Privilege, Bias, and Cultural Competence: An Examination of How Lived Experience Shapes Academic Advising Practices

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Privilege, Bias, and Cultural Competence: An Examination of How Lived Experience Shapes Academic Advising Practices

by

Jennifer Englert-Copeland

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bellarmine University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

Spring 2019
The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Dissertation of

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Privilege, Bias, and Cultural Competence: An Examination of How Lived Experience Shapes

Academic Advising Practices

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Abstract

As college campuses become increasingly diverse, the need for multicultural awareness among faculty and staff has become a critical component of student success. Though rising diversity among students promotes a rich and more robust learning environment (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 1994) and correlates with various positive educational outcomes (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umback & Kuh, 2006), student affairs and higher education professionals may be ineffective when managing and responding to diversity. For faculty and staff within community college settings, the need for multicultural awareness, including awareness of privilege and bias, is significant as the student populations at these institutions are diverse in age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. The objective of this dissertation is to examine the way student affairs practitioners—specifically academic advisors—understand how their own privileges and biases inform their interactions with students as well as the strategies these advisors utilize to practice culturally competent advising practices.

This qualitative case study is informed by a number of theoretical concepts including multicultural competence for counseling psychology, implicit bias and privilege, advising, and student success and retention. Four participants were selected from a mid-sized community college situated in the Southeastern region of the United States. Seven themes emerged from the study and are presented in the findings. The themes signify the importance of an advisor’s lived experience, including personal biases and beliefs, in their advising interactions with students as well as the strategies they utilize to inform culturally competent advising such as relationship building, seeing students as individuals, and transformation through shared stories.

(Keywords: Multicultural Competence, Community College, Academic Advising, Bias, Privilege)
Acknowledgements

When I first began the doctoral program journey, I had no idea just how much would change for me personally and for the world around me. Within the last years, which have moved ever closer to a decade, I’ve become a permanent resident of Kentucky after selling our home in South Carolina, our family grew from three to four with the birth of our youngest daughter, I’ve grown professionally and taken on increasing responsibilities of leadership, and I’ve watched my oldest transform from a squishy, curious three-year-old to a tall, inquisitive, and justice-minded pre-teen. Now, as I arrive at the end of this endeavor, I am reflecting upon all of those who have influenced me and who have made this journey possible. First and foremost, I want to thank my husband Jamie and my girls, Lucy and Claire, for the sacrifices they have made to allow me to pursue my doctoral degree.

I’m not certain that Jamie knew what he was getting into when I first began the program. So many weekends during those first few semesters were spent with me in class and Jamie taking on sole care of Lucy. I know that he was tired, but he filled in the spaces where I was lacking and in the process became a solid role model for Lucy. He showed her what it means to be an awesome Dad and a supportive husband and that being a strong man can mean making sacrifices for his wife. And for that, I am forever thankful. The dissertation process has been messy. I’ve whined. I’ve ignored. I’ve made lots of progress and then not touched it for months at a time. But Jamie has never been anything other than supportive. He believed in me even when I didn’t believe in myself.

When I think about people whose support has allowed me to get to this point in my life and in my academic journey, I realize that I’m blessed to be surrounded by truly special souls. The first are my parents. Early on, they encouraged my brother, Patrick, and I to be learners.
Though I would grumble about going to historical sites, folk festivals, musical performances, and libraries, I am so very grateful that they exposed us to the world and encouraged us to think. They also instilled in us a sense of justice and a desire to be a voice for what is right no matter if it’s popular. Not a day passes that I don’t miss you, Mom. And, to my brother, Patrick, you inspire me every day. You have picked me up when I’ve been down on myself and given me the extra push to finish this thing. You are a light and inspiration to world and I feel so very thankful for you. To Rick and Fran, family is more than genetics. Family is love and support and being there. You go above and beyond every day for us, and I wouldn’t be here today without you both. To Amy, you’re my sister by choice and I love you. You have always believed in me and never doubted that I could finish. Now, it’s your turn to go out and make your dreams a reality.

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Finally, to my girls Lucy and Claire, thank you for loving me even when I’ve had to miss activities or when I haven’t been present in the moment with you. I hope that both of you will see that education is important and that you can achieve anything as long as you are willing to persist. I love you both!
Dedication

Working in a community college advising office requires a passion for making a
difference and a belief in the power of education to change lives. Resources are limited. The
days can be long. And salaries don’t reflect the quality or significance of the work being
undertaken. Yet advisors show up every day ready to work with each student, meeting them
where they are and taking on the responsibility of not just helping the student but potentially
impacting generational poverty. This dissertation is dedicated to academic advisors. Though
your work may sometimes feel insignificant, never underestimate your impact and your potential
to change lives.
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

As college campuses become increasingly diverse, the need for multicultural awareness among faculty and staff becomes a critical component of student success. Though rising diversity among students promotes a rich and more robust learning environment (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 1994) and correlates with various positive educational outcomes (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Umback & Kuh, 2006), student affairs and higher education professionals may be ineffective when managing and responding to diversity. Scholars of higher education research (e.g. Barr & Strong, 1988; Cheatham, 1991; Harper, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford, 1998; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Pope, 1995; Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2004) have proposed that student affairs educators and faculty develop multicultural sensitivity and responsiveness. However, practitioners have not received adequate training, and multicultural sensitivity is not generally a performance rating criterion (McEwen & Rooper, 1994; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Talbot, 1996; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). Rather than make multicultural competence a comprehensive, wide-reaching part of campus education, many colleges employ multicultural experts to address issues of diversity. This promotes a lack of institutional support or reward for multicultural competence (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011) and therefore little added incentive for faculty and staff.

The deficit in widespread multicultural competence training on college campuses is of concern because of the changing demographics within the United States. The 2010 United States Census Bureau data yielded a 9.7% increase in the overall population of the United States between 2000 and 2010, and the majority of this growth is among those who identify themselves
as non-white Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Chao and Nath (2011) contend that colleges must commit themselves to diversity education and training in order to effectively address increasing diversity on campus. When colleges fail to do so, ethnically and racially underrepresented students report feelings of social isolation, alienation and marginalization, stereotyping, invisibility, and discrimination by faculty and staff (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Rieger, & Austin, 2002). While other studies have examined multicultural competence among counselors and psychologists (Ivers, 2012; Chao & Nath, 2011; Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008), few studies (e.g. Ume-Nwagbo, 2011; Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dismore, & Hof, 2008) have been conducted to examine the correlation between the multicultural competence levels of college faculty, academic advisors, and student success. This suggests a need for further research in regard to the ways in which a faculty or academic advisor’s multicultural competence level or lack thereof shapes the advisor’s relationship with the student.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study involves the insights and perspectives collected from academic advisors at one two-year institution in an effort to facilitate more widespread awareness of the impact of privilege and bias and to emphasize multicultural competence as a critical component of the advisor/student experience. By recognizing the significance of an individual’s understanding of privilege and bias (cultural competence), especially for those in roles key to student academic success, administrators may be more willing to implement multicultural competence training and professional development opportunities. Studies have examined the impact of a counselor’s multicultural competence on the success of the client being served (Chao & Nath, 2011), the relationship between a counselor’s ethnicity and their multicultural competence level (Ivers, 2012), and the significance of a counselor’s perceived
multicultural competence versus demonstrated performance (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008). However, a research gap exists in the examination of academic advisors and the way their perceptions, self-awareness, and multicultural competence shapes their advising practices and relationships with students.

Though there is a gap in research related to academic advisors and their levels of multicultural competence, there has been recent movement at the national and local levels within the field of academic advising to emphasize diversity and inclusion. Within the National Academic Advising Association’s (NACADA) (2017) strategic plan, strategic goal four states: “Foster inclusive practices within the association that respect the principle of equity and the diversity of advising professionals across the vast array of intersections of identity.” During the national conference held in October 2017, the NACADA Board of Directors created a formal subcommittee to develop a plan to assess the climate of inclusivity and equity within the organization. In addition, the board of directors created a new officer position to address issues of diversity and inclusion within advising. Within NACADA’s Clearinghouse, which is a repository for articles related to best practices in advising, there is a “Cultural Issues in Advising” page, but the articles available are limited.

At the state level, there is a push from councils on post-secondary education to engage in diversity and inclusion efforts. In Kentucky, for example, each of the colleges within its community college system was required to submit a strategic diversity plan for approval from the state’s council on post-secondary education. Future state appropriated funding and institutional ability to add and offer new programs will be tied to the success of the strategic diversity plan. Academic advising was selected as a diversity strategy at some of the colleges, but there is no uniform approach for how to ensure that diversity and inclusion are addressed within advising.
The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which academic advisors’ understanding and use of multicultural competence as well as potential hidden or implicit biases influence their approaches to the students they advise. The study also seeks to develop an understanding of how well the advisors understand their experiences with privilege and bias. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?
2. What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?

The research questions emerged from conversations with students, faculty, and staff who have illustrated a need for enhanced awareness of and education about the issues of privilege and multi-cultural competence. Relevant qualitative literature and emphasis on multicultural competence in fields closely related to education, including counseling and psychology, will inform postsecondary administration and faculty of the need for more widespread implementation of multicultural and diversity training, specifically on issues surrounding privilege and implicit bias.

Assumptions

This study was conducted at Silver Springs Community College which is part of a larger statewide system in the Southeastern region of the United States. Because there are few education programs in the United States that offer certificates or degrees in academic advising, it was assumed that the majority of the advisors (faculty, professional staff, counselors, etc.) participating in the study would have minimal formal training. An additional assumption was that the student affairs Characteristics of a Multiculturally Competent Student Affairs Practitioner will translate to advisors in higher education. Though multicultural competence
professional development and exposure may vary across institutions, I assumed that the advisors participating in the study would have had little formal exposure to this type of training. This is particularly true within the community college system due to a lack of financial resources for professional development. It was assumed that the advisors would each have a baseline awareness of the concepts of diversity, privilege, bias, and cultural competence but that their levels of knowledge and awareness would differ. Another assumption was that the advisors’ levels of comfort and honesty would be variable. Open discussions on the topics privilege, bias, and multicultural competence require an inherent sense of trust, and I assumed that I would be able to build varying levels of trust with each of the advisors within the study.

**Key Terms**

**Multicultural competence.** One of the barriers to creating a more just and culturally competent campus in higher education is the lack of a clear definition of multicultural competence. While some scholars argue for a definition that includes race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and religion (Pedersen, 1988; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991), others prefer a more exclusive definition, which allows for a closer examination of race (Carter & Qureshi, 1995; Helms & Richardson, 1997).

Helms and Richardson (1997) suggest that efforts to make multicultural competence more inclusive stem from conscious or unconscious discomfort when discussing the issue of race (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). Within the current climate of the United States, race is central to how we view ourselves and each other. This is true in higher education as race intersects almost every facet of higher education including admissions, curriculum, advising, and retention among others (Pope et al., 2004). This study utilizes a more inclusive approach to the term multicultural competence as it is important to acknowledge multiple social identities.
including race, class, gender, gender identity and expression, age, and abilities, among other identities. Building upon Crenshaw’s (1991) work on intersectionality, multicultural competence values and recognizes the overlapping of various identities such as race and social class and how these identities empower or oppress.

**Institutionalized racism.** Within society, dominant social structures and systems, including education, operate within the context of historical (Davis, 2006) and contemporary (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) institutionalized racism, which may be defined as varying levels of access to opportunities, goods, and services based upon race (Jones, 2000; Tyson, 2007).

**Race and ethnicity.** It is important to define both race and ethnicity as they will be utilized within the context of this study. Henry, Tettey-Fio, and Frazier (2010) defined race as “a social construction unsupported by science” (p. 5). The history of racial relations in the United States has led many United States’ citizens to connect race with skin color only (Henry et al., 2010). Graves (2004) suggests that the social construction of African-American identity, for example, stems from the ideology of whiteness with the intent of white social domination (Henry et al., 2010). Graves (2004) contends that race has remained significant within United States’ society because “Americans have made it significant on all levels” (as cited in Henry et al., 2010, p. 9). The concept of race exists for the purpose of supporting a specific power structure within society.

Ethnicity, as defined by Henry et al. (2010), relates to a group-constructed identity, which connects members of the group through shared traits such as language, cultural, history, cultural traditions, and religion. Ethnicity is “a social construct that defines the we-ness of group membership and often involves connection to place” (Henry, et al., 2010, p. 9).
Though race and ethnicity are related, they are not equivalent. Race and racism may lead to a shared sense of vulnerability and may contribute to one’s ethnic identity (Henry et al., 2010). When societal oppression and struggle are a part of a group’s cultural history, such as for African-Americans and Native Americans, the experience of racism may directly contribute to ethnic identity. Henry et al. (2010) emphasize that racial identity does not preclude a common ethnic identity.

**Implicit bias.** Unlike the psychological conception of social behavior in which individuals are guided by their explicit beliefs and conscious choices of action, implicit cognition suggests that individuals do not necessarily have conscious control of social perception, impressions, and judgements (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Implicit biases are discriminatory in that they are based upon implicit attitudes or stereotypes. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) assert that these types of bias are problematic in that they may result in behavior which contrasts the individual’s endorsed beliefs or principles. Bias, by nature, may be positive or negative depending upon whom it is directed. In-group bias, for example, involves favoritism toward one’s group. In this sense, bias is only negative when directed against another outside group (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Within this study, implicit bias is utilized as a lens for examining the unconscious perceptions academic advisors may hold towards the students they advise.

**Academic advisor/counselor.** For the purpose of this study, the term academic advisor is utilized to describe any individual within a higher education institution who provides insight or direction to a college student regarding academic, social, or personal matters. This definition of academic advising is taken from Kuhn (2008) who suggests that academic advisors serve to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, and teach their student advisees. Though the
term academic counselor is often used to describe individuals serving in the capacity above, this study will utilize the term academic advisor.

**Self-awareness.** Self-awareness, also known as cultural awareness within the helping professions such as counseling, involves the awareness by practitioners that their unique cultural heritage, background, and experiences have shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and biases (Mirsky, 2013). Though the concept of self-awareness is largely thought to be intuitive to counselors, scholars have struggled to clearly define the concept (Pieterse, Lee, Ritmeester, & Collins, 2013; Williams, Hurley, O’Brien, & DeGregorio, 2003). Williams et al. (2003) suggest that self-awareness is often viewed through two lens. The first involves a cognitive, global knowledge of one’s perceptions and experiences. The second reflects a temporary condition of reactionary focus on self. Individuals for whom the first definition applies would possess a more holistic understanding of their own values and the ways in which these value systems impact relationships. Those for whom the second definition applies, however, would be more likely to take a moment-by-moment approach with little awareness about previous experiences—a reactionary approach (Williams et al., 2003). Within counseling, practitioners most often engage in both the cognitive understanding and affective reaction aspects of self-awareness (Pieterse et al., 2013). Therefore, a more complete way to define self-awareness involves the practitioner being conscious of their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, behavior, and attitudes while also acknowledging how these same factors shaped their developmental and social history (Pieterse et al., 2013; Gergen, 1991). When counseling practitioners possess self-awareness, they are able to identify their personal reactions and utilize these reactions successfully within the counseling relationship (Pieterse et al., 2013). Within the framework of this study, the researcher will approach self-awareness through the lens of both the cognitive and reactive constructs.
Privilege. This study seeks to understand the ways in which privilege impacts the advisor/student relationship. In order to address the idea of institutionalized racism, one must examine historic and contemporary beliefs, social structures, and practices maintained by White Eurocentric society (Tyson, 2007). Tyson (2007) suggests that White individuals may believe that they are not racist and therefore not responsible for the practices which have resulted in continued discrimination within society and may question the value of revisiting a past in which they were not directly involved. Tyson argues that McIntosh’s (1988) seminal work regarding the concept of White privilege answers this question. In the work, McIntosh, a White woman, described White privilege as an invisible knapsack full of unearned assets that White individuals may easily access when needed. Individuals who benefit from White privilege are socialized from birth to not recognize or build awareness about their privilege; therefore, there is nothing to make it seem unordinary (McIntosh, 1988). Rather, it is the natural order. McIntosh goes on to identify more than 50 examples of her own experience in benefitting from white privilege including her observation that she could do well in a situation and not be called a credit to her race. Within higher education, white privilege may take the form of the often disproportionate representation of White faculty and staff on campuses with larger percentages of underrepresented ethnic and racial students.

Dissertation Overview

Given the increasing diversity within higher education, especially within the community college setting, coupled with the pressure from state appropriated funding, providing culturally competent and responsive academic advising is a critical component of student success (McClenny, 2013; McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017; Kuh, 2008). This study will inform readers about the ways lived experiences and awareness of privilege and bias impact an advisor’s
practices. It will also provide insight into the strategies that academic advisors use to provide culturally competent advising to the students they serve at the community college. By understanding the importance of culturally responsive advising practices as well as the need for training and professional development, community colleges can provide more support to academic advisors. With the appropriate type of professional development, academic advisors can positively impact student success (Buckley, 2016; Voller, 2011; Self, 2011).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview of Chapter Two

This literature review will provide a framework for understanding the theories which inform the study. In order to fully understand the complexities of advising within a community college setting, it is first necessary to understand the history and current state of higher education within the two-year college. First, an overview of community colleges, including demographic information, is included within this literature review. Secondly, an in-depth discussion of academic advising theories and practices is included as is information related to advising practices and student success and retention. In addition to the theories of advising, literature related to multicultural competence within the context of student affairs is discussed. Finally, the literature review includes a discussion of the theories and concepts of privilege and bias. Each of these discussions provides context for the research questions and emergent themes within the study.

Community College: Open Access and Diverse Populations of Students

Because community colleges have open access policies, the student populations of these institutions tend to have larger numbers of traditionally underrepresented students. McClenney (2013) suggests that for too long, community colleges have emphasized college access for traditionally underrepresented students but have failed to design systems to support the success of these students. In order to ensure success for community college students, colleges must guarantee that their early experiences—such as those in advising—are positive. McClenney (2013) argues that in addition to community colleges designing and implementing academic
pathways for students, they must also invest in the faculty and staff who will be doing this critical work.

