appear as casual comments, microaggressions may be invisible to the perpetrators and therefore dismissed (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008).

In addition to microaggression research that has focused on singular social identities such as race, class, and gender, intersectional microaggression research sheds light on the subtle biases that can occur in the experience of people who have more than one social identity from an underrepresented and/or historically oppressed group (Nadal et al., 2015). The researchers studied the possible intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and religion in regards to data from 19 focus groups documenting microaggressions. Examples of the themes of microaggressions that the researchers found include: Exoticization of Women of Color, Disapproval of LGBT Identity by Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Groups, and Gender-Based Stereotypes of Muslim Men and Women. While this study focused on qualitative accounts of intersectional microaggressions, other studies have focused on the development of quantitative measurement tools focused on LGBT people of color (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011) and Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015). As nontraditional student identities are often comprised of multiple social identities, microaggressions are also an important component for the study of nontraditional students.

The ramifications of microaggressions can be very detrimental. Constantine and Sue (2007) found that students reported feeling frustration, invalidation, pain, and mistrust. They also found that microaggressions can result in difficult or unhelpful relationships between the supervisor and supervisee and students devoting time and energy towards coping with the occurrence and consequences. At times, this results in giving up on the advising relationship altogether, and a loss of the academic and supportive benefits. Microaggressions can also result in decreased spirituality, inequities that harm people of color, psychological distress, and distress in relationships (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Marginality. In addition to the aforementioned threats to social identity and belonging, the environmental experience of nontraditional students can be viewed through a marginality versus mattering framework. Marginalization is a phenomena in which students may feel a lack of connection, loneliness, or devaluing of a minority experience, as opposed to feeling that their identity is valued or important due to multiple ways in which they may be blocked from accessing resources needed for success (Chambers & McCready, 2011; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Institutions have the power to affect the marginalization of their students in positive and negative ways. This framework has been used to study African American students on campuses that have a majority of White students (Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1998). The researchers found that while White students perceived their institutions as being supportive of both students of color and White students, and perceived students of color to be in agreement with this, African American students reported marginalization in their environments, classrooms, and for some, institutionally.

Marginalization may be embedded in multiple levels of academic institutions. Scholarly marginalization is defined as the devaluing of certain fields of scholarship in favor of others

(Evans & Cokley, 2008). Llyod-Jones (2014) studied African American women faculty members in higher education, and their experiences with scholarly marginalization. The researcher discussed how mentoring relationships have the potential to serve as a buffer to marginalization, and offer the opportunity of a socialization process within institutions that have practices of social exclusion, or the othering of people based on social identity.

Advising as Contexts for Understanding Nontraditional Identity Experiences

This study focuses on advising interactions as a potential buffer to decreased belongingness and social identity threat in order to support nontraditional students in their academic trajectories. Christian and Sprinkle (2013) defined advising as the process by which students engage in constructive discussion and receive helpful information to guide them along their academic career in the context of meeting with an advisor. They explained that advisors instruct students on how to navigate academia while also engaging with students to help shape the best courses of action and development for their individual needs and goals. According to Heisserer and Parette (2002), advising has been defined through multiple lenses, many of which emphasize a pro-active approach from the advisor's standpoint to meet the needs of the students. In particular, developmental advising occurs when mutual responsibility is established between the advisor and advisee in the advisee's long-term growth, and this approach is often viewed positively by students (Alexitch, 1997; Broadbridge, 1996).

Advising can facilitate many positive benefits. For example, advising may contribute to an increase in career decision-making and focus (Sweeney & Villarejo, 2013). Gaining social capital and successful completion of college activities are also advantages of effective advising (Stephan, 2013). An effective advisor provides high quality feedback to their students; feedback is comprised of both the method of communication used and the content of the information

communicated. Regarding method, Packard and Jeffers (2013) found that effective advisors provide feedback that answers questions, explains terms, clarifies concepts, actively listens, exposes students to new opportunities, coaches, and encourages students to ask questions. In their qualitative study, students reported that advisors perceived as useful provide accurate information to their students; when they cannot provide the information themselves, they direct the student to helpful resources. In addition to being accurate, the content of effective feedback is tailored to the individual and detailed (Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001). For example, Lipnevich and Smith (2009) conducted a mixed methods study in which students completed an essay and received undetailed feedback, detailed feedback from a presumed instructor, and computer generated feedback. The students reported that detailed feedback that was most helpful. Lastly, Rattan, Good, and Dweck (2012) suggested fostering a culture based on the incremental theory of intelligence, in which it is believed that everyone has the capacity to learn. The researchers continued that creating a culture based on the idea of malleable intelligence can be beneficial to any group that faces stereotypes or bias in achievement areas.

Why are some advising situations experienced constructively while others are not? It is important to recognize that advising involves interpersonal interactions that are nuanced and challenging to communicate effectively when involving 1) advisors and students from different social identity groups and 2) critical feedback or other challenging conversations. Specifically, advising may be viewed as a context for a microaggression of students from an underrepresented background because the students come away from the interaction feeling stereotyped or that the advisor lacked interest or belief in them. For example, Constantine and Sue (2007) isolated salient themes of microaggressions between White supervisors and Black supervisees that included minimization or dismissal of racial-cultural issues, stereotypes about all people of color

or about the advisee, blaming the victim of oppression, and giving culturally insensitive advice. These microaggressions invalidated the experiences and social identities of the supervisees.