The mission of the community college has traditionally been access. According to data from the Community College Research Center (CCRC), community college students earn more over the course of their lifetime than those who do not attend college (2018). A large-scale study conducted across six states found that a student who completes an associate degree at a community college may expect to earn $5,400 more each working year than a student who drops out of the community college (Bailey & Bellfield, 2015). Community colleges represent a significant portion of college enrollment across the country. Within the 2015-2016 academic year, approximately nine million students were enrolled in public two-year institutions. Among students who completed a four-year degree, approximately 49% were enrolled at a two-year college within the previous 10 years (CCRC, 2018). Students attending community colleges may experience financial challenges more often than their four-year student cohort counterparts. The 2011-2012 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), suggests that one in three community college students have family incomes less than $20,000, and 69% of students work while in college. Of that group of students, 33% work more than 35 hours per week. Only two percent receive Federal Work Study aid in comparison to 25% of students at private, four-year colleges (NPSAS, 2011-2012). Community colleges enroll a higher percentage of ethnically and racially underrepresented students than their four-year counterparts. According to the CCRC (2018), among college students who first enrolled in 2010, 48.5% identified as African-American or Black and 50.8% Hispanic as compared to 35.6% of White students and 37.8% of Asian students. In the Fall 2014, approximately 56% of Hispanic, 44% of Black, and 39% of White undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges (CCRC, 2018).
Community colleges continue to see lower rates of persistence and success. A 2011 study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) found that among first-time college students enrolled in a community college in 2011, which included full-time and part-time students, approximately 37.5% earned a credential from a two- or four-year institution within six years (CCRC, 2018). Disaggregated data suggested stark differences in completion rates depending upon race and ethnicity. While 46.7% of White students completed a credential within six years, that number fell to 35% for Hispanic students and 26% for Black students (CCRC, 2018). There were also significant differences in earned bachelor’s degrees among these students. Approximately 15% of students who started at a community college in 2011 completed a degree at a four-year college or university. White and Asian students earned bachelor’s degrees at higher rates than the overall average of 24.2% and 20% as compared to Hispanic and Black students who earned bachelor’s degrees at much lower rates of 12.7% and 8.6 percent (CCRC, 2018).

**Performance Based Funding and Impact On Community Colleges**

Despite their reputation as institutions offering access to students who may not otherwise have a pathway to post-secondary education, community colleges experience low rates of persistence, completion, and student success. Though community college students often face barriers and challenges that their four-year student counterparts may not, nationally, community colleges are being subject to performance based funding (PBF) models instituted by state and local government. McKinney and Hagedorn (2017) suggest that community colleges may suffer significant financial impacts as the result of the implementation of PBF models. In some models of PBF, community colleges, which are designed to offer affordable, open-access to postsecondary education could be penalized as these institutions tend to enroll a greater
proportion of traditionally underrepresented and/or first-generation students who are less likely to persist. Colleges with a high number of traditionally underrepresented minority students and fewer institutional resources may lose funding because of PBF and may find it even more challenging to improve student outcomes (McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017).

The first PBF model was implemented in Tennessee in 1979 and has now been implemented in 32 states nationally. The early PBF models (often referred to as PBF 1.0) did not result in a significant different in increasing student outcomes; however, a second set of policies referred to as PBF 2.0 have become popular within the past five years (McKinney & Hagedorn, 2017).

Unlike the earliest PBF models, PBF 2.0 frameworks utilize performance criteria to allocate base appropriations rather than as bonus funding. As of 2015, 27 states have PDB models for community colleges, including community colleges within the state of Kentucky, which adopted the model for the 2018-2019 fiscal year (Council on Postsecondary Education, 2018). The PDF goal is to increase post-secondary degree attainment from 45% to 60% by 2030. As state governments continue to push for accountability, colleges and universities will increasingly see funding linked to student success, course completion, maintenance and operations, institutional support, and academic support. Community college systems will be significantly impacted by the PBF model with some colleges within the system taking on a larger burden than others. Though the community college system in Kentucky is early in the PBF process, there is concern about how financially sound the individual community colleges within state system will remain. Enrollment coupled with student success and retention will become more critical than ever as state funding will be tied these performance metrics. For this reason, individuals responsible for ensuring student success, such as faculty and staff academic advisors,
must be equipped to support students from the time they enter college through earning their credential. Professional development and training for advisors will be crucial as successful advising is linked to increased persistence for students (Kuh, 2008).

**Academic Advising: A Critical Component of Student Success and Retention**

The area of academic advising is critical for further research as multiple studies (e.g. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Muraskin & Wilner, 2004; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Upcraft, Mullendore, Barefoot, & Fiddler, 1993) indicate that advising is a significant component of student success. Kuh (2008) suggests that academic advisors play an important role in student success as they are most often the first college professionals new students encounter upon entering the college or university and are the individuals with whom students have the most interaction during the first year of college.

The origins of academic advising may be traced to early faculty, tutors, and professors who acted in *loco parentis* as instructors and parental custodians (Frost, 2000). From 1870 through 1970, academic advising was a defined, but unexamined area (Frost, 2000). As institutions of higher education began to offer elective courses, college administrators sought to preserve the classical curriculum (Gordan, et al., 2008). In 1886, President Daniel Goit Gilman at Johns Hopkins University used the term *adviser* to refer to an individual whose role was to assist students concerning academic, social, or personal matters. He viewed the student-adviser relationship as similar to that of a lawyer and client or of a physician and patient. This early view of advising persisted through the 1970s in which a more formalized academic advising model developed as a result of increased access to higher education (Gordan, et al., 2008). Frost (2000) suggested that from the 1970s through the present, advising has existed as a defined and
examined activity in which advisors compare the advising models and practices of their institution to the advising models and practices at other institutions. The first formal comparison occurred in 1977 and led to the formation of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). Crookston (1972) and O’Banion (1972) published a seminal work that sought to define advising (Gordan, et al., 2008).

Practitioners in advising consist of individuals from a wide range of disciplines (Gordan, et al., 2008). Unlike positions within student affairs, colleges do not require a specific degree in order to practice advising. Furthermore, within higher education, individuals serving in multiple capacities may serve as advisors and/or counselors including professional full-time staff advisors, faculty advisors, paraprofessionals, peer advisors, graduate assistants, interns, and institutional administrators such as deans, directors, and coordinators (Robbins, 2012). Depending upon where academic advising is situated within an institution, practitioners may be referred to as advisors or counselors (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006). Robbins (2012) suggests that an individual’s role at the institution may have a significant impact upon the student’s potential advising experience as it shapes the mode of delivery and material being delivered to the student. Robbins asserts that even full-time professional advisors must navigate the balance between investing adequate time with students engaged in meaningful academic advising and the time they must spend participating in institutional requirements such as presenting workshops, serving on committees, and teaching first-year seminar courses. For faculty advisors, for whom advising is part of the required teaching load, this balance may become more difficult to manage (Robbins, 2012). However, despite the requirement for faculty to advise, many institutions do not conduct rigorous evaluation of advising or weigh advising as part of a faculty member’s promotion, merit, or tenure considerations (Robbins, 2012).
Academic advising, whether with a faculty or staff advisor, can and should have a significant, positive impact on a student’s experience in college. While the overarching goal of academic advising—that of ensuring that a student is on the correct academic pathway—has remained consistent, advisors are increasingly expected to employ an intrusive, holistic, and equitable approach to their advising (Show Me The Way, 2018). In a 2011 Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) administration survey, 56% of students indicated that an advisor had helped them to identify their goals and additionally assisted them to make a specific plan for reaching these goals. In 2016, these number increased to 67% (Show Me The Way, 2018). An academic advisor’s role has become more complex, but the institutional challenges have remained the same. These include the high advisor-student ratio, the lack of time advisors are able to spend with individual students, and the complex lives that students lead, especially those students who are attending community colleges (McKlenney, 2013). The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) found in the 2018 National Report that students who have met with an advisor are more engaged, which is a critical component for student success. Advising helps these students to experience early successes in college and to more easily navigate college processes (Show Me The Way, 2018). Kimball and Campbell (2013) suggest that academic advisors should be “flexible, eclectic practitioners able to adapt their strategies in accordance with the needs of their students,” (p. 6). Advisors should be able to adapt a variety of approaches that will serve the individual student being advised. Kimball and Campbell (2013) contend that when advisors only utilize one approach to advising, they may “disregard the diverse ways in which students learn and presume a single, linear, developmental path that is clearly more idealistic than realistic” (p. 6). The students that advisors serve are influenced by social, cultural, and academic backgrounds and interpret their unique experiences in ways that
make sense within their framework. Advisors, in turn, must be able to truly see the student they are working with and understand and respond to student diversity and difference, which requires them to adapt their approaches for the individual student (Drake, 2015). By doing so, advisors are able to help students make meaning of their world and help to cultivate “students’ academic, personal, and career interests” (Drake, 2015, p. 231).

Though academic advisors play an important role in student success, often, inadequate time and resources are allocated for training and professional development. Even for full-time, professional staff advisors, a number of barriers exist including: time to devote to training viewed as a potential expense to the time spent advising and registering students; justification of the need for professional development rather than simple policy updates; space and/or venue for training; and, costs associated with attending professional development opportunities such as regional or national conferences (Buckley, 2016). In a national survey of academic advising in 2011, NACADA found that many institutions are failing to provide academic advisors with the adequate training and professional development necessary to positively impact student success (Voller, 2011). Past president of NACADA, Casey Self, suggests that no matter who is providing academic advising at an institution, the success or failure of advising depends largely upon a solid training and professional development program. Self contends that “anyone assisting students with academic curricula, course registration, relationship building, and general or specific student success services must receive continuous support in the form of training and development” (Self, as cited in Voller, 2011, p. 1). Despite the need for comprehensive advisor training, which Self describes as pre-service training for new advisors and on-going support during a new advisors’ first year as well as continuous professional development through multiple delivery methods for more seasoned advisors, the 2011 National Survey found that
fewer than one half of institutions offer two or more external and two or more internal training or development opportunities. In addition, less than one-half of the survey respondents indicated that they had received pre-service training as new advisors, and almost one-tenth received no training or development (Voller, 2011). When institutions fail to provide adequate training and professional development for academic advisors, current and future students are negatively impacted by advisors who are ill-equipped to help them to persist (Voller, 2011).

Though advising plays a critical role in higher education, there are few unified academic advising theories associated with the field (Creamer, 2000). Hagen and Jordan (2008) contend that while a unified theory of academic advising may not exist, multiple theories form the foundation for successful advising practice. Crookston’s (1972) and O’Banion’s (1972) works with developmental theory have provided the basis of academic advising theory, research, and practice (Robbins, 2010). Other developmental theories including those by Chickering and Reisser (1993), Erikson (1950, 1968), Kohlberg (1964), Perry (1970), and Piaget (1932, 1952), have served as influences on modern academic advising. Educational theory and personality theory have emerged as more recent influences (Robbins, 2010).

While the field of counseling and psychology has emphasized multicultural competence since the 1980s (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barret, & Sparks, 1994), there is minimal research on multicultural competence for educators in postsecondary institutions with the exception of the field of student affairs. Because the theoretical foundations of multicultural competence in the field of student affairs were adapted by Pope and Reynolds (1997) from the field of counseling psychology, there is a greater emphasis for multicultural competence among student affairs staff. Sue et al. (1982) and Pederson (1988) produced the decisive multicultural work in counseling psychology by identifying the tripartite model of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills
as the foundation of multicultural competence (as cited in Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011). Their work was adapted by Pope and Reynolds (1997) who developed *Characteristics of a Multiculturally Competent Student Affairs Practitioner*, a work that outlines 33 specific multicultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills essential for student affairs administrators. Though multicultural competence has been emphasized in the area of student affairs, there are few studies (Ume-Nwagbo, 2011) on multicultural competence levels of postsecondary faculty or academic advisors. Yet when counselors mistakenly believe that discrimination based upon race or ethnicity no longer exists or that we live in a color-blind society (Manglitz, 2003), they may ignore the impact of oppressive social structures on their clients (Cook, Lusk, Miller, Dodier & Salazer, 2012). Sue & Sue (2008) argue that these counselors may also unwillingly perpetuate discriminatory practices toward clients.

Just as student affairs professionals must utilize helping, advising, and counseling skills so must academic advisors and counselors (Reynolds, 1995). Awareness, knowledge, and skills are critical components of work in student affairs and in academic advising. Research regarding the core competencies needed for effective student affairs practitioners include interpersonal communication and helping (Barr, 1993b; CAS, 1999; Komives & Woodard, 1996; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Reynolds (1995) asserts that basic helping and advising knowledge and skills necessary for effective relationships with students, faculty, and staff include micro-counseling skills (active listening, empathy, non-verbal skills, paraphrasing), conflict and crisis management, problem-solving, confrontation, relationship building, consultation, and mentoring. Though most student affairs professionals are not counselors, they may often provide support for students in making important life decisions. A central assumption about helping involves the ethical command of “do no harm,” which instructs counselors or advisors to assist others in a
way that does not allow or create further psychological or physical harm (Pope et al., 2004). In order to ensure that they abide by this ethical creed, counselors and advisors must have an understanding of the issues that clients experience. Counselors and advisors must also recognize their limits in helping offers and refer to the appropriate resources (Pope et al., 2004).

The helping profession competencies involve the attitudes, knowledge, and skills essential for helping individuals or groups with their concerns, issues, or problems (Pope et al., 2004). Historically, the counseling and helping field relied upon the assumption that of universality of the need to treat all people equal (Pedersen, 1987; Sue & Sue, 1999). Counseling theory and practice suggested that as long as individual concerns and issues were addressed, there should be no reason to differentiate for culture (Pope et al., 2004). The universality mindset has also been an issue within the field of student affairs. However, failing to recognize and incorporate cultural differences into theory and practice risks minimizing the worldviews, values, and realities of some groups (Pope et al., 2004). Pope et al. (2004) assert that an understanding of the diverse experiences of others can create insight and openness. Failure to develop this type of multicultural awareness may lead those in the counseling or helping profession to make negative assumptions or come to inappropriate conclusions. They may recommend interventions based upon negative beliefs (Pope et al., 2004). Gordon et al. (2008) argue that it is “crucial for advisors and other campus staff to realize their own level of cultural competency in identifying and addressing the concerns and issues of their advisees” (p. 191). Reynolds (1995b) suggests that multicultural competence creates the foundation for productive, affirming, and ethical work in student affairs. As some of the first college personnel that students encounter, advisors, in particular, should possess knowledge, awareness, and skills in multicultural competence in order to help facilitate student persistence and success.
Advising Approaches

Proactive advising. Habley (1994) stated that academic advising represents the only structured activity on campus which provides every student with an opportunity to receive personalized, intentional conversation and feedback with a faculty or staff member of the college (Drake et al., 2013). Advisors may help to encourage students to persist by showing interest in the individual student’s life and circumstances and by helping them to anticipate challenges and learn problem-solving skills and strategies. Greater impact, especially for students who may have deficiencies in reading or math, may be made when advisors act in proactive rather than reactive capacity (Drake et al., 2013; Upcraft and Kramer, 1995). Glennen (1975) first presented proactive advising as a strategy and termed it intrusive advising. This type of advising utilized best practices from advising and counseling and allowed advisors to present students with important information even before the students themselves realized they needed it (Varney, 2013). Proactive advising involves three approaches taken from advising research (Earl, 1998; Varney, 2013). The first requires that academic advisors are trained to identify students who may need additional support before enrollment ever occurs including those with lower high school grades, performance problems at previous institutions, or those whom identify with having a deficit in a specific academic area. The second approach involves academic advisors identifying potential problems or challenges and offering resources early within the semester. The early identification and outreach has a positive impact and response from students. Finally, academic advisors work with students to encourage a sense of belonging. By teaching success strategies and skills, advisors help students to find their own space at the college.

Cruise (2002) defines proactive advising as being more personal than professional in approach (as cited in Varney, 2013). The strategies of intervention that advisors utilize allow
them to become an active part of the student’s life, which results in the student being motivated to persist. Cruise contends that the development of this type of personal relationship also encourages students to take responsibility for their academic performance. Glennen (1975) suggests that in order to proactively advise students, advisors need updated, adequate information, good insight, and sound judgement. Advisors must be able to look past what is easily observable with a student and ascertain what may be below the surface (Varney, 2013). A student whose body language at first glance makes him appear uninterested, for example, may in reality lack confidence in his ability to be successful in college. A proactive advisor would utilize a technique such as motivational interviewing to determine what resources and approach may best serve the student. The proactive approach to advising may also require that the advisor and student have frequent and/or consistent contact throughout the semester. This type of contact may create opportunities for the development of a close relationship between the advisor and the student, which may, in turn, lead to engagement and persistence (Varney, 2013). Thomas and Minton (2004) emphasize that a proactive advisor does much more than register students for classes, rather, the advisor understands that a student’s well-being affects the student’s academic success. In the proactive model, “advisors express active concern for the welfare of every student, which requires directed advisor actions to reach the student as specific points throughout his or her academic career (Varney, 2013, p. 140). Advising theorists, however, assert that though the proactive model of advising emphasizes the relational, it does not involve hand-holding or parenting (Varney, 2013; Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). Proactive advising seeks to create intentional interactions with students before issues occur and involves an active concern for a student’s academic progress and a willingness to help student explore and utilize
resources that will help them in increasing their success (Varney, 2013). Earl, as cited in Varney (2013), contends that proactive advising shifts the traditional advising paradigm and patterns,

The difficulty with most advising-student contacts is that they take place precisely at the most frantic time for both advisors and students: the registration period. By being proactive at the beginning of a semester, advisors can counsel students during a low advising work cycle rather than just at advising time. (p. 1)

Proactive advising allows for targeted communication with advisees throughout the semester, which allows for the development of meaningful relationships. By establishing intentional times to reach out to students earlier in the semester, advisors can move beyond basic scheduling and registration and can focus on teaching students how to be advised (Varney, 2013). Thomas and Minton (2004) suggest that proactive advisors understand that student retention goes beyond what happens inside of the classroom and is influenced by a number of factors including the student’s personal and social issues.