Rather than dismiss or invalidate a student's experience, an advisor might withhold valuable feedback from a student for fear of looking prejudiced, which also harms the student in the longer run. According to Crosby and Monin (2007), in an experimental study, advisors failed to give realistic feedback to Black students, essentially failing to warn them about a possible course overload, significantly more than to White students for fear of looking prejudiced. In a similar vein, rather than withholding feedback, the advisor may be viewed as providing "comfort-oriented feedback" meaning that the student is falsely reassured that they can do without a critical skill (Rattan et al., 2012, p. 731). In both of these cases, the student may not be aware that something negative is happening because the advisor is trying to feign support, but the student still misses out on valuable feedback. Thus, a negative interaction can include microaggressions (e.g., where an advisor is dismissive, critical, or stereotyping of an underrepresented student), a seemingly neutral situation (where an advisor fails to warn a student, and then the negative impact comes later), to a seemingly positive interaction where an advisor feigns support.

There is a small body of research that targets what elements advisors might provide in order to ameliorate such challenges in communication. For one, advisors may need to couple critical feedback with a communication of positive expectation for success to underrepresented students. Cohen et al. (1999) found that when critical feedback was buffered with a message of positive expectation for success, Black students rated the instructor as lower in bias than White students, and that personal assurance influenced higher task motivation to revise the essay among Black students. Second, advisors who signal the malleability of intelligence may have more

positive effects. Good et al. (2012) found that in addition to verbal messages, implicit environmental cues that signify this may also have a protective effect such that students perceive such workplaces and study environments are good places to spend time. In this study, it is assumed that there are additional ways that an advisor can signal support for the underrepresented student even when critical feedback is necessary to provide.

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of microaggressions of nontraditional students within the context of their advising interactions within four-year college that enroll primarily traditional students. As nontraditional students are often at the intersection of multiple identities that may experience discrimination and microaggressions, the narratives of their lived experiences may shed light on how advisors can contribute to the validation and success of this growing student population. Thus the research question is: How are the academic experiences of nontraditional women students in four-year colleges positively supported and negatively discouraged by the nuances of advising interactions?

METHOD

Participants

Twelve nontraditional-aged college students participated in this study. Nontraditional students were defined as being age 24 and older, and/or having children, and/or holding veteran status. All participants attend one of two women's colleges in New England.

The researcher recognized the challenges of recruiting women of color for this study who are nontraditional at both of these campuses, given their small size (about 10% of the incoming class) and that both campuses have about 25% student of color representation overall. Given the importance of race in the existing microaggression research, the researcher oversampled nontraditional women of color in order to have a study sample that is racially-balanced, while recognizing that women of color are drawn from many races and ethnicities, and are therefore not a homogenous group.

Participants were selected based on their ability to provide a positive advising example, negative advising example, and an example that included social identity and/or a microaggression (see Appendix for interview protocol). The resulting sample was comprised of six participants of color (three African American or Black, one Latina, one Pan-Asian, and one Middle Eastern). Participant ages ranged from 26 to 62, with a median age of 32. Most participants were in their senior year (n=9); two were juniors, and one had just graduated three months prior to the study. Across the two campuses, participants had majors and minors in sixteen different academic disciplines. Eight of the twelve participants were first generation students, defined as when both parents of the student had not obtained a four-year degree. All participants had transferred from community college to their current institution. Nine participants lived off campus, and three lived on campus. Seven participants were employed, and five were

not. One participant was a veteran. Six participants were parents. Given that nontraditional students represent a small amount of the community, and that women of color within this group represent an even smaller minority, additional steps were taken to protect confidentiality of participant identities, including the decision not to include a participant list linking pseudonyms to specific demographic information.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via email and flyering. The nontraditional student community was emailed via listservs at two New England women's colleges. Additionally, flyers were posted in the nontraditional student residence halls. Flexibility in scheduling of a time and location for the interview was provided in order to recruit students who were diverse in their academic experiences. Participants who responded to the interview request were scheduled to meet with the interviewer at a quiet, private location in the psychology building on campus, or interviewed via phone.

A brief background of the study was explained to participants. Informed consent was explained and obtained from all participants. The interviewer conducted semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Participants were provided with either psychology course credit or a $5 gift certificate to a cafe to defray the cost of their time and efforts.

Interview Protocol. The interview explored student experiences of advising contexts, particularly in relation to their social identity as nontraditional students. The interview was semi-structured, with open-ended questions focused on the participants' lived experiences. While opening with a general discussion of the trademarks of positive advising experiences, which sometimes focused on the advising that took place before arriving at the four-year college, the

focus of the interview was on situations when advisors communicated in ways students felt invalidated, insulted, or dismissed. In particular, participants were encouraged to reflect on challenging situations when advisors may have had to provide a warning about a potential pitfall (such as a course load) or negative feedback on performance (see Appendix for interview protocol).

In order to establish trustworthiness of data, member checking was conducted in person through follow-up meetings for the first four participants only (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The main points of the data were summarized and repeated back to the participant to ensure that they were correct, and to see if there were any additional comments they would like to add for clarification.

Data Analysis

Each digitally recorded interview was transcribed to produce participant narratives. These narratives were read, coded, and analyzed using a grounded theory approach described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Using this method, a process of open, axial, and then selective coding was followed. During open coding, codes were generated according to textual meaning units, rather than line by line coding, until thematic saturation was achieved. Next, the data was axial-coded to develop connections between these categories. Selective coding produced core categories and related the themes to a central set of phenomena. The language of these themes was used to build a working model of the nature of helpful and unhelpful advising characteristics for nontraditional students. The researchers engaged in a constant comparative method, taking existing codes and broader themes and revising them upon scrutiny of new data. In addition, the researcher cross-coded with multiple researchers, and she compared analyses of the data in order to reduce biases or misinterpretations (Yosso et al., 2009).

When using a qualitative research paradigm, one does not typically report frequencies of particular themes, although quantitative representations of qualitative data can help to provide additional interpretations of meaning (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The typicality or how many participants reflected a particular theme, is included in the results because even though having more participants express something does not necessarily make it more important, it is still important information when developing a sense of the emergent picture from these data.

Positionality

As a researcher, I have access to prior literature focused on social identity, wise mentoring, microaggressions, and the nature of intelligence. I am aware that advisors may hold stereotypes about nontraditional students. I identify as a nontraditional student, woman of color, and first generation college student. My challenge was to bracket my own lived experience and my understanding of the literature in order to listen to the experiences of participants for new experiences, themes, and ideas that emerge (Moustakas, 1994).

My research advisor is contributing to the broader research program, which involves traditional students as well as my data collection on nontraditional students. She identifies as a first-generation college graduate, woman of color, and was traditional-aged when she was in college. Her research has focused on the experiences of nontraditional students and experiences of advising.

RESULTS

Helpful Advising Experiences

Six main themes developed from the student narratives about helpful advising: course selection assistance, considers the individual student needs, validation, active listening and taking time, personal connection through shared experiences and/or identity, and constructive criticism. For each theme, I explain and then illustrate using student examples.

Course selection assistance. Students reported that advisors who guided them in their course selection process were helpful (n=5). One student shared multiple times when she was "given great advice on what courses to take" by her advisor. Another student reported that when her original plan for course selection fell through, her advisor "recommended a class...that worked really well." Course selection assistance resulted in students feeling that their courses were appropriate for their major and future goals, and contributed to a sense of support from advisors.

Considers the individual student needs. Students described the helpfulness and support of advisors who took time to learn about individual needs of the student, including key contextual information (n=8). One student described feeling supported by her advisor when discussing her worry about the internship process:

> He recognized where I was at in my life...He knows. He cares to ask about my life. He
> knows I have older children, and so, he understands where I'm at more. So, it was kind of
> nice to have someone. The advisor applied this knowledge of her life to the advising
> process.

Another student shared how her advisor supports her intersectional identity: "She's able grasp that I am one person within multiple spheres, and not the same person every day or every

moment of the day, but I have other responsibilities and identities beyond what she witnesses on campus." The student went on to share that the professor acknowledged "the Black experience on being in a historically White institution" and how this may "change my sense of place."

One student reported an experience in which she approached her advisor for guidance on how to navigate a situation in which another professor said something that she "didn't feel comfortable with." The student continued that the advisor "actually helps me figure out how to go about it" and gave her concrete advice on the different steps that she could take to navigate the situation as safely and effectively as possible.

Validation. Advisors appreciated their students, and their goals, ideas, abilities, and work that they brought into advising (n=10). One student commended her professor for the support she provided, specifically in relation to her goals, about which the advisor helped her feel "not crazy." The advisor told her "it's okay if you want to set the bar high for yourself, provided that you're taking care of yourself, and that you feel able to see the big picture" and assured her of her confidence in her aspirations.

One student shared that when she hesitated to complete applications for internships for fear of rejection; her advisor told her to "value yourself. This is something that you need to work on." Another student discussed positive advising in which advisors "admire the nontraditional-aged student, you know, for sticking with it and completing an education."

Active listening and taking time. Advisors exhibited quality communication skills with their students when they engaged in active listening and taking time for them (n=10). One student outlined the attentive active listening skills of her advisor when she would come in for an advising session. The advisor allowed the student to lay "everything out for her, and she would actually take out a piece of paper and take notes while you are talking so as not to interrupt you,

but to kind of create a thought map for *you*." The advisor would follow this with verifying that she was understanding the student and asking questions for clarification prior to providing collaborative advice in which she invited the student to weigh in on the process. Another student described an advisor from her community college who would not expect her to know everything prior to the advising appointment, but instead would "listen to me when I talk about life instead of me having to come in with a solid conversation outline."

One student characterized active listening as how her advisor would "only talk about one thing at a time." The ability of the advisor to focus the discussion on singular item and save the next item for later "showed me that he was listening."

Active listening was not always described as this in-depth, and could be shown through pausing to take time for the student. For example, another student reported meaningful common experiences with her advisor, in which "if I happened to see her running to another class...she'd stop and take a moment with me, and I really appreciated that."

Personal connection through shared experiences and/or identity. Sharing a personal connection through experiences and personal details also emerged as a helpful advising theme (n=7). Often, descriptions of personal connections with advisors included emotional support. For example, one student shared her feelings about her advisor: "I had an adjunct professor who I really connected with. He was very, very good. He was kind of like a friend. I loved him….I still keep in touch with him. We email every now and then."

Some examples referred back to community college experiences. For example, one student described a professor at her community college who "was the most helpful...because we have - there's a connection." The student continued, "We have the same interests. We like to

write. We like to read, um. We like to travel" and these shared interests solidified a "personal level" of connection.