Proactive advising is especially beneficial for students who meet the following characteristics: an academic deficiency in reading, writing, or math, identify as first-generation college students, or are ethnically or racially underrepresented students. It is estimated that approximately 30% of entering first-year students have academic deficiencies in the areas previously mentioned, and further evidence suggests that academic skills may be declining in secondary schools (Fieldstein & Bush, as cited in Molina & Abelman, 2000; Jones, Slate, Blake, & Holifield, as cited in Molina & Abelman, 2000; Varney, 2013). Molina and Abelman (2000) suggest that in addition to the academic deficiencies that students may experience, navigating the higher education landscape as the first in one’s family to attend college poses challenges. The proactive advisor, then, must be able to anticipate some of the barriers to success that students
may experience and establish a framework for addressing them early on. Students who are traditionally underrepresented may not be equipped with the skills needed to manage the stress and expectations of college, while others may not be aware of the resources available. As a model, proactive advising reaches these students early and connects them with the support they need to move beyond the initial barriers to their success (Varney, 2013). Table 2.1 depicts a rubric to illustrate retention-related issues and the proactive advising strategies used to mitigate challenges developed by Hill (2010, pp. 10-11) as cited in Varney (2013, p. 143).

**Table 2.1**

*Retention Related Issues and Proactive Advising Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention Factor</th>
<th>Proactive Advising Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students need to feel integrated into the program and school.</td>
<td>Find connection points with students that are not exclusively academic and connect them with support services and social organizations and opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogy and instructor training affect retention efforts.</td>
<td>Develop relationships with faculty members and share academic insights with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family obligations may interfere with school priorities.</td>
<td>Encourage students to share relevant information in a safe space, help them manage school and family obligations, and refer them to counseling services if needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need support throughout their academic careers</td>
<td>Provide support from pre-enrollment through graduation; connect with relevant support services as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of interactions between students and the institution exerts influence on student decisions to stay.</td>
<td>Student interaction begins long before the first class meeting; be the link to support services and promote positive student interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students satisfied with the institutional environment are more likely to remain enrolled.</td>
<td>Be vigilant and responsive to students’ needs; anticipate challenges through relationship-based, proactive advising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific student situations and behaviors create barriers to retention.</td>
<td>Use student relationships to help them develop positive habits and strategies to overcome academic, social, and family challenges that may impede their academic performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best practices encourage students to stay in school.</td>
<td>Encourage students to engage in their education and help them to find ways to be a proactive part in their own learning experience.</td>
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</table>
Appreciative advising. Academic advisors have an integral role in student retention and success (Kuh, Kenzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2013). In today’s higher education landscape, advisors must be able to go beyond basic schedule-building and advice about courses. Instead, advisors must engage students in conversation about their educational goals, academic decisions and the potential impact of these decisions while at the same time encouraging students to become more self-aware of the responsibility they hold in their own academic careers (Bloom et al., 2013). One framework that advisors may utilize for ensuring successful advising interactions is appreciative advising (AA), which involves an intentional and collaborative effort to ask positive, open-ended questions designed to optimize a student’s educational experience and assist them in reaching their goals (Bloom et al., 2008).

Bloom et al. (2013) define AA as a “social constructivist framework and approach rooted in appreciative inquiry” (p. 83). Appreciative inquiry (AI) derives from organizational change theory focused on leveraging positivity to mobilize change. Bloom et al. (2013) assert that “the promotion of unconditional positive questioning, the engagement of people at the both the individual and organizational levels, and the systematic approach to action research offer significant implications to the field of academic advising” (p. 84). As a research-based advising model, AA has had a positive impact on academic performance, success, and retention in a number of advising settings (Bloom et al., 2013). The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) first used AA with a cohort of students on academic probation. Upon the integration of AA into retention programming for this population of students, their retention rate improved by 18% with a statistically significant grade point average gain of .73 (p=.03) (Kamphoff et al., 2007). UNCG later expanded the AA model into its first year seminar
programming and saw similar gains. An outcomes-based evaluation of the first-year experience program indicated that those students who participated in the AA model had higher grade point averages and higher retention rates. An additional positive outcome was that students reported higher perceptions of self-knowledge, academic preparedness, social behavior, and confidence (Bloom et al., 2013).

As a framework, AA contains six distinct phases designed to guide academic advisors. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the six phases: disarm, discover, design, deliver, and don’t settle and the advising action associated with each phase (Bloom et al., 2013).

**Table 2.2**

*Appreciative Advising Phases to Guide Academic Advisors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciative Advising Phase</th>
<th>Associated Advising Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Disarm</td>
<td>Advisors make a positive first impression while allaying a student’s fears or suspicions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover</td>
<td>Advisors build rapport and learn about a student’s strengths, skills, and abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Advisors initiate discussions designed to gain feedback about a student’s dreams and goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Advisors assist students in identifying their life and career goals and develop a plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver</td>
<td>Students, with encouragement from advisors, take responsibility for the plans they created in the design phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Settle</td>
<td>Advisors provide encouragement while pushing students to refine their skills and better themselves.</td>
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Bloom et al. (2013) assert that AA is an advising model that provides advisors with a “theory-to-practice” package as it includes concrete suggestions that will enhance the overall quality of advising. Because AA emphasizes a focus on verbal and non-verbal behaviors, communication becomes a central tenant of the model. Given the nature of an advisor’s role
communication may be the primary method by which the advisor delivers his or her services. By engaging in the AA framework, students and advisors can “extend their cognitive understanding beyond that determined by educational settings and experiences” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 88). Beyond the cognitive dimension, the AA framework also emphasizes student development of metacognitive and affective skills and strategies. Though students must have knowledge and comprehension of higher education processes and procedures in order to be successful, AA expands the student’s ability to analyze, apply, create, and evaluate (Bloom et al., 2013).

**Theoretical Framework**

The framework for this study draws upon multiple theories and areas including multicultural competence in counseling and psychology, privilege, implicit social cognition (implicit bias), and student success, retention, and engagement. The study utilizes theories from Pope and Reynolds (1997), Sue et al. (1982), and Pedersen (1988) to understand and interpret the development and assessment of multicultural competence in academic advising professionals. In the fields of psychology and student affairs, multicultural competence has shown a positive correlation. Pope et al., (2004) suggest that self-awareness, which they define as being aware of one’s own biases, assumptions, worldview, and areas of discomfort, is a crucial component of “developing culturally sensitive and affirming helping skills” (p. 86). Additionally, Pope et al. acknowledge the influence of personal experience and exposure to stereotypes and the way these factors may bias information and learning. However, they contend that in order for individuals working within the helping fields, especially those in student affairs and academic advising, must learn how to assess their own multicultural skills and comfort level in order to increase self-awareness. Pope et al. suggest that failure to build a foundation of self-awareness prevents individuals from being successful within their fields.
Multicultural competence for student affairs professionals. As college campuses become increasingly diverse (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002), King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) posit that a common language for defining multicultural competence for student affairs professionals is necessary. Castellanos et al. (2007) contend that as diversity across college campuses nationwide increases, student affairs professionals must integrate culture-specific approaches that include awareness, knowledge, and skills within and between various culture backgrounds and perspectives. Though higher education institutions may emphasize the need for multicultural awareness, often, multicultural practices are limited to individual offices.

Sue, Arrendondo, and McDavis (1992) developed one of the first frameworks of multicultural competence that was defined in terms of awareness, knowledge, and skills. Pope and Reynolds (1997) expanded the work to include student affairs competencies with a component regarding meeting student learning and development needs within the context of cultural diversity (as cited in Castellanos et al., 2007). The inclusion of multicultural competence has been argued as a pivotal direction for growth within the field (Castellanos et al., 2007; McEwen & Roper, 1994; Pope, 1993; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Pope, Reynolds, & Cheatham, 1997).

Within the field of student affairs, multicultural competence has been defined by awareness, knowledge, and skills (Pope & Reynolds, 1997) and its assessment is a vital aspect of providing services to students (Castellanos, et al., 2007). Competencies in awareness include: “a belief that differences are valuable and learning about difference is necessary and rewarding,” “openness to change and belief that change is necessary and positive,” and “awareness of self and the impact it has on others” (Pope & Reynolds, 1997, p. 271). Pope and Reynolds (1997)
define the knowledge competency as knowledge of “diverse cultures and oppressed groups,” “information about how change occurs for individual values and behaviors,” and “knowledge about within-group differences and understanding of multiple identities and multiple oppressions” (p. 271). Finally, they posit that the skills competency involves the “ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues,” “capability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from themselves,” and the “ability to gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from themselves” (p. 271).

King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) conducted a study in which multicultural competence was assessed in diversity educators, student affairs professionals, and college student personnel master’s students. They found that all three groups scored highly in multicultural awareness, but their multicultural knowledge was low. Pope and Reynolds (1997) define multicultural awareness as an ability to be aware of how one’s attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and self-awareness affect the ways they interact with persons from different cultures (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Multicultural knowledge, however, involves having a deeper, more informed understanding of cultures different to one’s own. If an individual has multicultural knowledge, he or she has knowledge about histories, traditions, values, and practices of other cultures (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

One specific area of multicultural competence that has been studied is that of gender (Castellanos et al., 2007). Psychological literature has shown differences in multicultural competence in relation to gender; however, in the field of student affairs, there is a gap in literature regarding differences in gender. Castellanos, et al. (2007) contend that studies investigating socio-race (as defined as White versus racial and ethnic minority) and gender are
needed to assess and ensure that student affairs professionals provide effective, ethical, and competent services for diverse populations of students.

Among its guiding standards and principles, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) emphasizes an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) competency area that includes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to create diverse learning environments (as cited in NASPA, 2012). Of its basic tenants, of which all college student personnel should be able to exhibit, are the ability to: facilitate dialogue effectively among disparate audiences, design culturally relevant and inclusive programs, services, policies and practices, and to recognize the social systems and their influence on people of diverse backgrounds. At an intermediate level, college student personnel should demonstrate the ability to engage in hiring and promotion practices that are fair, inclusive, proactive, and nondiscriminatory and to apply advocacy skills in assisting in the development of a more multiculturally sensitive institution and profession. Finally, at an advanced level, college student personnel should be able to provide leadership in fostering an institutional culture that supports the free and open exchange of ideas and beliefs, identify issues of power and privilege.

The importance of multicultural competence in counseling and psychological settings has been emphasized since the 1980s (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barret, & Sparks, 1994), yet there is minimal research on multicultural competence for educators in postsecondary institutions with the exception of the field of Student Affairs. However, the competencies used to assess the multicultural competence of student affairs professionals may be applicable to post-secondary faculty.

King and Howard-Hamilton (2003) assessed the multicultural experiences and competency levels of graduate students in college student personnel preparation programs,
student affairs staff serving as internship supervisors, and diversity educators. A total of 131 individuals from four campuses in two geographical regions completed a series of assessments regarding multicultural competence. Respondents to the assessment rated themselves low in multicultural knowledge but high in multicultural awareness, and the researchers found significant differences by group and by race.

Castellanos et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative study to empirically assess Pope and Reynolds’ (1997) model of multicultural competence characteristics for student affairs professionals. Within the study, the researchers addressed the internal consistency coefficients in the areas of awareness, knowledge, and skills, which were initially specified by Pope and Reynolds. The researchers reviewed the degree to which student affairs professionals upheld the behaviors and practices within their interactions with students and assessed the differences by gender and socioeconomic class to account for background characteristics of each of the competence domains. The study also explored the interrelationship of the variables and the degree to which multicultural awareness and knowledge predicted skills.

As a result of the study, Castellanos et al. (2007), posit that as higher education responds to the changing student demography, there is a need to provide assessment and evaluations of appropriate interventions. Through self-reported multicultural competence of 100 student affairs professionals, it was revealed that males reported significantly higher multicultural awareness in interactions with students as compared to females. The researchers found that multicultural awareness and knowledge together predicted a larger portion of the variance in multicultural skills; however, the knowledge component was the most predictive of skills. The study found that age, gender, and socio-race were not predictive of one’s skills and that reported multicultural awareness, despite having a positive correlation with skills, only predicted a small percentage of
variance. Student affairs professionals with specific cultural knowledge predicted the highest levels of multicultural skills. The researchers assert that consistent and timely evaluation and assessment of all student affairs professionals is needed to maintain a minimal standard of multicultural competence. They posit that university training and workshops linked to multicultural knowledge based issues that teach specific skills and interventions would better serve the needs of diverse student populations.

**Multicultural competence and academic advising.** The theoretical foundations of multicultural competence in the field of student affairs were adapted by Pope and Reynolds (1997) from the field of counseling psychology; therefore, multicultural competence is an embedded component of student affairs education and work. Because formal training or education for academic advising is not unified, it is difficult to build widespread a multicultural competence framework into the field. Harding (2008) asserts that academic advisors recognize their own intercultural awareness levels and suggests that they be able to identify their levels of awareness. Table 2.3 provides an overview of Harding’s levels of intercultural awareness and the demonstrated skill associated with each level.

**Table 2.3**

*Intercultural Awareness Levels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Intercultural Awareness</th>
<th>Demonstrated Skill(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-awareness</strong></td>
<td>The advisor may recognize difference but does not assign value to difference. Approaches each student as an individual regardless of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness of Difference</strong></td>
<td>The advisor recognizes difference and its value to individuals and his or her relationships with them but lacks formal training to apply this knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance/acknowledgement of difference</td>
<td>The advisor recognizes and accepts that difference is not negative and that he or she is responsible for being culturally competent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding cultural difference</td>
<td>The advisor seeks to increase cultural knowledge through diversity training, workshops, discussions with others, and self-education in an effort to better understand the needs of his or her advisees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation</td>
<td>The advisor is able to apply knowledge and adapt approach to advising to best serve individual needs and communication style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Skillfulness</td>
<td>The advisor has become culturally competent and has the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to not only relate to but to be comfortable with serving a wide range of students. An ongoing process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harding (2008) suggests that once advisors identify where they fall along the continuum, they can acknowledge areas of weakness and engage in the work necessary for strengthening their cultural competence and improving their relationship with individual students. A culturally competent advisor possesses awareness, knowledge, skill, and respect. Being aware involves the advisor’s ability to understand self and others and adjust to an individual student’s needs. The knowledge component of cultural competence, according to Harding (2008), is the advisor’s education regarding difference, cultural competency, theories of integration, racial and ethnic identity, and relationship building. Once an advisor is aware and has acquired knowledge, they must then utilize the skills to adjust and apply what has been learned. Finally, Harding (2008) contends that the most important quality of a culturally competent advisor is respect as “without respect, awareness, knowledge, and skills become just tools and not an ideology that is internalized and applied” (p. 192).

Though students from diverse backgrounds continue to experience unique challenges in both accessing and succeeding in higher education, Castillo Clark and Kalionzes (2008) argue
that students of color and international students require special attention from advisors. They suggest that though advisors should demonstrate an awareness of issues and concerns relative to these student populations, advisors must avoid mega grouping (Anderson, 1995) these students. Castillo Clark and Kalionzes (2008) describe mega grouping as homogenizing the diverse characteristics within one group in areas such as language, achievement, class, etc. Advisors must work to not only be aware of the specific needs of diverse students and to understand how to adequately address issues “thoughtfully and appropriately” (Castillo Clark & Kalionzes, 2008, p. 211), they must also value and affirm the experiences of these students (Castillo Clark & Kalionzes, 2008). Tierney (1993) suggests that colleges and universities must not only celebrate the cultural and personal histories of students of color, they should help students to examine the ways in which society shapes their lives. Because advisors are crucial actors in helping students to navigate through the higher education process, they must educate themselves about the population of students being served as well as the lens through which these students view their experiences and relationships (Castillo Clark & Kalionzes, 2008).

Multicultural competence is critical to the field of academic advising; however, there appears to be a gap in competency training for those working within the field of academic advising in higher education. Though there have been studies regarding K-12 teachers and multicultural competency (Hitchcock, Prater, & Chang, 2009), there have been few studies on multicultural competence for higher education advisors or faculty. This is significant in that many faculty within higher education also assume the role of advisor. A quantitative study conducted by Ume-Nwangbo (2012) sought to measure the cultural competency of nursing faculty in accredited baccalaureate nursing programs in Tennessee and to assess the relationships between culture competence and the percentage of nursing students admitted to and graduated
from these programs. The study revealed a significant positive correlation between nurse educators’ mean cultural competence and the percentage of ethnically and racially underrepresented nursing students who graduated from the participating schools. As a result of the study, Ume-Nwangbo argued that all nursing faculty be required to achieve high levels of cultural competence to help identify and meet the needs of culturally diverse student bodies.

NACADA clearly defines its statement of core values of academic advising and emphasizes that advisors be aware of the individual circumstances and experiences of the students they serve. The first of the six core values involves the advisor’s responsibility to “strengthen the importance, dignity, potential, and unique nature of each individual within the academic setting,” (National Academic Advising Association). NACADA’s seven core principles state that advisors’ work must be guided by the belief that students:

1. Have diverse backgrounds that can include different ethnic, racial, domestic, and international communities, sexual orientations; ages; gender and gender identities; physical, emotional, and psychological abilities; political, religious and educational beliefs.
2. Hold their beliefs and opinions.
3. Are responsible for their own behaviors and the outcome of these behaviors.
4. Can be successful based upon their individual goals and efforts.
5. Have a desire to learn.
6. Have learning needs that vary based upon individual skills, goals, responsibilities, and experiences.
7. Use a variety of techniques and technologies to navigate their world (National Academic Advising Association, 2018). Though NACADA stops short of suggesting that all advisors be culturally competent, the core principles indicate that advisors must be aware of, recognize, and value the differing life experiences students bring to college and adjust their advising approach to accommodate these differences (National Academic Advising Association, 2018).
Privilege. As this study seeks to examine the lived experiences of academic advisors and the ways in which these experiences shape the advisors’ perceptions or and interactions with students, the construct of privilege provides a useful framework. For this study, specifically, the construct of white privilege will serve as an invaluable lens as all of the academic advisors participating are White. McIntosh (1988) defined the concept of White privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day” (p.1). McIntosh describes everyday entitlements that she terms “unearned white privileges” which are normal and universally available to everyone (p. 1). These include being accepted into new neighborhoods, receiving friendly customer service at a store, or being able to speak without being the spokesperson for one’s whole race. Case (2012) suggests that within the United States whiteness remains invisible to the dominant group who are exempt from having to apply race to themselves. Critical White studies seeks to question the assumption that White defines normal (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Wildman & Davis, 1997, and Case, 2012). Case (2012) suggests that becoming aware of one’s unearned advantages may lead to the “self-exploration of subtle behaviors that support racism and provide motivation to take anti-racist action” (p. 79). White privilege must be included within discussions of multicultural competence and advising to better understand the relationship between white advisors and racially and ethnically minority students. Leonardo (2009) suggested that because Whites are not exposed to race discourse early on in life, they do not consider themselves as belonging to a racial group. Lee (2018) suggests that advisors consider racialized experiences and the ways their racial experiences inform their interactions with the world. White advisors must engage in critical reflection to consider their racialized privilege and position and “the ways these qualities either help or harm their relationship with students” (Lee, 2018, p. 81).
Implicit bias. Theories of implicit bias provide a framework through which one may gain a deeper understanding of how implicit stereotypes or attitudes shape his or her perceptions of and subsequent actions toward an individual. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) suggest that long prevailing assumption of human behavior existing under conscious control has shifted toward the idea of individuals as continually evolving actors who are not always consciously aware of their own social perceptions, impressions, or judgments that motivate their actions. Implicit cognition operates under the concept that parts of past experience influence behavior even though an individual may not consciously remember or reflect upon the experience (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). A number of mental processes function implicitly or outside of consciousness (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). These include implicit memory, implicit perception, implicit attitudes, implicit stereotypes, implicit self-esteem, and implicit self-concept. Within this study, the functions of implicit memory and implicit attitude will be utilized as guiding frameworks for exploring the attitudes and perceptions of academic advisors on the students they serve.