Shared identities were also reported as contributing to helpful personal connections in advising. A student who is a veteran shared, "I also talk to advisors from my last college still, because they know I'm in the military. One of them's a veteran, so we connect on that a lot." The advisor and student could relate to each other in regards to military status and related experiences. The same student also expressed this connection regarding age. While recognizing that the advisors were more advanced in their academic and career field, she said that they were "more on, like, the same age level I guess you can say, generationally," and that she felt "just more comfortable talking" with them due to this similarity.

However, possessing the same identity was not always necessary to share experiences about identities. One student of color shared a time when she told her advisors about her challenges during a study abroad position due to race. The advisor established a personal connection by first owning her position "as a White woman." The student reported that "even though I am of color, we still were able to bridge that gap where she's like 'I know it's not the same. I know that I have privileges that you don't have and experiences that you don't have.'" The advisor went on to empathize and relate to other aspects of the advisee's story, and the student concluded, "for me that was kind of like, a big deal in just knowing that she cared enough to even make that...connection."

Constructive criticism. Students emphasized the importance of critical feedback during advising, in which they were able to learn how to improve their work, develop their plans appropriately and successfully, and focus their goals (n=9). For example, one student reported that she went to her advisor seeking help with a class paper, and the advisor "sat with me...and

[we] made an outline, and I proceeded to do the paper." The same student also reported how her advisor helped her realize that her goals for a group project were components of a "multi-year program," and explained the steps she may want to take to complete these two goals.

Another student valued constructive criticism from her advisor to apply to her academic goals: "I was really confused….She really helped me sort of deconstruct what I was thinking, the goals I wasn't conscious of, what they were. So, she helped me get on track, which direction I would take while being a student." Additionally, students valued constructive criticism that challenged them: "She just gives me tough love. She tells me how it is, and I just really like that." The student valued her advisors' honest feedback.

Unhelpful Advising Experiences

Seven main unhelpful advising themes emerged from these narratives: indifference, lack of advising information, low expectations for high achievement or attainment, invalidation of student feelings and experiences, gatekeeping, lack of understanding about and microinsults toward the nontraditional student experience, and institutional concerns. For each unhelpful theme, I explain and then illustrate using student examples.

Indifference. The first negative theme of advising was indifference, in which advisors signaled that they were unconcerned or disinterested with who students were, what they wanted to do, or how they could work towards academic success (n=6). Some advisors did not know who the student was or did not recognize their story. One student provided an example of the beginning of an unhelpful advising session: "I went in and he didn't know my name." Students felt as if the advisor was not concerned with retaining information about which one of their students they were. Another student reported that her advisor was not focused on remembering her: "Sometimes I just have to remind him my story."

Advisors also exhibited this theme through affect. One student described a "stand-offish feeling" from her advisor during a meeting, explaining that "the vibe I got from her wasn't welcoming." The student responded to this disengagement by discontinuing the advising relationship. Another student articulated her impression of the advisors' indifferent communication signals: "He just pretty much goes through the motions."

Lastly, advisors exhibited their disinterest when either the speed or amount of time they dedicated to advising was lacking. A student described repeatedly reaching out to her advisor for specific discussions regarding her plans:

> She said send her an email, which I did. No response. I sent her another email. No response, and finally it came down to where it was my last semester….I didn't get an answer through my emails until one week before school started.

Lack of advising information. Participants reported that when advisors provided an inadequate amount of advising or incorrect information in advising, they experienced a negative impact (n=8). Often, students expressed that they were prepared to seek guidance from their advisors, but that they were met with insufficient information in response to their preparation. For example, one student described an advising session:

> I could have asked, like you know, a million questions….It was just "What classes are you taking? Sounds good! Send me an email, remind me to unblock you." And this is like right before I'm ready to go in to take an exam.

Another participant reported advisors who, when they lacked advising information themselves, did not provide the student with guidance on how to seek this information elsewhere. When asked to describe her experiences with feedback in advising, one student reported hearing "Ok, I can't help you," in response to describing their academic goals in their first meeting with

their advisor. The student explained, "And I'm like, 'do you know anybody that can?' and they're like 'No.'"

One participant demonstrated how incorrect information can specifically hinder successfully graduating and moving beyond college, by retelling a story of her friend's experience, who received misinformation from her advisor about the correct amount of credits she needed to graduate, explaining, "She's in a bind. She's supposed to graduate." In these situations, the students are left with disappointment, unanswered questions, a sense of incomplete advising, and in some cases, academic trajectories that are negatively affected.

Low expectations for high achievement or attainment. Advisors who expressed low expectations for their students emerged as an unhelpful theme in this study (n=3). Some advisors conveyed these expectations through patronization. One student explained that the reason she began minimally engaging with her advisor was because the advisor had "zero faith that I can do anything." After describing multiple instances of patronization, including one in which her academic pursuits were questioned due to her socioeconomic status, she summarized the message she felt she was receiving:

> Oh, you're so lucky to be here, but we don't expect that you're going to go to the UN or
> do anything like that. Those things seem to be reserved for students of a certain age and a
> certain class.

Low expectations also emerged specifically for nontraditional students as opposed to traditional students, signifying different standards for each. One student reported low expectations of nontraditional students' ability to take as many classes as traditional students from her advisor. She described the effects of these expectations: "If that's the case, why am I even here? You know, it just kind of makes you question the whole point of the program."

Invalidation of student feelings and experiences. Some advisors directly dismissed or devalued feelings and ideas expressed by students in advising conversations, signaling that they considered them unimportant or invalid (n=3). One student explains an unhelpful appeal to her advisor for emotional support regarding an unsatisfactory grade:

> It was the fact that she wasn't acknowledging where I was coming from or what it meant for me to be there, and, and just like, "You are coming from a place of challenge – like this is a challenging place for you, and the fact that you're doing as well as you are is commendable," instead of "Yeah, you gotta work on that. You got a long way to go."

> Students' stories and ideas were questioned regarding their importance or legitimacy. Another student, when appealing to an advisor for advice on how to navigate a difficult experience with another professor, was told "I don't believe you" when she reported a negative account. Her voice was not valued or respected to the point that it was deemed false.

Gatekeeping. The participants also pointed to the fact that advisors often serve as an access point to particular academic interests and achievements, and that some advisors said no, blocking their desired direction (n=5). One student described having a "really elegant solution" to complete both a double major and a thesis that was "dismissed out of hand" by her advisor.

Another student described her numerous efforts to pursue a thesis using critical race theory, which "just in a nutshell, it says that White, or -- institutions act in certain ways to preserve White privilege." The advisor said "I don't do race," and that "it wasn't an actual theory," despite the student explaining that "in any area of the Department, the issue of race is...very salient." The student had completed a seminar paper on the topic and spent the summer conducting further research. She shared her subsequent experience:

> I submitted probably over ten drafts of my thesis proposal, each time trying to satisfy my

advisor's demands by asking specific questions, and that I don't center it around critical

race theory, because it's an unsupported theory in her mind. And I realized halfway

through this that [the advisor] was just stalling my attempts to do as thesis. [The advisor]

didn't want to work with me….she kept sending it back for revisions, denying it, and

after about 10 or 11 revisions I just gave up, and there was never a point where we sat

down together and worked on it together. It was just me delivering something and [the

advisor] rejecting it.

The student concluded, "I don't think [the advisor's] intention was for me to ever give a proposal

that would be approved."

Lack of understanding about and microinsults toward the nontraditional student

experience. Students emphasized unhelpful advising particular to their status as a nontraditional

student (n=10). This unhelpful theme often manifested as applying traditional student advising to

nontraditional student needs, and is most similar to microinsults within microaggressions (Sue et

al., 2007).

One student said of her advisor, "I didn't feel like that person understood my situation,

particularly as a [Nontraditional Student] who lives off-campus. The person just didn't get it."

Another student reported her advisor's' response to her questions regarding the material he was

teaching. He exhibited "shock and removal," asking "whoa, really?" She empathized and yet

expressed frustration that he did not "know how to work with" her as she struggled to understand

what he was trying to teach. "There was no way for me to reach him," she said of trying to

communicate her advising needs.

Additionally, this theme resulted in condescending and marginalizing the nontraditional

student experienced based on stereotypes. For example, after explaining that she not only

experienced this in advising but in general, a student said that she was "always asked where I'm from" to the point that "you're just so used to it that you don't really notice it anymore. It's just like, a part of life." She expressed that this exoticization "makes me feel lonely, because I know even more that they don't know, um, about my culture."

Another student describes a situation in which she had to disclose her section 8 housing status in order to navigate an administrative matter on campus with her advisor. The student described condescending language used towards her in general after this by her advisor, and particularly in regards to her thesis plans. For example, the advisor said, "People in your situation, you know, I mean, do you really want to take on this work?" The student was left feeling as if "instead of an advisor being a mentor, you know, someone to help you, the advisor is like, this oppressor on campus."

Institutional Concerns. Finally, although the interview questions focused on advising experiences, some students responded with reports of negative experiences having to do with larger campus concerns that were not attributed to advising contexts (n=8). These results were categorized according to four institutional aspects: policies that affect nontraditional students, microaggressions from the broader campus community, lack of campus social connections for nontraditional students, and campus does not prioritize time for advisors.

Policies and structures that affect nontraditional students. Some students reported feeling frustrated with the extra effort or decrease in lack of opportunity that some policies, outside of the jurisdiction of the advisor and advisee, created for them as opposed to traditional students (n=2). One student described snow days in which commuter students were either required to come to class or notified of the class cancellation on their way to school. She recounted, "one [Nontraditional Student] saying that she started driving, and she started losing

control of the car because the road was so slippery," as well as mothers having difficulty obtaining access to childcare due to other school closings.

A second student describes her difficulty navigating the language requirement as an older student. Even after committing herself to a great deal of extra work, she was unable to learn the language. She reports that "the methodology was...definitely geared toward students who had taken this class in high school a year before," which was different from her experience of being out of high school for over thirty years.

A student disclosed her status as an undocumented immigrant, and explained that the lack of opportunities and funding for her meant that being dismissed in advising had very serious consequences. "So [College] accepted me….but now the problem was: Where was I going to live? How was I going to eat?" she said, explaining that she does not qualify for the same funding as traditional students due to her immigrant status, and therefore advising that impacts her academics negatively also impacts these basic needs.

Microaggressions from the broader campus community. Participants reported that other members of their institution such as students, staff, and faculty members, judged or communicated intentional or unintentional denigrating messages revealing bias based on the identity of the student (n=5). Multiple students described experiencing instances in which professors addressed the traditional students first and the nontraditional students second, if at all, when they addressed a classroom. One student reported, "I can say this across the board, the professors talk to the traditional students first and the nontraditional students second."

Another student shared her friend's experience with "prejudice" from a traditional student, who told her that "I hate being in class with these older women. Why do we even have [Nontraditional Students]? Why couldn't they have gotten their shit together earlier in life?" The

traditional student continued "It makes me so uncomfortable to like, have these old people in my class," unaware the student they were talking to was a nontraditional student herself.