Greenwald and Krieger (2006) define implicit memory as the impact a memory or previous experience has on an individual even when that memory is no longer explicit. The experience leaves a “memory record.” Like implicit memory, implicit attitudes remain unidentified to the individual, but traces of the experience produce favorable or unfavorable feelings and attitudes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Within social psychology, attitudes may be defined as evaluations or the tendency to like or dislike some person or object (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). When an attitude is explicit, it operates under the assumption that the individual is consciously aware of his or her favorable or unfavorable opinion and has been able to reflect upon the rationale for the associated feelings. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) utilize the example of an individual voting for or against a candidate based upon the voter’s understanding and
beliefs about the candidate. However, when an individual votes for a candidate without understanding the candidate’s beliefs or values, this indicates that the individual is operating under an implicit attitude. In this sense, “the action that indicates favor or disfavor toward some object but is not understood by the actor as expressing that attitude” (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006, p. 948). Greenwald and Krieger (2006) suggest that implicit and explicit attitudes toward the same object may differ, a phenomena they define as dissociations. These dissociations most often occur when observing attitudes toward marginalized groups including groups defined by race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Academic advisors are not exempt from the implicit assumptions which unconsciously guide how they approach their interactions with students (Castillo Clark & Kalionzes, 2008). Advisors must become aware that their implicit assumptions or biases may not align with those of the students they serve. This misalignment may lead to confusion, misunderstanding, or disagreements during advising.

**Student success, retention, and engagement.** For the purposes of this study, student success, retention, and engagement will be explored in relation to the community college setting. Though the core function of academic advising is as O’Banion stated in 1972, to assist students with choosing a program of study, over the past four decades, the role of the advisor has evolved and expanded. Within the community college setting, specifically, there has been a general shift from access to success (From Access to Success). One result of this shift is that in addition to the responsibilities of outlining course sequences, delivering placement score information, facilitating student organizations, creating personalized academic and career plans, reviewing plans to ensure that progress is made, providing information about and making referrals to resources both within and outside of the college, and assisting with a smooth transfer process,
academic advisors are now expected to build meaningful relationships with every student they advise (Center for Community College Engagement, 2018).

Tinto (1999) suggests that quality advising is an integral component of student success and retention efforts. Additional research (i.e. Glennen, Farren, Vowell, & Black, 1996) suggests that a strong academic advising program can assist higher education institutions in improving overall retention rates and it does so by the broad engagement of areas and services across the college including faculty advisors, student affairs professionals, administrators, financial aid staff, admissions, and recruiters. Allen and Smith (2008) assert that academic advising has a direct impact on the persistence of students and probability of graduation as well as a student’s overall satisfaction with the college experience. Heisserer and Parette (2002) suggest that the development of a quality relationship with significant members of the college community is the only variable that has a direct impact on student persistence. Miller and Murray (2005) contend that academic advisors may be the individuals best suited for forming significant relationships with students and that the use of intrusive advising strategies build resiliency.

Data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2017) suggests that students “who receive more advising—more time with advisors and more in-depth discussions in their sessions—are more engaged” (2017, p. 1). Though the role of advisors has become increasingly complex, advisors continue to face challenges that include high student-to-advisor ratios, a necessity to advise large numbers of students within a short timeframe, and working with students who must balance the competing demands of coursework, employment, and family obligations (Center for Community College Engagement, 2018). Advisors must evolve with the changing landscape of community college enrollment and must develop broader skill sets that include current knowledge about job and labor markets, earning potentials, and
possible careers. Advisors must also make special effort to avoid bias by addressing each student’s challenges and assisting him or her with reaching goals (Center for Community College Engagement, 2018). With the expansion of the role of advisors, opportunities for professional development should be standard; however, decreases in funding at the state level have led to decreased access for advisors to attend professional conferences at the national level.

Data from the 2017 CCSSE, the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), and the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) indicates that advising is considered the most important student service on campus. Students who self-report meeting with an advisor remain more engaged in CCSSE benchmarks including active and collaborative learning, effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and utilizing supports, than their peers who did not meet with an advisor (Center for Community College Engagement, 2018).

Conclusion

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon multiple theories and areas that serve to complement the research questions as well as to provide context for the ways in which these concepts interact within a community college setting. Theories of multicultural competence within student affairs and counseling provide a solid reference point for exploring the ways in which academic advisors navigate relationships with the students they serve. Theories related to bias and privilege provide a lens for the researcher to better understand how the lived experiences of individual academic advisors shape their interactions with their advisees. Finally, current literature related to student success, retention, and engagement allows the researcher to validate the importance of academic advising within higher education, specifically within the community college setting.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) define qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 6). This type of research utilizes a set of interpretive, material practices that assist illuminating the world around us. The qualitative researcher attempts to make sense of and interpret specific phenomena and the resulting sense that individuals make of them (Denzin & Lincon, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that the key objective of qualitative research is an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the participant rather than the researcher. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is inductive. The researcher’s aim is to build concepts, hypotheses, and theories rather than deductively testing a hypothesis. The researcher often chooses to engage in qualitative research in an effort to explore a phenomenon in which there is a lack of existing theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Though qualitative researchers do draw upon discipline-specific theoretical frameworks, information gleaned from the field informs the framework.

In this study, a qualitative approach is utilized in an effort to better understand how academic advisors understand multicultural competence and the ways in which this understanding impacts the advisor/advisee relationship. Currently, within the state of higher education, specifically at the community college level, advisors receive divergent levels of training and professional development. The training and professional development that is occurring often focuses exclusively on policy updates rather than a more holistic approach which would include the critical relational approach to advising. Cultural competence or diversity training appears to be lacking in many, if not most, advising training programs.
The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which academic advisors’ understanding and use of multicultural competence as well as potential hidden or implicit biases influence approaches to the students they advise. The study also seeks to understand how well the advisors understand their experiences with privilege and bias. The following research questions were examined:

1. How do an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?

2. What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?

A qualitative approach is necessary for this study as quantitative methods would not adequately address the underlying theories of privilege, bias, and race that inform an advisor’s understanding of multicultural competence and the ways it shapes their interactions with students. The voices of the participants provide a rich description of the phenomenon in a way that numbers simply cannot. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest that qualitative data have a quality of “undeniability” and that “words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, and meaningful flavor that often proves more meaningful to a reader—another researcher, a policymaker, or a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers” (p. 4).

**Theoretical Framework**

Maxwell (2013) defines a theoretical framework as the conception or model of “what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why—a tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating” (p. 39). This theory informs the design of the research and assists the researcher in assessing and refining goals, developing realistic and relevant research questions, selecting appropriate methods, and identifying potential threats of
validity to conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). Kincheloe and Berry (2004; Kencheloe et al., 2011) further developed the concept, which “challenges the idea of paradigms as logically consistent systems of thought on which research practices are based” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43). Within this study, various theories are utilized to form a paradigm through which the study could be scaffolded and built.

This study is informed by an epistemological constructivist perspective, which posits that individuals construct their own understanding of the world; therefore, these constructions cannot be claimed as absolute truth (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell contends that individual perceptions and beliefs are shaped by assumptions, prior experiences and by everyday reality. In this perspective, all theories, models, and conclusions are simplified attempts to grasp complex realities. For this reason, Maxwell suggests four constructs which may be utilized when creating a conceptual framework: (a) experiential knowledge; (b) prior theory and research; (c) pilot and exploratory research; and (d) thought experiments. Given the subject matter of this study, I relied heavily on experiential knowledge and its impact on myself as the researcher, which will be discussed at length in my Reflexivity Statement. Within the context of the study, I utilized experiential knowledge as it relates to advising policies and practices. Though each individual institution utilizes its own documents and materials for advising, given the nature of my current role and history within higher education and advising, I was able to connect with the individual advisors as a result of our shared experiences within our profession.

Because this study is informed by an epistemological constructivist perspective, the framework draws upon multiple theories and areas including multicultural competence, privilege, implicit social cognition (implicit bias), and student success, retention, and engagement. The theoretical framework for this study relies upon the concept of the advisor as
an individual whose lived experiences inform their work and practice with students. The concepts of privilege, implicit bias, and multicultural competence all intersect to inform the advisor’s advising practices. This intersection of experiences leads to culturally competent advising practices, including the ability to build meaningful relationships, advise students toward independence, and respond to individual student needs. Additionally, the advisor’s lived experiences and beliefs are continually influenced by their interactions with the students they advise; therefore, their level of cultural competence and awareness should be fluid. Figure 3.1 provides the conceptual framework for the study. The circles in the figure represent the advisor and the student. The academic advisor is influenced by lived experiences, privilege, implicit bias, and level of cultural competence. The students that an advisor interacts with each bring their own lived experiences, identities, and stories with them to every advising session. The advisor and the student may find common ground through shared experiences. The advisor or practitioner is influenced by their own lived experiences, privileges, biases, and cultural competence levels but they are also influenced by the students they serve. This marriage or blending of lived experience influences the advisor and leads to outcomes including: the advisor’s relationship with students, the recommendations the advisor makes, the advising practice chosen (prescriptive versus developmental, proactive, or appreciative), and how the advisor’s level of multicultural competence is impacted. The process of advising is iterative in that with each student interaction, the advisor may reflect on the experience and revise their approach and practices.
Multicultural Competence

Theories of multicultural competence, specifically within the fields of student affairs and counseling, provide a vehicle for examining the ways in which academic advisors acknowledge their own beliefs about difference. Pope and Reynolds (1997) defined multicultural competence within student affairs as the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for providing services to students. To demonstrate an awareness of multicultural competence, the practitioner must not only believe that differences are valuable but must also find learning about difference necessary and rewarding. A practitioner demonstrating knowledge of multicultural competence must be educated about diverse cultures and marginalized groups and should acknowledge within-group
differences and understand the concept of multiple identities and multiple oppressions. Finally, a practitioner demonstrating multicultural competence skill must be able and willing to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from themselves (Pope & Reynolds, 1997).

**Privilege**

This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of advisors as well as their overall awareness, knowledge, and skills in multicultural competence and the ways in which these shape the advisor-student interaction. The construct of White privilege will provide a useful lens as the majority of the academic advisors participating within this study are White. White privilege, as defined by McIntosh (1988), is defined as the invisible unearned assets in which a White individual may count on utilizing each day. Within the United States, whiteness remains invisible to the dominant group as these individuals do not have to apply constructs of race to themselves (Case, 2012).

**Implicit Social Cognition (Implicit Bias)**

Theories of implicit bias provide a solid framework for gaining a rich understanding of how implicit stereotypes or attitudes shape an advisor’s perceptions of and subsequent actions toward an individual. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) suggest that parts of an individual’s past experiences influence their behavior even though the individual may not consciously remember or reflect upon the experience. Implicit memory and implicit attitude will be utilized as a guiding framework for exploring the attitudes and perceptions of advisors toward the students they serve. Implicit assumptions from academic advisors may negatively impact the student experience.
Student Success, Retention, and Engagement in Relation to Advising

For the purpose of this study, student success, retention, and engagement are explored in relation to the community college setting. The role of the academic advisor has evolved from simply assisting students with academic planning to a more holistic approach in which they are expected to outline course sequences, interpret placement scores, creating personalized academic and career plans, reviewing plans to ensure that progress is made, and making referrals to academic and non-academic resources. Tinto (1999) suggests that high-quality advising is a critical component of college student success and retention efforts. Allen and Smith (2008) echo Tinto’s assertion but also contend that, when done well, academic advising has a direct impact on a student’s overall satisfaction with the college experience. In the most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2017), data revealed that students who reported meeting with an academic advisor remained engaged in CCSSE benchmarks including in active and collaborative learning, effort, student-faculty interaction, and utilization of campus resources.

Case Study Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define qualitative case study as an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). Stake (2006) defines a case as something special, “a noun, a thing, an entity” (p. 1). Yin (2014) defines a case in terms of process and asserts that a case study “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 6). Yin suggests that case study lends itself well to situations in which a phenomenon’s variables may not be separated from their context. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) describe the case as “the phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 28). Within this study the bounded case is academic advising at Silver Springs
Community College (SSCC). As a phenomenon, academic advising at a community college is of particular interest for multiple reasons. Within the field of advising, there is variance in the quantity and quality of training and professional development being provided. Though the National Association of Academic Advising (NACADA) has established competencies for professional academic advising, which includes a commitment toward diversity and multicultural competence, it remains unclear as to the extent of which individual advising centers align training and professional development to this competency.

**Participant and Participant Selection**

**Context.** Participants were chosen from SSCC, which is part of a large state community college system in the Southeastern portion of the United States. SSCC was selected as it is a medium-sized institution with an enrollment of approximately 4,450 students. The racial and ethnic makeup is: seven point four percent African American, three point five percent Hispanic, two point three percent two or more races, and 83.4 % White. SSCC was chosen due to its advising structure which involves a centralized advising center and a staff of professional advisors as well as a full-time director of advising.

**Participant selection.** Unlike quantitative research, which primarily utilizes random sampling, qualitative research often relies on purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) suggests that there are five goals of purposeful sampling. These include: 1. representativeness or typicality of settings, 2. capturing adequate heterogeneity in the population, 3. deliberate selection of individuals or cases, 4. to establish particular comparisons which illuminate reasons for differences between settings or individuals, and 5. selection of groups or participants with whom to establish productive relationships. Creswell (2013) suggests that the qualitative researcher take into consideration three factors when using purposeful sampling and
that these considerations will vary depending upon the qualitative approach. Creswell states that
the researcher must decide (a) whom to select as participants and sites for the study; (b) the
specific type of sampling strategy; and (c) size of the sample to be studied. According to
Creswell (2013), in purposeful sampling, the researcher selects participants and sites “because
they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon
in the study” (p. 156). Purposeful sampling was utilized for this study to ensure representation of
staff and faculty advisors. Creswell (2013) suggests that the ideal sample size for case study
research is no more than four or five individuals in a single study. Within college and university
settings, advising may be provided by professional staff advisors or counselors or by faculty as
part of their teaching responsibilities. Four advisors were identified as participants for this study.
Three of the advisor participants at SSCC are full-time staff advisors whose primary job
responsibilities involve academic advising for students. The fourth advisor is a full-time Human
Services faculty member who advises students within her program as well as students
interested in transferring to a four-year institution to complete a degree in Social Work. The
advisors were intentionally selected as they represented a diversity of experiences in regard to
their role within advising at SSCC. The inclusion of the faculty advisor provides additional
perspective and richness to the data.

**Participant demographics.** This research study consisted of a single bounded case—
academic advising at a mid-sized public community college (SSCC)—in the Southeastern region
of the United States. The demographics of SSCC are comparable to other two-year colleges
within the region with approximately 13.2% of its student population identifying as
underrepresented minority. Four participants were included within the study, and each was
engaged in providing academic advising to students. The participants ranged in age from their
late twenties to their sixties. Three were full-time professional staff academic advisors, and the fourth was a full-time faculty instructor who has advising responsibilities as a significant part of her responsibilities. Participant information is included in the Table 3.1. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants and to the college.

**Table 3.1 Demographics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years in Advising</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Participation in Formal Diversity Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Flaherty</td>
<td>Academic Advisor</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Pursuing Master’s Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Gibson</td>
<td>Professional Academic Advisor</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Montgomery</td>
<td>Director of Transfer Services and Advising</td>
<td>Two years, six months</td>
<td>Pursuing a Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Richards</td>
<td>Assistant Professor/Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Pursuing a Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant descriptions.** Demographic information and pseudonyms are presented in Table 3.1. Participant overviews with an emphasis on thick description are provided below and will serve as a framework for better understanding the perspective each participant brings to the study. First, a description of the participant’s educational and career pathway to advising is provided followed by his or her definition of diversity and privilege.

**Ms. Carol Flaherty. Professional academic advisor.** Ms. Flaherty is a full-time, professional staff advisor who works primarily with students pursuing technical program majors
including Advanced Manufacturing, Welding, and Automotive Technology. She has recently moved from advising students pursuing majors within the College of Arts and Sciences to advising for the technical programs and acknowledges that she has faced a learning curve. She is currently pursuing her Master’s Degree in Public Administration, but explained that she began her educational pathway as a student at SSCC. She is proud of being a graduate of SSCC and shares this with many of the students she advises. While she does not have formal education in the topics of diversity, cultural competence, privilege, and bias, she believes that these concepts are important to her work within the field of advising.

**Mr. Declan Montgomery. Director of Transfer Advising.** Mr. Montgomery is a full-time, professional staff advisor and the Director of Transfer Advising. He works primarily with students who are interested in transferring to public and private four-year institutions. Because of his position, he balances serving as an advisor with other administrative tasks such as facilitating partnerships with the four-year colleges and universities. He followed a traditional educational pathway having gone to a four-year public university after high school and then immediately to graduate school. He acknowledged that he has always had an interest in the concepts of diversity, bias, and privilege and that he has participated in formalized training and professional development. He began his professional career in higher education teaching English at a four-year university before transitioning to the community college. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree.