Another student described walking into student offices and being asked for her daughter's ID number instead of her own. She said, "I get mistaken a lot for staff rather than a student, which is frustrating."

Lack of campus social connections for nontraditional students. Some participants expressed feelings of disconnection or isolation in campus spaces or the campus community (n=4). These reports included feelings of being excluded, unwelcomed, misunderstood, or of alienation in their bodies and positions on campus.

One student said, "I don't have friends. That kind of gets into the other area where I have a need, where I'm disconnected from the other students," explaining that she does not "have that kind of fallow time that a lot of stuff happens in" and in which knowledge about the campus and its culture is shared. She expressed frustration that advisors may think she is a part of this larger body of cultural of knowledge when she is, in fact, not.

Another student elaborated on her feeling "awful" regarding isolation:

The traditional students live on campus, in dorms, and you're just saturated in it. It's your life. You live together. You go to all the events together, and you form these bonds, and because I'm entering as an upper-level student, I definitely feel like an outsider.

This was difficult for her, because "I like to feel accepted, and not necessarily like, 'we are family,' but just like, respected and accepted, you know?"

A third student elaborated on the details of this isolation: "There's three different classes. There's traditional, there's nontraditional young, and then there's nontraditional older." She reported that being in the third class was "more difficult socially."

Campus does not prioritize time for advisors. Lastly, students recognized that the institution does not allot the professors enough time resources to dedicate towards advising (n=2). One student described an unhelpful advising session, but followed up her description by explaining that "he was really busy, so I wasn't pushing anything." Another student reported the difference between her community college and her current institution. At the community college, there was an employee whose position entailed always being available to help the students. At her current institution, she was grateful that her advisor would "take the time to talk" to her amid his busy demands.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the advising experiences of nontraditional students were examined to identify the positive characteristics that support and help as well as the negative characteristics that discourage academic experiences and success. Consistent with past literature on advising, course selection assistance and considering the individual student needs emerged as helpful components of advising (Broadbridge, 1996; Christian & Sprinkle, 2013). Broadbridge's (1996) focus groups of undergraduate students revealed that information about course selection was a foundational component of helpful advising. Participants viewed course selection as part of developmental advising. Studies show that students prefer developmental advising, in which the advisor gets to know the student's individual needs and considers the student within a collaborative advising process (Alexitch, 1997; Broadbridge, 1996; Christian & Sprinkle, 2013). The current study extends the reports of these advising preferences to nontraditional student experiences.

The theme of active listening and taking time supports previous literature on advising and helpful feedback in higher education. Packard and Jeffers (2013) found that for underrepresented students in higher education, in this case community college students transferring to four-year STEM degrees, helpful and supportive advising entailed active listening. Alexitch (1997) studied the advising preferences of undergraduate students, 23.5% of whom were nontraditional-aged, and found that the amount of time spent on advising correlated with student satisfaction. The emergence of this theme supports previous literature on active listening and taking time in individual studies of student experiences, and signals a possible connection between these previous results: nontraditional students connected active listening and taking time together as a positive and helpful aspect of communication in the advising process.

Themes of validation and constructive criticism also emerged, which support previous studies on wise feedback and helpful advising. Cohen et al. (1999) explained that wise feedback is the combination of validation, or communication that an instructor believes that a student is capable of achieving the high expectations that the instructor has set, with detailed constructive criticism, or the specific steps a student must take in order to meet this expectation. The researchers went on to show that wise feedback, as opposed to vague feedback or constructive criticism by itself, can be instrumental in buffering the negative effects of stereotype threat for students of color. As both validation and constructive criticism emerged as themes in a group of students who are susceptible to stereotype threat, these components that create wise feedback are possibly applicable to advising contexts for nontraditional students. These qualitative results suggest that future studies may benefit from studying an experimental condition of wise feedback in the advising contexts of nontraditional students.

The theme of low expectations for high achievement or attainment connects to previous literature on the experiences of people with underrepresented identities in academic contexts. For example, Rattan et al. (2011) found women's perception of low expectations as an effect of comfort-oriented feedback in an environment that contained stereotype threat, resulting in internalization of these expectations as well as decreased motivation. While Rattan et al. (2011) focused on the stereotype of women performing poorly in mathematics, nontraditional students expressed that their experiences of low expectations were due to a perception of their identity of nontraditional students as being less academically competent than traditional students. While students who reported this theme did not report internalization of these expectations or decreased motivation, one student did report questioning the nontraditional student program as a result.

Lack of understanding about and microinsults toward the nontraditional student experience also emerged as a theme in the unhelpful advising data, and this theme, while new in the literature regarding this population and context, is supported by previous studies of underrepresented students in higher education. Gosset and colleagues (1998) found that people may have misunderstandings regarding the experiences of marginalization by students of color in academia. In their study of 1,180 students across four college campuses, they found that White students were unaware of the marginalization of African American students. White students reported that they did not believe that African American students were treated differently, while students who were African American revealed statistical significance on forty-five out of sixty on a scale that measured campus environments in which they experienced marginalization. In addition to or in combination with the misunderstanding of marginalized student experiences, nontraditional students reported instances of microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) defines microinsults, a type of microaggression, as "communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (p. 274). The current study revealed microinsults on the basis of student identities, with students reporting microinsults specifically related to their racial-ethnic identity and the nontraditional student identity. The emergence of various microinsults in the data highlights the importance of an intersectional framework when studying microaggressions that nontraditional students may experience (Nadal et al, 2015)

Lastly, indifference and emerged as a theme in unhelpful advising experiences for nontraditional students, which is novel in the advising and nontraditional student literature. Previous research has found that lack of advising correlates with student dissatisfaction with advising, however, an indifferent quality of advising interactions has not been discussed – while

the former is a lack of the act of advising, the latter emerges in this study as a lack of care within advising (Alexitch, 1997). It is possible that indifference could signify a mismatch in expectations between the advisor and the advisee. Broadbridge (1996) found that confusion over the purpose of advising, expectations, and/or desire to participate in and advising relationship may lead to unsatisfactory advising. Future studies should explore the nature and replication of this theme in the advising contexts of nontraditional students.

Implications for Practice

Advising is an inherently interpersonal relationship, subject to the possible expectations and difficulties of any social relationship. Advisors, advisees, and institutions all have the opportunity to incorporate these results into their practices. Both the intentions brought into and impacts of advising sessions can be considered as we reflect on ways to collaboratively support students. For example, advisors may benefit from reflection on their perceptions about students regularly both independently and within professional groups, providing them with an exercise in which to challenge their own misunderstandings and judgements about students. They can engage in "metacognition" to develop further understanding of their students and their positions (Hollis, 2009). If an advisor does not share the same social identity as a student, they can consult the literature about identity and reflect on the contextual aspects that could possibly influence the student in academia.

Students may benefit from taking an active role in advising. Packard (2003) developed an intervention in which students expanded their concepts beyond the singular advising relationships to multiple mentoring relationships in which they took specifically proactive roles to engage in the learning process. The study proved how training for students, not only advisors, can benefit the advising relationship by showing them how to best approach advising resources

and increase the changes of a successful outcome with multiple advisors as resources. Similarly, Kasprisin, Single, Single, and Muller (2003) found that training of mentors helps to ensure positive experiences by both parties.

Institutions can support their professors and students in multiple ways. Institutions can provide a database for advisors to keep track of and review notes about their students prior to advising sessions. Teaching and learning centers can promote the scholarship of both teaching and advising for professors, and institutions can provide incentives to devote as much time towards supporting their students as towards research and publication (Keig, 2000; Wieman, 2015). Singh (2010) found action research interventions that taught about communication and encouraged dialogue through a series of class activities to be successful in promoting communication among people with different backgrounds at a university. Intergroup dialogues have been found to increase the likelihood of ally-ship (Alimo, 2012). Students with underrepresented identities associate allies with interpersonal support (Brown, 2014). Additionally, universities can critically examine the data of faculty social identities intersectionally and across faculty position and research (Leggon, 2010). Using these evaluations, institutions can enact policies the address a lack of diversity in those who do the advising, while keeping in mind that the work load of addressing the needs of students with underrepresented identities should not be unequally shared among faculty members.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. The location of the study may have influenced the participant pool, because it was conducted across two selective colleges at which the nontraditional student population is in the minority. One study found that students who transfer from community college may be more likely to transfer to an institution that has a higher

percentage of transfer students than to transfer to one that is considered a more selective

university, when presented with a choice (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). Future studies could

examine the differences between nontraditional student experiences at institutions in which there

are higher rates of transfer students enrolled. We might expect to find that certain negative

interactions still occur but they may be fewer or more nuanced in nature.

Additionally, there could be gender differences. Recruitment occurred at two women's

colleges. While Broadbridge (1996) found that a coed participant pool preferred developmental

advising, Alexitch (1997) found that gender had an effect on advising preferences, with women

preferring more development and higher frequencies of advising,. Christian and Sprinkle (2013)

found that men preferred less career advising than women. Therefore, there may be gender

differences that future co-ed studies could address as needed such that the women in this study

preferred different types of support than might be found by men, or on co-ed campuses.

While this study uses an intersectional social identity framework to consider the

participant identities, the small sample size does not allow for inferences to be made regarding

the interactions of specific intersectional identities within or in combination with the

nontraditional student identity (Crenshaw, 2005). Ro and Loya (2015) studied results in relation

to specific combinations of social identities as their study analyzed over 5,000 participants.

However, this study analyzed 12 participants, and given the amount of combinations of identities

that occur, each participant may represent a combination by themselves making it impossible to

draw inference from the specific intersections. Future studies would benefit from larger sample

sizes to explore the nature of experiences of the specific interactions of identities that may occur

within or in addition to the nontraditional student identity. In addition, member checking only

occurred with the first four participants. Future steps should include member checking with

additional participants, and possibly, subsequent projects can engage students around the emergent themes for comment and further development.

Advising is an interpersonal interaction involving both the advisor and advisee in a communication process. Previous studies have shown that advisors and advisees may have different perceptions about advising (Broadbridge, 1996). While studies have explored student perceptions regarding advising, future studies may want to explore advisor perceptions of advising interactions (Broadbridge, 1996; Christian & Sprinkle, 2013; Constantine & Sue, 2007). Furthermore, as advising is a two-way communication process, dyadic models may shed light on the nuances of both sides of the communication process, as well as barriers advisors perceive when getting to know students who are different from themselves (Schector, 2014). Future studies may benefit from using dyadic models to explore how to ask questions about individual student needs respectfully.