**Ms. Claire Gibson. Professional staff advisor.** Ms. Gibson is a full-time professional staff advisor who primarily works with students interested in pursuing allied health and nursing programs. The majority of the students she advises are in their first or second semesters at SSCC, and she admits that a significant number of them will not make it into their first choice
of program. She views her role as the gatekeeper of sorts and she tries to help steer students into pathways she believes will be manageable for them. Ms. Gibson followed a different pathway to higher education having spent much of her career in project management within a corporate setting. She moved to higher education as a result of convenience and a desire for a slower-paced, less stressful work environment. She acknowledged that she does not have formal training in the topics of diversity, cultural competence, privilege, and bias. However, during her tenure in management within the corporate settings, she had significant interactions with colleagues from around the world.

*Ms. Macy Richards. Associate Professor of Human Services.* Ms. Richards is a full-time faculty member and associate professor within the Human Services department at SSCC. As part of her responsibilities at the college, she has a large caseload of students she advises. The majority of these students are interested in pursuing a Social Work degree at four-year institutions. Ms. Richards meets with students upon completion of their first semester and after they have met with Ms. Gibson. Ms. Richards followed a traditional educational pathway and transitioned to a bachelor’s program immediately after graduating from high school. She then went on to earn a master’s degree and is currently in a doctoral program. She came to SSCC upon the recommendation of a family member and discloses that she loves her position as an instructor. Because of the nature of her current role, she believes that she is very knowledgeable about the concepts of diversity, cultural competence, privilege, and bias. She has participated in a number of trainings and incorporates these topics within the classes she teaches at the college.

**Reflexivity & Statement as a Researcher**

According to Miles et al. (2014), qualitative researchers should position themselves within
their writing. The concept of reflexivity involves the writer being conscious of their biases, values, and experiences. A researcher’s reflexivity, therefore, is integral to sound qualitative research (Wolcott, 2010).

**Background.** My knowledge of academic advising and higher education comes from my own experiences working in advising at the community college-level. Before I began working in academic advising, I did not understand the complex role advising plays within the college environment. Though I had a background in higher education through my experience teaching writing and literature at a four-year university, I had no experience within the realm of academic advising. I also had limited experience working in a two-year college setting. At most, I had taught two semesters of first-year English at a small technical school. When I began working in the academic advising office, I was thrown in with little training. I was told to study the college catalog and was allowed to shadow a full-time allied health and nursing advisor for one day. The next day, I was sent out on my own to assist students in fulfilling their academic goals.

Given that the college was in peak enrollment season, I understood the need for the quick, trial-by-fire approach to training. However, I know that I was not an excellent advisor during those first few months on the job. What I did learn, I gleaned from listening to other advisor-student conversations. Sometimes, the other advisors were ill or short-tempered with students. I would hear comments like “You’re in college now. You should know these things.” Other advisors seemed to sway to the opposite side, providing students with excess information and keeping the students in their offices for long periods of time. As time went on, I developed my own style of advising by taking what I had learned from my colleagues and adapting to my own style. Because my educational experience was traditional in that I graduated from high school and went immediately to my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I used my own college
experience to inform my advising. This approach did not always align with the needs of the students I was serving, many of whom were first-generation college students. It was not until I moved positions from academic advisor to developmental advising counselor that I really began to understand or appreciate the critical role of the academic advisor. I learned that the style I had adapted was not the best style for the demographic of students I was working with. Though I had taken on more of an administrative role and was responsible for faculty advisor training and development, I was also responsible for advising all students who had tested into remedial reading courses at the college. Based upon my initial evaluations, I realized that perhaps I was rushing students. I began to understand that advising was much more than simple schedule-building and that in order to connect with my students, I had to take time and become a better listener. I also had to learn not to make assumptions about the students I was advising. Over the next few years as developmental advising counselor, I began to research advising best practices. I became involved in NACADA and infused best practices into my advising and into the training materials for the faculty advising under my supervision. For the past three years, I have served as the Director of Advising and Assessment, and I have continued to develop training and professional development materials for faculty and staff advisors across the college. I believe that advising is a critical component to student success and is especially important for students at the community college level. However, advising has mixed connotations and practices depending upon the institution. My time in advising has allowed me to see that advisors come in all forms. While some academic advisors have a background in college student personnel or higher education, many individuals working in advising have either fallen into the position or have, in some cases, been reassigned from other areas in a college when they were not performing well. I have witnessed advisors who are excellent, but I have also
seen those who do not listen or treat students with the respect they deserve. As I began to reflect upon the different types of individuals in advising, and I listened to some of the negative comments from faculty and staff inside and outside of the classroom, I realized that there was a disconnect between faculty and staff and students. During one all faculty and staff professional development day, a group of college leaders were conducting a college-wide book talk about the challenges our students encounter in large part due to socioeconomic status. The general sentiment from faculty and staff was negative. Students at the college “should know better.” How could we expected to work with such “low-performing” students? Perhaps we just needed “better students.” From these conversations, I began to wonder how we could ever expect our students to succeed with these types of attitudes, and I became curious about how faculty and staff formed these opinions and assumptions about our students.

**Bias.** Maxwell (2013) and Yin (2014) state that bias is present in all research, and therefore, must be addressed. I entered into this research topic with my own assumptions and biases related to my experiences in higher education and academic advising. My educational background in English literature and women’s and gender studies has allowed me to spend time studying topics such as inclusion, multicultural competence, and intersectionality. I have always had an interest in studying other cultures and in having frank, open, and honest conversations about topics such as race and bias. Because of this, I sometimes incorrectly assume that others are also interested and willing to engage in this type of discourse, which may prove to be uncomfortable. I began the study with the assumption that the advisors participating would have varying levels of experience in discussing topics such as race and privilege and that their understanding and use of multicultural competence in advising would vary. Though I do engage in reflection regarding my own biases, I had to engage reflection regarding my reactions
to the participants within this study. I had to ensure that I was constantly aware of my own privilege as a white, middle-class woman working in higher education administration.

**Validity.** Maxwell (2013) suggests that a number of strategies should be utilized in order to account for researcher bias within qualitative studies. In an effort to prevent bias within my study, I used rich data, respondent validation, or member checking, and triangulation. By conducting intensive interviews with my participants, I gained “a full and revealing picture” of the issue (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Observations of participants during academic advising sessions produced rich data as I took detailed, descriptive notes. Becker (1970) suggests that the rich data from observations,

Counter the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias by making it difficult for respondents to produce data that uniformly support a mistaken conclusion, just as they make it difficult for the observer to restrict his observations so that he sees only what supports his prejudices and expectations. (p. 53)

Respondent Validation, or member-checking, involves the systematic solicitation of feedback regarding the researcher’s data and conclusions from the study’s participants. Maxwell (2013) suggests that member-checking is the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and misunderstandings of what you observed” (p. 127). Finally, through triangulation, which Creswell (2013) defines as the process of corroborating evidence from multiple sources (interviews, observations, and artifacts), I provided validity for my study. Maxwell (2013) suggests that the qualitative researcher should address potential sources of error or bias that
might exist within a study and to identify specific ways in which to address this bias. The use of rich data from advisor interviews and observations as well as member-checking allowed for thorough data analysis.

Data Collection

The data collection for this case study was conducted in three phases, which began in August 2018 and continued through October 2018. Four individuals participated in all three phases. The first phase of the study involved an informational interview that was sent through a Survey Monkey link through email. The second phase of data collection was an in-person semi-structured interview (1-1.5 hours) followed by an observation of an advising session. The third, and final phase, was the solicitation of an artifact in the form of a written response to a formal discussion prompt. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the research timeline and data collection.

Table 3.2 Data Collection with Phase and Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Type</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Total Time in Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational Survey</td>
<td>1 questionnaire with open ended questions x 4 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>1-2 hours x 4 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1-2 hours x 4 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact Solicitation</td>
<td>15-20 minutes x 4 participants</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour and 30 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Review</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>16 hours</td>
<td>3 hours, 30 minutes</td>
<td><strong>20 hours, 30 minutes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews. Conducting interviews is a critical component of case study evidence (Yin, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that interviewing is necessary when the researcher
cannot readily observe behavior, feelings, or how participants interpret the world around them. Patton (2015) explains that “the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 426). An initial Informational Interview summary was sent via email to the study participants. This questionnaire was designed to solicit demographic information about the participant and to establish a baseline reference point for the individual advisor’s familiarity with the concepts discussed within the study. The interviews were conducted in the advisor’s offices, which allowed for rich description of data regarding personal space. Semi-structured interview questions were utilized to ensure consistency but also allowed for fluidity. The semi-structured interview questions were reviewed by three faculty members with expertise in the areas of advising, student development, cultural competence, and qualitative methodology. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Reflexive journaling was utilized after the completion of each interview. Journaling helped with organization of emergent themes and mitigate personal bias.

**Informal observations.** Stake (2006, p. 4) suggests that observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research and allows for meaningful data collection. Physical settings, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and the researcher’s own behavior should all be noted during the observation. For the purposes of this study, I acted as the nonparticipant/observer as participant. Creswell (2013) defines the researcher as “an outsider of the group under study, watching and taking field notes from a distance” (p. 167). After each interview, I observed the participant during an advising session. Three of the observations were conducted in the advisors’ offices during individual student advising appointments. Two additional observations occurred during group advising sessions in the classroom. Reflexive
journaling was completed after each observation, which allowed for documentation of emergent themes and the mitigation of personal biases.

**Documents and artifacts.** Document review involves the collection of artifacts and documents related to the case being studied (Miles, et al, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). The participants were asked to complete the Project Implicit IAT on race and one other indicator of their choice. They were asked to respond to three written discussion questions, which were designed to prompt further reflection about privilege and implicit bias. The reflective discussion document provided additional depth of understanding about concepts specifically related to the first research question.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis occurred within three phases with two cycles of coding and aligned with the methods of Miles, et al., (2014). The first phase or cycle included deductive and inductive analysis and occurred during data collection. Initial deductive themes were generated and then further substantiated through inductive analysis and first cycle coding. A second cycle of coding was conducting during phase one and data collection during which time further codes were produced. I used descriptive coding and assigned a word or short phrase to data points. Phase two of data analysis occurred during and after data collection. The initial 83 codes were reduced into six clusters. Clustering was an emergent process that allowed for triangulation across data points (informational survey, interviews, observations, and documents collected). Member-checking was conducted during phase two to solicit feedback from the initial clusters. Phase three began with the six clusters which were further reduced and developed into seven themes connected to the research questions. Member-checking was conducted again to solicit
additional feedback regarding the final seven themes. Table 3.3 depicts the three phases and two cycle coding process.

**Table 3.3 Analysis and Cycles of Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase one, first cycle</strong></td>
<td>Phase two began with the process of reducing the 83 codes into six clusters. Clustering was an emergent process was used that focused on across participant findings based on prevalence of codes. These clusters were triangulated across data points (survey, interviews, observations, and collected documents). Member checking occurs with each participant to solicit feedback around the initial six clusters.</td>
<td>Phase three began with the six clusters were further reduced and developed into 7 themes, which were connected to each research question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase one began with deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive themes were generated based my experience as an advisor. These themes were substantiated through inductive analysis through first cycle coding. First cycle coding occurred via pencil and paper coding of all data collected— informational survey, in-person interviews, observations, and document analysis. The first cycle of coding yielded 74 codes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>RQ1. How do advisors lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase one, second cycle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Belief and bias shape all aspects of all advisors work with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second cycle coding was performed using a table within word and electronically coding all data, while incorporating and reducing codes. Through second cycle coding and reduction 83 codes were produced.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal awareness of privilege strengthens the advising experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lived experiences shape advisors and their work in advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RQ2: What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Building relationships is necessary for culturally competent advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Advising students toward independence with support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Treating each student as an individual with different needs and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Desire for continuing education, transparency,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and dialogue around cultural competence

Member checking with participants took place to solicit additional feedback on final themes.

Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) established constructs for qualitative researchers to utilize to plan for and ensure that a study is trustworthy. These constructs include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). A study may be deemed credible, and therefore trustworthy, when its findings align with reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The construct of transferability emphasizes the criteria and boundaries of the case or cases presented and the overlap of the participants outside of the cases (Stake, 2006). Dependability is established when a study’s findings may be replicated with similar cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, confirmability involves the researcher utilizing reflective practices to reduce bias and ensure that the study’s findings authentically align with the experiences and content from the participants (Shenton, 2004). Table 3.4 provides a table illustrating how this study addresses each of Guba’s (1981) constructs of trustworthiness.

Table 3.4 Analysis Consideration for Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods and Analysis Considerations</th>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Transferability</th>
<th>Dependability</th>
<th>Confirmability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member checking with participants</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation of cases and rich data</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thick description is used to present cases and findings & X & X &  
Detailed demographic of each participant and individual narratives for single cases & X & X &  
Reflective memoing throughout the data collection and analysis process to capture my process and thoughts & X & X & X &  
Ongoing review of limitations of the study was conducted throughout the data collection process & X & X &  
Process map was used to ensure consistent process (Appendix C) & X & X & X &  
Diversity of type of data collected & X & X &  

Case study research should incorporate multiple methods for ensuring validity or credibility (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al. 2014). Within this study, I incorporated member-checking, rich data, and triangulation to create credibility. Member checking, which involves providing the study participants with the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy, was conducted during phase one and phase two of data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Rich data (Maxwell, 2013) were collected through digital recordings of all interviews, detailed descriptions of observations and field notes, and analytic memos. All interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and triangulated to provide a cohesive illustration of emerging themes. Transferability was created through the use of detailed and thick description for each of the participants within the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured dependability through the use of thick description (Stake, 2006) and through the inclusion of the documents needed to replicate the study, including the study invitation, consent form, and coding process. Finally, the study exhibits confirmability through the use of rich data, reflective memoing throughout the data collection and analysis.
process, and the creation of a process map (Appendix C) to clearly articulate the steps I used to arrive at my findings.

Despite following the constructs for trustworthiness from Lincoln and Guba (1985), threats to trustworthiness arise in every study. The two significant threats within this study were saturation and researcher bias. Access to participants was a threat and limitation of the study. Saturation was achieved (Walker, 2012) through emphasis on the depth of the data collected and the use of multiple stages of collection and analysis. Due to the nature of their positions, academic advisors have varying amounts of time available for interviews, observations, and writing prompts, especially during times of peak enrollment. Though I reached out to all of the advisors at SCC, five initially responded, and four actually participated. Several potential participants responded that they did not have the time necessary for thoughtful responses or interviews. In order to mitigate this limitation, I included multiple methods of data and followed up with participants after the initial interview via phone for further feedback regarding emerging themes.

Researcher bias is also a threat to trustworthiness. Because I work within the field of advising and I am passionate about the research concepts of privilege and bias, I brought my assumptions and biases into the study. Two biases emerged early on in the study, after my initial observation and interviews, and I accounted for them throughout data collection, analysis, and the coding process. After each observation and interview, I engaged in reflexive memoing during which time I addressed my bias. I was intentional about asking participants broad questions with follow-up questions for clarification. I also utilized member checking to ensure that my bias did not influence the interview and observation transcripts.
Conclusion

This chapter described the methods used in this case study examining how an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform their advising practices. A rationale for the usage of qualitative research for this study was provided as was a theoretical framework that connected theories of advising and student success, multicultural competence for student affairs practitioners, privilege, and implicit bias. An in-depth description of my data collection and analysis was discussed as were methods for ensuring trustworthiness within the study. Chapter four provides an overview and in-depth presentation of the finding of this study.
Chapter Four: Lived Experiences and Cultural Competence within Advising Practice

The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which an academic advisor’s lived experience and awareness of privilege and bias inform their advising practices. The study also seeks to explore the strategies advisors use to engage in culturally competent advising practices with students from different identity groups. The following research questions were examined:

1. How do an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?
2. What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?

Chapter four presents an explanation of the themes that emerged from data collected through an informational survey, semi-structured interviews, observations of individual and group advising sessions, and a discussion prompt in response to results from the Implicit Bias Indicator. Seven themes presented are:

1. Advisor beliefs and bias shape all aspects of their work with students.
2. Awareness of privilege positively impacts the advising experience.
3. Lived experiences shape advisors and their work in advising.
4. Relationship building is necessary for culturally competent advising.
5. Advising students toward independence with support.
6. Treating each student as an individual with different needs and experience.
7. Desire for continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence.

The perceptions of four academic advisors (three full-time and one faculty member who advises
a caseload of students) are included through the use of vignettes which are explicated with thick description.

Research question one is addressed through the three themes: (a) belief and bias shape all aspects of work with students; (b) awareness of privilege positively impacts the advising experience; and (c) lived experiences shape advisors and their work in advising. Research question two is addressed through three themes: (a) building relationships is necessary for culturally competent advising; (b) advising students for independence with support; and (c) treating each student as an individual with different needs and experiences. One of the findings, the desire for continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence, informs both of the research questions. The findings below are a descriptive analysis of the seven themes. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and how these themes interact and connect to one another.

**Figure 4.1. Presentation of Case Themes.**
An Overview of Themes as they Relate to Research Questions

Lived Experience, Beliefs and Bias, and Privilege as Influencers on Advising Practices

The first research question explores the ways in which an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases informs their advising practices. Each of the advisors within the study shared stories that helped to illustrate their understanding of the concepts of privilege, bias, and diversity. Within these stories, themes emerged that inform the research question. These include: beliefs and bias shape all aspects of an advisor’s work with their students, personal awareness of privilege positively impacts the advising experience, and lived experiences shape advisors and their work in advising. Each of the advisors spoke to their own beliefs about the factors that
determine student success, and through their discussion, biases emerged. Though two of the advisors in the study use formalized language to describe and label their thoughts and actions as bias, the other advisors in the study exhibit varying levels of knowledge. The advisors may acknowledge their actions as being potentially biased, but they do not always formally acknowledge this bias. Each of the advisors within the study acknowledged the necessity of approaching each student as an individual with different needs and goals. However, the way that these advisors approach the students differs depending upon their lived experiences. From directing students to specific pathways based upon specific assumptions to connecting students to the appropriate academic and non-academic resources, these lived experiences shape every aspect of the advisor/advisee interaction.

**Strategies for Informing a Culturally Competent Advising Experience**

The second research question addresses the ways in which advisors use their awareness, knowledge, and skills in cultural competence to inform the advising experience. Each of the four advisors participating in this study emphasized the importance of building and nourishing relationships and rapport with the students they advise. The advisors did so through a variety of strategies including through their office space set-up, employing active listening strategies, asking intentional questions, and avoiding the “one size fits all” approach when seeing students. All four of the advisors in the study expressed the desire to move students toward self-sufficiency and independence. However, three of the four also discussed the delicate balance between “hand-holding” and providing support. The advisor’s perspective about how much support a student needs versus when to encourage independence, differed based upon the advisor’s own experiences. By building relationships with students and providing support, the advisors within the study were able to connect students with the appropriate academic and non-
academic resources. Each of the advisors in the study demonstrated knowledge about the competing demands that students face as well as the skills necessary to connect students to the resources they need to be successful. Through interviews and observations, the advisors described changes within their own mindsets as a result of their work with students and hearing student stories.

**Continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence**

An additional theme that emerged from the study is continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence. This theme has a tangible relationship with both research questions. Each of the advisors within the study expressed the desire for ongoing education regarding topics such as bias and privilege. Ms. Gibson and Ms. Flaherty provided specific strategies for making these concepts more transparent on campus. Other advisors shared their thoughts about who on campus is currently involved in the conversation around privilege, bias, and diversity and a desire for others to become active within the conversation. Ms. Richards initially suggested that since she is already involved in work with privilege and bias within the courses she teaches that it was not necessarily her place to be responsible for the work of promoting. However, upon completion of the Implicit Bias Indicator, she expressed that she too would need to remain aware of privilege and bias. This desire for continuing education, transparency, and dialogue runs through each of the themes and speaks to the need for the study.

**Theme One: Beliefs and Bias Shape all Aspects of an Advisor’s Work with Students**

Each of the four advisors within this study spoke to ways in which their own beliefs and assumptions impacted their advising interactions with students. Advising, as a field, requires the individual advisor to gain access to information from the student, process (internally) the information received, and then deliver recommendations. By nature of the position, the advisor
relies upon personal experiences as well as the experiences of other students they have advised. Personal beliefs and biases impact the ways in which the advisors talk with the students, ask questions, process information, and make recommendations. Each of the advisors in the study described characteristics of a successful Silver Springs Community College (SSCC) student. The advisors’ responses ranged from an emphasis on academic ability to intrinsic motivation to a willingness to ask for help. Advisor responses differed based upon the advisor’s experience and the type of advising for which they were engaged (transfer, allied health, or technical program).

Ms. Richards, an advisor for students interested in human services and social work programs, suggested that a successful student has multiple facets. In addition to motivation and a desire to achieve, she stated:

"I think there needs to be some level of academic ability. That doesn’t always mean a high I.Q. or doing well in school in the past. But there needs to be some form of a foundation that I can work with. I think that it can be really difficult if there’s not."

(interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Richards also spoke to the outside influences that impact students, especially those at the community college. She suggested that time management was a contributing factor to student success:

"Time management is huge and I know that’s kind of a cookie cutter answer, but to be honest, with our students, they’re juggling work and family obligations, and kids, the majority of traditional college students may not have so they really have to be good time managers. That can make or break a student in this field."

(interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Richards had a traditional college experience in that she matriculated from high school to a four-year college and then on to graduate school. Despite having a different college experience
than many of her students, Ms. Richards disclosed that her conversations with students both inside the classroom as instructor and outside of the classroom as an advisor have provided her with a greater awareness of the demands on student time. She acknowledged that she has had to have difficult conversations with students, especially when it seems that they will not be successful within the social work program. She stated:

I do try to have honest conversations with students, but in this field, it can be really awkward because a lot of people are attracted to this field because of issues they have gone through in the past. Sometimes, they are really good students, but I don’t think that they are going to be a good fit because of all of that. I can kind of relate to that but at the same time that’s very hard to say because there’s no like academic evidence to prove that they’re not going to do well. So, it’s a lot of times, a process that works itself out.

(interview, October 3, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery’s description of student success aligns with Ms. Richard’s description in multiple ways. Like Ms. Richards, Mr. Montgomery primarily advises students who plan to transfer once they graduate from SSCC. Mr. Montgomery described a traditional pathway from high school to college in that he left home after high school, attended college at a large public institution, earned his bachelor’s degree, earned his master’s degree, and is now pursuing his doctorate. Like Ms. Richards, Mr. Montgomery’s educational experiences do not reflect those of the students he advises, however, he has gained knowledge about the community college student experience through his interactions with the students he advises. As a result, he viewed persistence as one of the key indicators of student success and stated:

I’m thinking of Silver Springs students and realizing that this is a broad brush, but one of the things I’ve noticed that seems to be really important, and this is true for everywhere,
but I think it’s particularly important with a lot of our students, is persistence. A lot of our students are arriving with a lot of outside life commitments and navigating their way when they can’t be full-time where realistically it might be a three-year trudge at two or three classes at a time. That willingness to persist if the first math class doesn’t go real well and we figure out how we’re going to go well the second time around. So persistence seems to be a consistent characteristic in our students that succeed.

(interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery also suggested that students must have a sense of ownership and engagement within their education. He stated:

I would say some ownership and personal responsibility but I say that with almost a twist. In that same frame understanding when you need to ask and that willingness to go and ask. I think that’s part of personal responsibility. The students who seem to be in a cap and gown are the ones who I seem to remember coming and who had at least an idea of what classes they wanted to take or what they needed to do. So at least in the community college setting, I think those to two things, personal responsibility or ownership and persistence really stand out. They seem to cross a lot of students…those characteristics cross students of all different backgrounds and ages. Those two things seem to push them through. (interview, October 2, 2018)

As part of his advising responsibilities, Mr. Montgomery helps to direct students along pathways in which they will be successful. He seemed to have an understanding of the complexity of this role and its subjective nature and admitted that recommending specific pathways for students can “definitely be a challenge because I think that those of us in academia, just from pure experience, can recognize perhaps the risk before the student does” (interview, October 2, 2018). He
provided the example of students who come into the advising session with the initial goal of pursuing a nursing degree. At first, the student cannot envision any career other than nursing. But Mr. Montgomery suggested that, in some cases, students are just not able to succeed in a specific program. He explained:

> The student cannot see themselves being anything else and I can understand that. But there is a point academically when you see, not just an initial pattern, but a steady pattern of not being able to see a path of how we’re going to get you into the nursing program let alone get you through the program. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery qualified this statement, however, and cautioned advisors against making and applying broad assumptions to students. He stated:

> What we do have to be careful with—and I guess this is the anti-answer to this question—we get into this natural habit of saying ‘I can look at this person on paper and tell you if they’re going to succeed or not.’ There’s a decent amount of accuracy to that but with a lot of years being in advising in one facet or another, there’s a lot of surprises in there. There’s a lot of folks that show up on paper that I don’t think we’ll see them in a year. And they end up showing up in cap and gown. We almost have to and be careful about our innate ability to recognize someone who’s going to pass or succeed or fail. (interview, October 2, 2018)

In contrast to the responses from Ms. Richards and Mr. Montgomery, Ms. Gibson’s response about the factors influencing student success or potential success on a specific academic pathway were more direct, which seems to align with her own background and pathway to higher education. Ms. Gibson holds master’s degrees in management and project management. Before coming to SSCC, Ms. Gibson worked in a high level corporate position,
leading a diverse team of employees. She was successful and discloses that she was regularly promoted into higher positions and given substantial raises. However, the stress and toll on her health were significant, and she could no longer work in that environment. She came to SSCC first in a part-time capacity and later in a full-time role. She explains that in her role as the Allied Health and Nursing Advisor, she must have direct and honest conversations with students. She believes that in order to do so, she must make the student comfortable. She stated:

You have to get a student to where they are comfortable enough to come to you and that’s part of these conversations. I want to get them to that comfort level so that they are willing to come to me if they have issues. A lot of students out there are paralyzed with fear and they won’t come to you and you don’t know until you start seeing Starfish flags. Those who are successful are usually listening. They are not on their phones. I’ve called them out I don’t know how many times. If you are on your phone you need to decide if you want to be on your phone or if you want to go to school. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Gibson emphasized that successful students must exhibit respect and active listening as well as a sense of personal responsibility. She shared stories about students coming into the office with their parents. One particular student was interested in the Medical Assisting program and brought her mother with her to the advising appointment in Ms. Gibson’s office. When the mother monopolized the conversation while the student sat quietly, Ms. Gibson admonished both the mom and student saying, “You need to stop talking because she [the student] wants to be a medical assistant, and I know she has to be able to talk” (interview, October 3, 2018). In addition to high expectations regarding student responsibility and involvement, Ms. Gibson identified several other characteristics of successful students. Like the other advisors, she viewed academic ability as just one aspect of success. She stated:
Most of them [successful students] are intensive, they are asking questions, they are sending you emails if they don’t understand. Sores are just one factor in my mind. I’ve seen students in adult ed graduate with nursing degrees. I don’t take the scores really at hand. It’s more their drive and motivation and why they want to be here is the reason they will be successful. (interview, October 3, 2018)

As the allied health and pre-nursing advisor, Ms. Gibson meets with a high number of students who have expressed an interested in programs such as nursing, social work, and physical therapist assistant, all of which have a number of difficult pre-requisite courses. Ms. Gibson shared that when she first began in her role, she had approximately 450 pre-nursing students and only a fraction of those students would ever be admitted into the program. She described the work that she and other colleagues did to help direct students into alternate pathways, which included switching all students interested in nursing or allied health to a more general, health science technology degree pathway. However, before this option existed, Ms. Gibson never shied away from having honest and difficult conversations with students. She stated:

When I was a pre-nursing advisor, I could have those conversations like, ‘Look, you’ve already tried this twice. You still have math and two more sciences to go. You’ve taken this science, this Biology 137 [Anatomy and Physiology] twice already. I think it’s time to…aren’t you getting frustrated? I think it’s time to switch to something that is more manageable for you.’ Sometimes they don’t know that nursing is the night shift. ‘You’ve got three kids. How are you going to do that?’ All those kinds of things. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Each of the advisors discussed their individual philosophies of advising, which helped to provide a framework for their perceptions of their role as advisors. Within the individual
descriptions, personal beliefs and biases are imbedded. Three of the four advisors identified teaching students to be independent as one of the core tenants of their advising philosophy. Ms. Richards described her approach to advising as “to get it done” and “to be as helpful as possible—to help them but also to not do things for them” (interview, October 3, 2018). Her goal within advising was “teaching them [students] kind of how to fish and then they’re able to do it themselves. . . have them feel like they know what they’re doing by the time they leave” (interview, October 3, 2018). Ms. Gibson expressed a similar desire to help promote independence stating, “My big thing is to try to get them to be self-sufficient . . . I will go through a lot of those main issues they have apprehension about. Really my goal is to give them a strong foundation” (interview, October 3, 2018). Mr. Montgomery’s advising philosophy also included the theme of independence, but he acknowledged that moving a student toward independence may be complicated. He stated:

The goal for me in any kind of advising related to work is to try to work the student towards independence. With the understanding that depending upon the student more or less hand-holding might be needed at the beginning. But it’s really trying to come up with a practice or philosophy that doesn’t mean you’re still hand-holding at the end of this process. I think that is good for the institution as it allows the ability for advisors to work with more folks and not be tied down to folks. More importantly I think it’s good for the students because in the end I think advising has to be exactly that and advice, not a prescription. I think there’s a place for a mix of advising styles. I also think at our institution the need for intrusive advising is more present that at any other institutions I’ve worked at or been affiliated with. (interview, October 3, 2018)
In contrast to the emphasis on student independence in the advising philosophies of Ms. Richards, Ms. Gibson, and Mr. Montgomery, Ms. Flaherty’s approach offered much greater emphasis on providing students with an almost limitless level of support. Unlike the other three advisors, Ms. Flaherty’s educational pathway did not involve a traditional matriculation from high school to the four-year institution. Ms. Flaherty is an alumnus of SSCC and is open about the role the institution has played in her success. She is proud of being an alumni and often shares her struggles as a young parent in school with the students she advises. Rather than emphasizing student independence in her philosophy of advising, Ms. Flaherty focused on empathy and support. She stated:

“My philosophy in advising is not only to enroll a student into classes but to also be their advocate or mentor. I feel like we are the first impression of the college and we’re going to set the tone for them so if it’s positive hopefully they will have a positive experience. I think that there’s a lot of follow-up and communication within advising but overall I think it’s just being empathetic to the student, making sure you meet their goals as well as your own goals. We’re the first face that they see and we’re going to be their first impression. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Two of the four advisors expressed assumptions about the different motivations students bring to college. The advisors’ assumptions were related to their biases and beliefs about the students they advise. Ms. Gibson and Ms. Richards both spoke to the idea that some students only attend SSCC to gain access to financial aid. Both advisors suggested that they must determine whether or not students are “here for the wrong reasons” (interviews, October 3, 2018). Ms. Gibson shared a story about a student who had some into her office crying. The student was having difficulty in her reading course and could not figure out how to access the
online course modules. Ms. Gibson was able to connect the student with tutoring resources, and
the student was able to get caught up in the course. Ms. Gibson expressed pride when she shared
that the student passed the course and is now doing very well. Ms. Gibson then shared her
thoughts about her experiences with less positive student advising interactions. She explained:

The other side of the fence is you have come students who are just not here for the right
reasons. I have no problems calling them on that and helping them to see what
opportunity they have. Some can hear that and some cannot. So some have been given
the golden parachute and are not taking advantage of that. I try to show them, especially
the ones who are taking enormous loans and explain to them why it is important not to do
that. Really to try to talk them through. Like I said some can hear and some cannot.
Some don’t like to hear what you have to say. You try to make them positive by all
means, but sometimes they can’t hear it. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Gibson’s reference to the idea of a “golden parachute” speaks to her background in
corporate America, which seems to inform her approach with students. When asked how she is
able to determine student motives or which students are in college for the right or wrong reasons,
Ms. Gibson clarified that she looks at their past history. When students do not meet Federal
Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), they go on SAP warning and ultimately
suspension of their Financial Aid. Ms. Gibson explained:

Obviously past history tells a lot. That’s when I really have very difficult conversations.
Hey you are on the last strike, don’t blow it. They’ve told me ‘I want to make a
difference for my child.’ I say, then make a difference for your child. This is your last
chance. So some can hear that or are ready to hear that. Others are here for the money
and continue to live off the system. You can’t save them all. (interview, October 3, 2018)
Ms. Richards referenced the belief or assumption of some advisors and faculty at the college that students attend college for non-academic reasons. She shared:

There’s an idea here like okay some people come here for money or to get something and they’re using the system and that does happen but it’s not really all that much. I think a lot of people in advising and in teaching sometimes get that impression. That if you look a certain way or are kind of acting a certain way you may be here for the wrong reason.

(interview, October 3, 2018)

Upon completion of the Project Implicit IAT and discussion prompt, Ms. Richards further discussed this idea. She explained that she sometimes assumes or has a feeling that students are “just in it for the financial aid.” She acknowledged that she may need to be more cautious in her thinking and should ask herself, “Is this just about their race or other characteristics such as low grades, or missed appointments” (discussion prompt, October 10, 2018).

**Theme Two: Personal Awareness of Privilege Positively Impacts the Advising Experience**

Each of the advisors demonstrated an awareness of their own privilege. Participants acknowledged privilege specifically in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic class. Rather than parsing each advisor’s individual statements about race, gender, or socioeconomic class by category, each participant will be discussed individually as this will provide context for their understanding of their privilege and how this knowledge influences and strengthens their approaches to advising.

Ms. Flaherty was willing to openly acknowledge and discuss her thoughts about privilege as it related to students and to her experiences and identity. She described her identity as a middle class White female who came from “a little bit of a privileged, spoiled background” (interview, October 2, 2018). However, she acknowledged that she had a child at the age of 20,
which changed the trajectory of her life. She married her child’s father and is still with him today, but she disclosed that there were times in which they struggled financially and she had to utilize resources including food stamps and government support. She often thinks about this and shares her story with the students she advises. She stated:

So when I sit down with the student and they look at me and they think, oh my gosh, she had no idea, she’s never been in my shoes, yeah I have. It’s a little different but I have sat at a food stamps office and waited two to three hours to get food for my family. So yes I have been in your shoes. I have never been homeless. I have never been scared of being homeless. But I’ve lived paycheck to paycheck and I’ve been on resources and look where I am now? You can get there. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery also spoke of his privilege in terms of being a White male from a middle-class background. He described growing up as a White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, which he says allowed him to be raised “a little blindly and privileged” (interview, October 2, 2018). However, he explained that in terms of social class, his family’s financial situation changed over time. Though he was born into what would have been considered a working or lower middle class family, by the time he was a senior in high school, his family had moved into an upper middle class setting. During his early childhood, he was surrounded by a more diverse population in terms of race and believes that by growing up in a neighborhood that may have been considered “poor,” he was exposed to different perspectives. As his family’s wealth grew, he become more entrenched in what he refers to as “the White suburban kind of privilege that you’re sort of unaware of” (interview, October 2, 2018). Despite coming from more of a privileged background in terms of race and class, Mr. Montgomery believed that his outlook on the world
was different than his White, upper middle class peers as a result of his younger years which provided him with a heightened awareness of the experiences of other identity groups. Once he went away to college, he described himself as “going way left” before “coming back a little bit.” Yet now, he described himself as a sort of class warrior and explained:

> When people have a discussion about privilege and opportunity and minority student access, I tend to still think that green is the most important color. I am of the belief that economic status has as much to do with it today and so some of the other things are blinders to keep the status quo. With that said, I mean within the current climate of what we see today whether it’s the ME Too movement or the debate about race, the lack of opportunity, the lack of equity and the lack of access is very real. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery suggested that the misconceptions from the early 2000s that class and racial differences were lessening are simply not accurate. He says “It’s 2018—I see a lot of opportunities especially when I go out into the community trying do recruiting events where equity and access are huge issues” (interview, October 2, 2018). He cited the current economic issues in his area in which there is low unemployment but a consistently growing poverty rate, particularly suburban poverty. Mr. Montgomery acknowledged that the phenomenon may not seem logical on paper, but that “when you start looking at the jobs on paper, there’s no doubt that equity and access are still huge issues” (interview, October 2, 2018). Mr. Montgomery stated that though community colleges help to address issues of equity and access through the services they provide and the students they serve, they do not fully address these issues.
Because of his awareness of his own privilege and how privilege and lack thereof impacts equity and access, Mr. Montgomery demonstrated intentionality within his advising recommendations for students. He stated:

We’ve got to be a little careful about making determinations based upon the paperwork. We are surprisingly accurate in the number of times in which we can predict a student’s success or failure based upon what they bring to the table. But we’ve got to be a little careful about that whether that is an extreme. Making an evaluation based upon someone’s name, let’s say, or upon their appearance when they first arrive or on their background. I think perhaps when we talk about blind privilege for example one of the things we are often guilty of is making an evaluation based upon the school you went to. I think perhaps we would be better off if we just whitened out the name of the school the student went to for example. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery further elaborated on his thoughts regarding privilege when he emphasizes that the community college is often the student’s first experience and access to a higher education institution. And, he cautioned that advisors must be aware of their own privilege and experiences as well as the student’s experiences and stated “We better constantly remind ourselves that every time someone shows up at our door, that’s a different person with a different background, a different set of baggage, and a different set of issues, and different experiences in terms of how the world has treated them and viewed them” (interview, October 2, 2018). He asserted that people make decisions based upon a student’s appearance, based upon where they live, and what identity group they fall into and cautions that we must keep this in our minds while advising because “sometimes people don’t even get to self-identify…we do it for them” (interview, October 2, 2018).
Like Mr. Montgomery, Ms. Gibson emphasized privilege in terms of socioeconomic class, though she briefly acknowledged race as well. She described being raised in a “middle-class, White, corn-field community” and disclosed that she had “never seen African-American until [she] was in the 10th grade” (interview, October 3, 2018). She never experienced food insecurity and lived a middle-class experience. However, through her interactions with students and through travel overseas, she has become more aware of her privilege. She explained that now, “simple things like the homeless person on the street, you seen them totally differently. You see how maybe they managed to get there based on what some of your students have told you” (interview, October 3, 2018). She believed that her work with students has broadened her perspective and informed her advising. One of her primary goals in advising was to connect her students with the resources they need. Her awareness of her own privilege has made her more proactive in meeting the needs of her students and she stated, “once your eyes are opened, how can you ignore it then?” (interview, October 3, 2018).