In conclusion, while we see the potential for invalidation and other microaggressions within advising interactions for nontraditional students, we can too be hopeful about advising as a tool to facilitate their success. Nontraditional students continue to make up an important proportion of undergraduates today, and their intersectional identities are important to understand and support. Through greater research and practice in this area, we can both strengthen their experiences and our campuses alike.

Appendix

Introduction: This study is about student experiences of advising. Advising is the process by

which students engage in discussion and receive information to guide them along their academic

career with another person associated with the college. This person can be your major advisor,

major chair, a professor, a staff member associated with a particular support service, or another

staff member or peer advisor.

1. Let's start with the basics. Can you tell me the types of advisors you use (such as major

   chair, major advisor, professor, staff member)?

2. How often do you use advising as a resource during the academic year?

3. Now I'd like to discuss your opinions about advising. What do you see as the trademarks

   or characteristics of positive, helpful, or supportive advising?

4. Looking at your own experience, can you give an example of a situation in which you

   received feedback from an advisor that was helpful or supportive? What about the

   advisor was helpful and supportive, and what about their feedback was helpful and

   supportive? (if no - friend with advising)

5. (If not mentioned: What position does/did this advisor have at your school? Was this your

   initial advisor?)

6. And going back to looking at advising in general, what do you see as trademarks or

   characteristics of unhelpful, discouraging or unsupportive advising?

7. Can you give an example of a situation in which you received feedback from an advisor

   that was unhelpful or discouraging or unsupportive? (Please focus on example here at this

   college you are attending right now.) What about the advisor was unhelpful and

   unsupportive - and what about their feedback was unhelpful and unsupportive? (if no -

friend with advising)

8. (If not mentioned: What position does/did this advisor have at your school?) (initial advisor?)

Identity section: I'm talking to you to learn more about your experience with being a (student of color / first generation student / nontraditional student). I recognize that people have many different identities and aspects of themselves - so you are definitely more than just ___ - but for now I want to think with you about how that identity has influenced your advising experiences both negatively and positively.

9. What comes to mind when you consider your advising experience in the role of a ____ at MHC / Smith?

10. In your advising experiences, have there been times where social identity seemed to be a factor in a negative or unsupportive advising feedback or interactions? Can you provide an example?

11. (If not mentioned: What position does this advisor have at your school?) (initial advisor?)

Microaggression probe: I would like to further explore this topic of identity and advising. Some people experience or have experienced subtle instances of bias or misunderstanding based on their identities. Here are three examples of these subtle occurrences. A. A student of color may be asked "Where are you from?" implying that they must not be from the U.S. or this area. B. A female employee is asked to complete administrative duties (such as cleaning or filling) that are not part of her job description. C. In a class of mostly traditional students, the professor requires students to come to an event on campus at 8pm. These types of occurrences may be referred to as microaggressions. there's a wide range of what can occur, what social identities they may relate to, whether they are intentional or unintentional and whether they are between two people or part

of the environment.

12. Have there been times when you have experienced microaggressions within an advising conversation based on your identity as _____? If so, can you provide an example? (if no - friend)

13. PROBE: How did this affect you, and what did you do after?

14. (If not mentioned: What position does this advisor have at your school?) (initial?)

15. Now I'd like to discuss critical feedback in advising. Critical feedback can be described as a time at which you have gone to an advisor and presented them with an idea, plan, or piece of work, and they have told you that what you presented does not meet the mark, must be improved in some way, or needs to reach a higher standard. It's like constructive criticism. Have there been times when you have received feedback that your performance or something that you were discussing in advising was not up to standard and needed improvement, and hearing this was discouraging or unsupportive? If so, could you provide an example? What did you do afterward?

16. When it comes to giving critical feedback, how about times when hearing that your work or something you were discussing in advising needed improvement was encouraging or supportive? Can you provide an example? What did you do afterward?

17. We've discussed possible unsupportive advising experiences as a ___. I'd like to revisit positive situations, perhaps advising experiences in which you felt especially listened to or supported. Do you have any examples of advising where it felt like your identity as a _____ was validated or supported? Can you provide an example? What did you do afterward?

18. Lastly, we've discussed your identity in terms of _____, however everyone has many

identities that are important to them, and we value intersectionality. Are there other

identities, such as that of ability, veteran status, gender, class, or otherwise, that you

would like to discuss in terms of advising? Specifically, I'd like to discuss examples in

which these aspects of your identity have been either supported and validated or felt

unsupported or discouraged?

19. Thank you so much, and are there any final thoughts you would like to add?

Debriefing: Thank you very much for participating in our study of advising contexts for an array

of students across identities. The purpose of our study was to investigate how nontraditional

college students, students of color, and first-generation college students experience advising in

higher education and to learn more about how advisors provide support and also how interactions

can be experienced negatively by students in advising contexts. To this end we were also

interested in possible microaggressions that may occur during these interactions. Through

interviews with individuals from a wide array of backgrounds, our goal was to shed more light

on how advising feedback is received and interpreted by underrepresented students in a college

setting. And it's also possibly to inform faculty and staff in their practices of providing feedback

and navigating contexts in which the social identities of students are salient in advising.

*If participant decides they want to add more, turn back on and say "Addendum to id number__"

20. Lastly, I will be conducting member checking to make sure that I'm understanding your

contributions accurately. Would it be ok to contact you in the future for this? Should we

schedule with you via email or call to see if you are available?

21. Thank you, and may I take your number for the member checking follow up? _____

*If you have any questions at all about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the supervising

professor at (email).

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