Ms. Richards had the most experience with discussing privilege and bias as these topics are embedded in her formal educational background and within the courses she teaches at SSCC. She teaches about privilege within her classes and explains privilege to her students as an “imaginary book bag,” and that our book bags differ based upon our experiences and beliefs. She explained:

Privilege is a really good way that I explain it to my students is that it’s the things that make you think, like you have to think about. So the fact that I don’t have to think about when I’m driving that if I’m going too fast that I could potentially get shot because of it, that’s inherent, that’s privilege and not everybody has that. Or the fact that I don’t have to think about the fact that I’m going to eat dinner later. Like that’s inherent privilege
with socioeconomic status. That’s how I teach it and that’s kind how I live it. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Like Mr. Montgomery, Ms. Richards believed that privilege shapes the lens in which individuals view the world. She acknowledged that her privilege impacts the way she looks, the way she advises, and the way she teaches. She disclosed that she comes from a middle-class background and because of this, her life experiences were limited. She explained:

I didn’t really even have many friends whose parents were divorced. Everyone had a house. And that is something throughout my career that I’ve really had to realize. Not everybody had that. Not everyone had stable parents. Not everyone had stable housing. My entire life there was no, Are you going to college? There was, Where are you going to college? That was never a question. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Richards recognized that the students she advised likely had very different life experiences from her own. She admitted that sometimes the students she works with in advising and within her classroom have made decisions that bring out her biases. She sometimes wanted to ask students, “What is this?” or “Why are you doing this?” but she tried to think about the student’s perspective and what may have influenced their actions. This awareness of privilege allowed Ms. Richards to be more intentional with students and to make better informed decisions and recommendations for the students she advises.

**Theme Three: Lived Experiences Shape Advisors and their Work in Advising**

The overarching purpose of the first research question is to better understand how lived experiences inform an advisor’s practices. The concepts of privilege and bias are embedded within the advising experience, specifically the advisor’s own awareness of their privilege and possible biases. However, in order to fully understand these concepts as they relate to advising
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practices, it is important to explore lived experience. For the purpose of this discussion, lived experience refers to the advisors’ individual experiences and backgrounds as well as their experiences within their profession. The experiences they share about their pathways to their current profession coupled with the perspectives they share about the students they have advised through the years illustrate the complex relationship between the academic advisor and the student.

Though the advisors within this study come from differing levels of comfort and knowledge about the concepts of cultural competence, bias, and privilege, each them expressed an understanding of the complex lives that their students lead. However, the advisors’ pathways to this understanding differ and represent a complex journey to where they are today. Three out of four of them acknowledge having some sort of bias about race and ethnicity as a result of their childhood background and experience. Three out of four of them acknowledged bias related to socioeconomic class. Each of them provided at least one example of having made an assumption based upon a belief or bias that stemmed from their own experiences. Inversely, all four identified an experience with a student that challenged their assumptions and helped to broaden their perspective on the students they serve, which allowed them to being stronger advisors. The seemingly insignificant questioning of a belief or bias led to an action that will lead to a better advising experience for the student and strengthen their odds for success.

Each of the advisors in the study reflected upon their identity group(s) as it related to race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. Within the discussion about identity, each of the advisors disclosed examples from their personal history that illustrated their knowledge of privilege afforded to members of some identity groups. They also disclosed examples of their own personal biases and reflected upon why they may feel this way about a specific identity
group. Each of the advisors also discussed at least one experience with a student which
callenged or influenced their individual biases or assumptions. Personal experience as it
intersects with student experience, informs the ways in which the advisors in this study work
with students.

Though all four of the advisors engaged in transparency regarding their biases and
assumptions, two of the advisors, Ms. Flaherty and Ms. Richards, touched upon privilege and
bias both within their personal experiences and within their interactions with students. Ms.
Richards, as a result of her formal education in the field of social work, utilizes formal language
to describe the concepts of privilege and articulates fluid connections between her lived
experiences and her assumptions. Ms. Flaherty does not use formal language to describe these
concepts, however, she is able to articulate a connection between her background and experience
and the assumptions she makes with the students she advises.

Ms. Richards and Ms. Flaherty believed that the way they grew up has shaped their views
of the world. Ms. Flaherty expressed biases she has about certain populations of students,
including students from other countries and those who are recovering from substance abuse
issues. She believes that her biases stem from growing up in a rural area. She explained,
“‘I think that the way that I grew up, I prejudge and I shouldn’t. I do think that I still struggle
with judgment and being biased “(interview, October 2, 2018). When asked to think of an
example, Ms. Flaherty shared the story of a student she advised who had disclosed that he was in
recovery from a drug addiction. When the student disclosed this information to her, Ms. Flaherty
felt a bias and judgement toward him. She described her thought process:

In the back of my head, I’m like, oh my god, you’ve been in the trenches. You’ve been in
the pits. Why the heck would you do that? That’s horrible. But then I’m like, you’re
here today. But I do think that in the back of my head, I’m like, if I put them in these classes, are they going to—in a couple of weeks—be out there and struggling again or going through something? (interview, October 2, 2018)

As she described this experience and her thoughts about the student, Ms. Flaherty apologized and acknowledged that she struggles with making assumptions and what she calls pre-judgements. She believes that her tendency to pre-judge people comes from the way she was raised. She described family members who have espoused long-held views about race and that she has heard them make comments that she does not agree with. She is aware of her tendency to pre-judge students and colleagues, and she acknowledges that she works to avoid making these assumptions and judgments. She stated:

Sometimes when they [students] walk in you think things and you shouldn’t and then you get to know them, you’re like ‘Oh my god.’ I mean I’m very bad about judging a book by its cover, and you don’t do that because it’s so wrong. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Because Ms. Flaherty was aware of her tendency to pre-judge people, she tried to ask intentional questions and valued listening as a critical skill within advising. She provided several examples making judgements or assumptions about colleagues at SSCC, specifically about her former supervisor and a colleague within advising. Upon first meeting these individuals, whom she described as smart, strong, amazing women, Ms. Flaherty was intimated and assumed that she would have nothing in common with them or with their experiences. However, once she spent time with each of them, she learned that her earlier judgements were invalid. She then shared that she has made assumptions about other colleagues at the college in terms of their motivations. She shared a meeting she was in a few months prior with the president of the college. As he looked out at the faculty, staff, and other administrators, he stated that he knew they were all
working at SCC because they cared about students and their success. Ms. Flaherty admitted that when he made this comment, she thought “some of them don’t care because they don’t get back to me. They don’t really want to be here” (interview, October 2, 2018). However, after she began getting to know some of the technical program faculty members that she worked with, she realized that several of them had taken pay cuts to work at the college. One automotive instructor, in particular, caused her to change her mindset. She explained, “He could be out there making $80,000 a year turning wrenches, and he’s not. It’s just getting to know the person and understanding their side of the story and what they went through,” (interview, October 2, 2018).

And through this experience, Ms. Flaherty also reflected upon how others may view her, specifically students. She recognized that when students meet with her, they make similar assumptions that she cannot relate to them. And she realized that in order to impact student success through advising, she has to get to know each of her students as individuals and allow them to get to know her as well.

Ms. Richards struggled with her biases and assumptions about students, particularly when it comes to the decisions they may make. She described having grown up in middle-class household in a community where few of her friends had single parents, post-secondary education was the norm rather than the exception, and where most of the people she interacted with on a regular basis were White. She described one of the first times in her early career in which she became aware of just how different her life experiences have been from the students she teaches and advises. She explained that as she was growing up, she only knew one person who had a child outside of marriage, but within the population of the students she works with, she believes that a majority of them have children who were born outside of what society deems traditional marriage. She recalled the experience:
I remember when I first started out in the field, I assumed, like, your husband’s coming home, but this wasn’t the case. There’s just, you live and learn and you realize that not everyone is like you and it’s not just looking like you. It’s the culture you grew up in. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Richards viewed this early experience as one that helped her to begin to challenge her assumptions and reframe the way she worked with students in advising and within her classroom. However, she acknowledged pushing against her biases, specifically as they related to the decisions that students make. She explained that decisions students sometimes make about having children or raising children have triggered her bias, and she found herself making judgments about the student such as whether or not they should have more children. Ms. Richards recognized that she is a making an assumption based upon her own middle class mindset. She explained:

I think I know what’s best but that’s not necessarily what is –coming down from your moral high horse we all struggle with . . . you think you what’s best for people or even with students in certain relationships. You may not think that they should be in that relationship with that person, but they are. It’s just processing and realizing that you can’t control other people. Everyone has their journey. (interview, October 3, 2018)

By recognizing her bias, Ms. Richards was better able to work objectively with students and make advising recommendations based upon the student’s actual needs, rather than what she assumed the student needs.

Ms. Richards also acknowledged her bias regarding race and ethnicity and attributed this bias to her upbringing. Upon completion of the Project Implicit IATs on Race and Arab-Muslim ethnicity, Ms. Richards reflected on her results, which indicated that she had a slight preference
for other White or Caucasian persons versus persons of color whether African-American or Arab-Muslim. She explained that her first reaction was “I am not a racist” (discussion prompt, October 10, 2018). However, as she reflected on her results, she began to think about why she may have a preference for identity groups that more closely align with her own. She suggested that she had been socialized to feel the way that she does about people who make look differently. She explained:

I took a step back and realized I don’t think this test measures racism but preference and bias. I do agree with my results. I have grown up around a White majority. I have worked with Black people professionally, but I do not know many personally. (discussion prompt, October 10, 2018)

She had a similar response when processing her bias regarding Arab-Muslim individuals and attributes her bias to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. She described being a 14-year-old girl at the time of attacks and developing negative feelings and beliefs about Arab and Arab-American individuals. As she grew older and experienced different perspectives, her views broadened, and she realized that the actions of a few individuals does not represent the entire culture or religion.

In addition to bias about race or ethnicity, Ms. Richards spent time reflecting upon her middle class upbringing and the expectations that align with the middle class, specifically as they relate to professionalism. Ms. Richards disclosed that she struggles with when and how she should correct her students’ grammar. She explained:

Sometimes, you know, I have to take a step back. I could correct them, and to be honest, in certain professional settings, you can’t speak that way. But I also know that they didn’t come from somewhere where people were speaking proper English all of the time.
I have to realize that I have a different background. It doesn’t make me better or worse, but I do think that it shapes everything that we do. It’s the middle class mindset.

(interview, October 3, 2018)

As the advisor for students who wish to transfer to social work programs at four-year institutions, Ms. Richards understood that professionalism, including utilization of proper grammar, was critical to a student’s ultimate success within the field. She acknowledged that she does correct the student when they say phrases such as “I seen,” but she believed that she makes these corrections equally among students from different backgrounds. However, once she completed the IAT on race, she indicated that she would be interested in examining whether or not she corrects the grammar of her African-American students at higher rates than that of her White students.

Having come from a different educational and professional background than Ms. Flaherty and Ms. Richards, Ms. Gibson shared a different perspective regarding how her lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform her advising practices. However, just as Ms. Flaherty and Ms. Richards have evolved in their ideas and awareness of privilege and bias, so has Ms. Gibson. Having grown up in a predominately White, middle-class town in the Mid-West, Ms. Gibson did not have much experience in interacting with people from different identity groups. During her time working in corporate America, however, she managed a staff of employees of whom 80% were from India. She explained that it would not have been uncommon for a new employee to begin working less than 48 hours after arriving in the United States. She quickly learned that there were cultural differences and that she would have to be willing to learn about her staff’s culture and be flexible in regard to holidays. She felt conflicted when her staff would want to celebrate a holiday that was important to their religion but subsequently fell during a
peak time of year for the company. She explained, “sometimes you can make exceptions and other times you cannot. In corporate America, that [cultural sensitivity] was very much a secondary item. It’s like we could accept it, but if it messed with the deadline of a budget, forget it” (interview, October 3, 2018). Ms. Gibson did not believe that this same type of pressure or conflict with culture exists at SCC.

Moving to a role within higher education from corporate America was a learning curve for Ms. Gibson. She was unaware of the barriers that students face when trying to enroll in college. One of the experiences that awakened her to student obstacles was with her student employee, Cara, who worked with her in the advising office for over two years. Ms. Gibson described Cara as a typical SCC student. She was a single parent and struggled to make it through school while balancing the stress of being a parent, working, and managing relationships with family. Ms. Gibson explained that she was alarmed by the lack of parental support that Cara and others students experience. Rather than the parent serving as a role model for the student, students were spending time parenting their parents. Ms. Gibson stated:

Probably the most alarming thing to me I guess out of that [experience with Cara] was the parent’s interaction there—you know the role model was not a role model. That was kind of a new concept for me. There are so many barriers there and how much that student is still being a parent to the parent was amazing to me too. The responsibility that that student feels for the parent to the point of sacrifice was kind of alarming so that was all kind of new to me. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Gibson explained that though she had the experience of working with individuals from different countries and ethnic cultures, the barriers related to socioeconomic class were “eye-opening” to her. As she continued to work with students at SCC, she learned more about the
needs of the students she was advising, and she began to embed conversations about non-
academic resources into every conversation.

As the only male advisor within the study, Mr. Montgomery’s perspective and lived experiences differed from the other advisors in multiple facets as he acknowledged that he was, by all definitions, the example of White male privilege. He realized that he does not have to think about his privilege though he makes an effort to be conscious of it. He asserted that the biggest role his privilege plays in his life is socioeconomic privilege and advantage. He used his children as an example as he sees that they have more opportunity than he was afforded at their age. He believed that he has “an obligation to them to make sure that they are aware of the privilege they have” (interview, October 2, 2018). Mr. Montgomery credited his experiences of meeting individuals from other identity groups with helping him to gain a deeper understanding of the privileges he has been afforded and also with helping him to address personal assumptions and biases. He believed that “the more opportunity we have to have interactions and intersections of folks of different identities, I think the better off we are” (interview, October 2, 2018). Mr. Montgomery suggested that intentional interactions are critical in the effort to “make progress” and “eliminate bias” because “it’s hard to become self-aware of things that you’ve never experienced” (interview, October 2, 2018).

The first research question guiding this study sought to explore the ways in which an advisor’s lived experience and awareness of privilege and bias informs their advising practices. The second research question builds upon the first by examining the practices that advisors utilize in order to provide culturally competent advising. The data within this study produced several themes. They include: building relationships is necessary for culturally competent
advising, advising students toward independence with support, and treating each student as an individual with different needs and experiences.

**Theme Four: Building Relationships is Necessary for Culturally Competent Advising**

Each of the advisors in this study shared their philosophies of advising and approaches. The concepts of building relationships and making students comfortable and providing a welcoming space were recurring. The advisors expressed an awareness of the importance of cultivating a relationship with the students they serve and viewed the process as a mechanism for building trust. Though they each suggested the need for an advisor/advisee relationship, their strategies for connecting with their students differed. Ms. Flaherty, for example, utilized an informal approach with the students she advised while Ms. Gibson was formal and stern but caring. Differences were also evident within their office spaces. While some advisors had offices that offered a glimpse into their personal lives and provided more of a personalized space, others had offices with few personal objects. Despite these differences, each of the advisors employed methods for connecting with their students.

Ms. Flaherty began working in advising just over two years ago but had worked at SSCC for five years. Already, in this short amount of time, she had won the “Student’s Choice” award, which is given to the staff member whom students recognize as an excellent advocate and was recently nominated again for the 2017-2018 academic year. She was dressed informally in black leggings, a white blouse, black boots, and a cardigan. Her first advising session of the day was for a group of students in the welding program. As the technical program advisor, Ms. Flaherty worked with program faculty to assist with registration and to ensure that students are on track toward graduation. Ms. Flaherty was sitting on the front row of the welding classroom with her laptop and a list of students to be advised. There were 13 students in the classroom, all
of whom were men. As she called each student’s name, she would greet them with a friendly “How’s it going?” and once she had logged into their student account with them, she would ask them “What are you thinking?” She referred to each individual student as “buddy.” One of the students she was working with had a t-shirt on with the word “Colonel” across the front. Ms. Flaherty asked him where he went to high school and if he was a Northwood Colonel. He responded that he was, and she smiled and enthusiastically stated, “I was too!” While Ms. Flaherty was finishing with that student, a younger woman walked in for advising. She disclosed that she was there for advising into her final semester of the welding program. The student asked Ms. Flaherty for a piece of paper to use for notes, and once she began writing, Ms. Flaherty commented “You have really pretty handwriting.” When the student expressed concern about taking the Introduction to Computers course online, Ms. Flaherty reassured her, “You’ll be fine.” As she advised additional students, she continued to speak in an informal manner saying, “Hey buddy,” and “I’ve got lots of guys needing that one” in reference to a course that several of the students needed. As she finished advising the final student, a veteran named Bryan who began by apologizing for being late, she said, “You’re good to go Bryan.” He responded “That was quick and painless.” She smiled and said “That’s the way we like it” (observation, October 2, 2018).

The group advising session accurately represented Ms. Flaherty’s philosophy of advising as she focused on building rapport and making students comfortable even within a group setting. If students expressed concerns, she reassured them and gave them affirmations such as “You’re going to be great.” Ms. Flaherty explained that her strategy is to make students as comfortable as possible and to find small ways to connect with them whether it is a comment about their attire or a question about the high school they attended. She believed that she has made a
connection with a student when the student begins to share more information with her. For the students she advised from other countries, Ms. Flaherty tried to be intentional about finding a way to connect in an appropriate manner. She stated that she believed that being open and honest was the best way to approach these types of advising appointments. She explained:

I tried to ask them questions and I just tell them, I’m curious. They may come in and they’re in a different type of attire. I’m like ‘That’s beautiful or I like that.’ Or, if they have an accent, I may tell them that I love their accent and ask them about where they’ve lived. ‘What was it like? What was your high school like?’ I just try to get to know them and make them comfortable. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Ms. Flaherty also acknowledged that there have been times in which she has been unable to connect with the student in her office. She attributed this to a student’s fear and the need for additional time to get to know them better. She explained that she asks intentional questions as she is making suggestions about academic pathways and courses, including questions such as “Are you comfortable with this?” and “Is this all right with you?” Her goal is that the student views her as a resource and feels supported.

Ms. Gibson, in contrast to Ms. Flaherty, was much more formal in her attire and in her approach with her students, though she expressed a commitment to building a relationship with the students she advises. She was dressed in black dress pants and a colorful blouse and her appearance was neat and tidy. Her first advising session of the day was for students working through the medical assisting program. The room in which she was advising was a computer lab, and at any given time during the majority of the advising session, there were 10-11 students in need of advising assistance. The students were all female, and the majority were White. There were three African-American students, and each was sitting at the end of a row away from Ms.
Gibson. In her role as the allied health advisor, Ms. Gibson works closely with the Dean, Dr. Hanson. During the advising session, they worked together to ensure that the students were on the correct pathways and registered for the correct courses. Dr. Hanson stood at the front of the classroom but would walk around to ask students if they needed assistance. She would stand next to the student while they were at the computer and would spend time with each one. In contrast, Ms. Gibson spent time at the computer removing advising holds and would respond to student questions with short, one word responses. The students were directed to log into their accounts to complete the registration process. One student stated that she had been unable to enroll to which Ms. Gibson responded, “I’m still working on removing the holds.” Though she was not unfriendly, her response was direct. Another student named Rebecca was sitting a few computers over from Ms. Gibson when she began to have issues with her enrollment. Ms. Gibson looked up Rebecca’s account and responded “Yeah, we have a lot of issues here.” She began to ask Rebecca questions about her financial aid award, including if she had completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA. Dr. Hanson interjected to state that Rebecca should have been ready for enrollment. Ms. Gibson continued to ask questions before directing Rebecca to visit the Bursar’s office because she “can’t do a thing about that” hold. Another student asked Ms. Gibson a question about her enrollment screen to which Ms. Gibson responded quickly, “You’re always going to have that screen.” The student apologized for asking the question. A few minutes later, another student walked in and Dr. Hanson asked her for her student id number as she was having difficulty finding her. Ms. Gibson said to the class “When you guys don’t send your student id number, we’re like, uh, yeah, there are 10 of you!” As students began to complete the enrollment process, Ms. Gibson would ask them “Are you good?” and “Did you get everything you need?” (observation, October 3, 2018).
Ms. Gibson’s approach to advising the students in the session was quick and efficient, without much time for small talk. While Dr. Hanson would walk around and provide more individualized time with the students who seemed to need additional help, Ms. Gibson seemed less willing to do so. An older African-American woman who was sitting at the furthest computer from the others was having trouble with printing and had additional questions about her enrollment. Ms. Gibson responded to this student’s questions from across the room, and the student seemed frustrated. Dr. Hanson, however, walked over to the student and spent several minutes working with her. Ms. Gibson later explained her advising philosophy and that there’s a time for efficiency and a time for providing students with additional time and support. She believed in making students comfortable and explained:

You have to get a student to where they are comfortable enough to come to you and that’s part of these conversations. I’m here for you, email me. I want to get them to that comfort level so that they are willing to come to me if they have issues. A lot of students out there are paralyzed with fear and they won’t come to you and you don’t know until you start seeing Starfish flags (interview, October 3, 2018).

Yet Ms. Gibson emphasized a desire to have students become self-sufficient, which was demonstrated during the class advising session. She explained that she has high expectations of students and expects them to listen attentively and that she has not been hesitant about reprimanding students who use their cellphones in her office. She stated, “I have called them out I don’t know how many times. If you are on your phone you need to decide if you want to be on your phone or if you want to get to school” (interview, October 3, 2018). Ms. Gibson believed in holding student accountable while being empathetic and sensitive to the student’s needs. She viewed herself as being “totally student focused” and has a strong desire to help students
overcome the many obstacles they face. She provided the example of a student coming to college only to be advised into a remedial or developmental course. She explained that these students, upon receiving the news that they must take a non-credit bearing remedial course, feel like giving up or that they are not good enough for school. Ms. Gibson explained that she tells these students that the test score does not matter and that “where you are is where you are and we’ll get you there” (interview, October 3, 2018). Ms. Gibson stated that the core of her advising philosophy is to listen and to connect students to the resources they need to be successful. Her approach with students is firm, expedient, and direct.

As a full-time faculty member with advising responsibilities, Ms. Richards’ approach to relationship building and advising differed from the approaches of her advising peers in that many of the students she advises have taken courses with her, which has provided her with an opportunity to spend more time getting to know them and build a relationship with them. She acknowledged that she felt a better rapport with the students who have taken her classes and believed that they have a better advising experience because she has had time to truly know and understand them, and they know her better as well. However, she also advises a number of students of whom she does not have in class and knows that she must still build a relationship with these students. Though she is not their instructor, she must still engage in strategies to build trust. Her approach is simple and involves making the student feel comfortable. She stated that she tries to keep the conversation fun, which reflects her personality. She did not see herself as someone who is formal or “stuffy,” and though she admitted to having high expectations for the students in her courses and in advising, her approach is friendly and fun, which she believed made it easier to have the difficult conversations. She also explained that one of the strategies
she utilizes for building rapport with students was questioning. Though she believed in asking
students questions about their goals, she also spent time asking them about their interests.

Ms. Richard’s informal approach was illustrated in her office and in the way she was
dressed in a professional yet playful attire. She was wearing black dress pants with a bright pink
blouse covered with small, black and white zebras. Her hair was pulled back in a loose bun, and
a pair of thick, dark-rimmed glasses sat atop her head. A bright pink cardigan was draped over
her desk chair. She greeted me with a warm “hello” and “come on in.” When her student
appointment arrived a few minutes later, she greeted him in the same friendly and warm manner.
She stood to greet the student, James, and shook his hand before motioning him to sit down. She
sat down across the desk at her computer and looked at his account before turning to him to ask
him about how his semester was going and whom he had first met with in advising. James
admitted that while his first semester at SCSS was going well that he had not really understood
what he was “getting into” when he registered for online classes and that he had been struggling
to keep up with the courses. He mentioned to her that he had met with Claire Gibson during his
first advising appointment and that while it was helpful, he had not felt like he knew what to
expect. Ms. Richards nodded and acknowledged his comments but commented that she knew
Ms. Gibson is thorough during her appointments and reassures him that she will make sure that
he leaves with his questions and concerns addressed. Ms. Richards then asked James what he
does for a living, and he responded that he currently works as a program coordinator for a local
non-profit focused on addiction. Ms. Richards responded, “That’s an awesome job. You
probably know more than I do!” (observation, October 3, 2018). They both laughed and Ms.
Richards asked James what he was interested in doing in the future in terms of his degree
program and career. He explained that he had personal experience and that while he enjoyed the
work that he was doing, he could not see himself working in that specific field long-term because of the stress that it would involve. They discussed potential job opportunities and pathways in the field of social work and addiction and recovery and discovered that they had several mutual friends and acquaintances in the field. Ms. Richards offered James several affirmations about his current position as well as the research he had already completed about his future including “You probably have a lot of connections, which is good” and “You know your stuff. This is an easy one [appointment]” (observation, October 3, 2018). Ms. Richards looked away from her computer and began to work on creating an academic pathway plan for James. As she typed, Ms. Richards asked James questions about how his semester was going, and he again admitted that he was struggling to manage the demands of his online course and the demand of life, including work and relationships. As she typed, Ms. Richards shared her own experience with James and said, “If it makes you feel better, I’m in a doctoral program and I know school and work can be stressful. It’s definitely an adjustment” (observation, October 3, 2018). As Ms. Richards spoke, James remained engaged in the conversation and asked her several questions about specific courses. While Ms. Richards worked on James’s academic pathway plan, another advisor came to the door to give Ms. Richards money for a donation for a student project she was advising. Ms. Richards thanked her and jokingly pretended to place the money in her shirt to which James and the other advisor laughed. Ms. Richards then placed the money to the side and went back to her work on James’s Smart Plan. After the finished the Smart Plan, she moved her wireless keyboard across the table to James and began to describe the process for registration. James mentioned that he had heard that there were some classes at SSCC that would not transfer to the four-year institution he planned to attend. Ms. Richards responded, “Always come to me
if you have questions. Things change all of the time. There’s a lot of talk that goes on at SCCC but come to me. I send lots of emails so you will be fine” (observation, October 3, 2018).

As Ms. Richards instructed James about how to register for classes, she continued to ask him questions, and they discovered that they had additional acquaintances. He shared with her that he had many life changes coming in the next year, including getting married and buying a house. As the conversation progressed, James shared more information with Ms. Richards about his personal life and his goals. After James was registered for his classes, Ms. Richards printed his schedule and brought it him and told him that she had enjoyed working with him. James agreed and remarked that it had been a helpful appointment. Before James left, Ms. Richards reminded him that she would see him in January since he would be taking her course and that she would be there to help him as he works toward his goals of transfer. James smiled and thanked Ms. Richards again for her help.

Within less than an hour, Ms. Richards met with James and began to form an initial relationship with him. The theories and strategies she shared during my interview with her were evident during the advising session. I remarked that she seemed to have had a textbook advising session according to best practices in advising to which she explained:

I just think being a human is important and sometimes in higher education you don’t always get that. I feel like people here for the most part are open and helpful and would go out of their way to help students even if it’s not part of their job description. I feel like we’re all very student driven. Maybe not every single person here but I think the majority of people here want to learn these things but I do think that different people have different approaches. (interview, October 3, 2018)
Ms. Richards’s belief in bringing a human aspect to advising was apparent within the session I observed. Yet she also acknowledged that though she believed that most people who work at SSCC are there for students that they each have different approaches. This was also illustrated during Mr. Montgomery’s advising appointment. As the Transfer Coordinator, Mr. Montgomery’s role is comprised of administrative and advising responsibilities. His approach to the students he advises is more formal, which is illustrated in his attire, his office, and his conversations with students. Mr. Montgomery was dressed in khaki dress pants, a dress shirt, and a blazer, and his office was more formal in that fact that there were few personal items other than three photos of his children tacked on the desk hutch door above his computer. Standard advising office items such as academic catalogs and folders were scattered on his desk, and on the two-door black filing cabinet directly behind the chairs where students sit, a poster with rape and sexual assault resources hangs. Mr. Montgomery’s voice is commanding and could be heard from down the hall. The feel of his office space is comfortable yet formal. As the Transfer Coordinator, most of the students Mr. Montgomery advises plan to transfer to four-year institutions. For this reason, he is expected to possess a significant knowledge about transfer policies and programs. He believed that an advisor’s role is multi-faceted in that registration or enrollment is the desired outcome but that it is not the first priority of an advising appointment. He stated:

One of the things that I think is key is when we get into the meeting that the first priority is not finding the schedule. The first priority is taking a bit of time to really try to explore a little bit with the student and what they want. I think some of the exploration is really key to building that relationship otherwise you’re just a registrar services agent.

(interview, October 2, 2018)
He acknowledged that because the students attending SSCC often have needs or barriers outside of academics, advisors must be able to forge relationships with students in order to help ensure their success. He suggested that advisors must be open to sharing their experiences and that, in turn, students may be more willing to open up to the advisor. Yet he cautioned that advisors must be careful in determining when to share and stated:

As an advisor, sometime when a student is talking about their individual experience, where—and you’ve got to be careful about this—where I can truly kind of empathize and share a quick story, I do think that makes some connection. But, I do think that you have to be a little careful to make sure that your empathy lines up. Some people have gone through some things that are a lot harder than anything I’ve gone through. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery cautioned that advisors must listen to students and their experiences and find ways to connect through common experiences; yet, they must be intentional when determining what, and how much, to share from their own experiences. In some cases, the advisor may have experienced similar problems and is able to speak to the student and share their own perspective and how they approached the situation. However, Mr. Montgomery suggested that in some situations, the advisor should step back and listen without attempting to draw similarities between his or her experience and the student experience.

Mr. Montgomery was expecting a student named Nancy to come in for an appointment. He received notification of her arrival via an instant message on his computer, but after several minutes had passed, Nancy had not yet made it to his office. Mr. Montgomery went down the hall to try to find Nancy but returned having not yet located her. Several minutes passed before a student in what appeared to be her mid-thirties appeared pushing a stroller with a young girl and
a young boy walking alongside them. She apologized as she came into his office and mentioned that she had stopped at the vending machine to buy snacks for the children. Mr. Montgomery stood to greet Nancy and said a quick hello to the children. Nancy sat down in the chair across the desk from Mr. Montgomery, and her son sat in the chair next to her. The little girl stayed in the stroller while Nancy reached into her purse to take out the snacks for the children. She handed the young girl her phone to play with while the young boy ate his snack, closely watching his mom interact with Mr. Montgomery. Mr. Montgomery began the advising appointment by looking at the initial intake form that Nancy brought with her to the appointment. As part of every advising session at SSCC, students bring the blue folder they were issued when they were first advised. Within the folder are materials about campus resources, Financial Aid, and non-academic resources. A general intake form was also included, and provided advisors with basic information about the student and his or her potential needs. Mr. Montgomery began by asking Nancy if she was a veteran to which she responded “Yes.” Nancy then indicated that she was there to pursue her associates degree with the intention of transferring to a four-year institution into a social work program. As Mr. Montgomery and Nancy discussed her options, the children began to get restless. The young girl spilled her bag of Cheez-its on the floor while the young boy began kicking his feet against the metal side of Mr. Montgomery’s desk. The result was a loud, rhythmic clanging. Nancy apologized and admonished the young boy to stop. Mr. Montgomery smiled and responded “That’s ok, it’s irresistible.” Mr. Montgomery then began to discuss Nancy’s placement test scores with her and showed her the academic pathway plan for her program. He spoke loudly and quickly. Nancy looked at him while he was speaking, but she also glanced at the children who by then were moving about the office. The young boy began tapping on Nancy’s shoulder while she was listening to Mr. Montgomery speak. Nancy’s body
language began to change as Mr. Montgomery spoke. Though she was looking at him, she began to tap her leg, and he glanced at the children. As she sat on the edge of her chair, Nancy engaged with Mr. Montgomery and asked questions about the field of social work and inquired about what might be the fastest pathway for her. Mr. Montgomery provided Nancy with a list of classes and assisted her with enrolling. He explained to her that he was going to “drive the train” today in terms of registration, acknowledging that she seems to have her hands full with the children. He took time to explain the registration process with her and inquires about what type of schedule she would prefer. After Mr. Montgomery registered her for her classes, he provided her with information about veteran’s benefits. As he spoke, it was evident that he was knowledgeable about financial aid and veteran’s benefits awards. The children began to run around, and the young girl ran out of the office. Nancy apologized and said that her children were usually well behaved for short periods of time. Mr. Montgomery responded, “They have been very good considering that they had to listen to some boring guy talk about boring stuff.”

As Nancy left to catch the young girl who had since disappeared, Mr. Montgomery thanked Nancy for coming in to see him in advising and encouraged her to reach out to him again with questions (observation, October 2, 2018).

After Nancy left, Mr. Montgomery explained that he felt the session did not go as well as it could have. There was more information that he wanted to share with Nancy, but he wanted to be sensitive to the children and their ability to sit quietly for an extended period of time in his office. He believed he did his best to establish an initial connection and to help the student succeed with the goal that brought her in to his office that day, which was registration. However, he also noted that he did not “prod a lot because you have to sense when it’s time and you can’t just ask a lot of digging questions” because “folks to tend share what they need to share”
(interview, October 2, 2018). He viewed the advising conversation as a “give and take” and he was hopeful that Nancy’s next advising appointment would provide an opportunity to build upon their initial meeting.

**Theme Five: Advising Students Toward Independence with Support**

The theme of the desire to move students from dependency on the advisor to self-sufficiency emerged. While it is not surprising that advisors would want to teach students how to become engaged actors within their own academic stories, what is surprising is the conflict that advisors expressed feeling about how to move students along the pathway to independence. Three of the four advisors spoke explicitly about this phenomenon as it relates to the students they advise. Ms. Gibson emphasized the need for student self-sufficiency and explained that she spends time and effort in ensuring that the students she advises are aware of the resources they need to be independent. She explained:

> My big thing is to try to get them to be self-sufficient. So I go through different things on the website. I show them Visual Schedule Builder. I will go through their financial aid with them. I will go through a lot of those main issues that they have apprehension about. Really my goal is to give them a strong foundation. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Gibson believed that once students were aware of the resources available to them, they would be more likely to utilize these resources on their own. Mr. Montgomery’s goal in advising was to “try to work the student towards independence” in part for practical purposes (interview, October 2, 2018). The full-time professional staff advisors at SSCC have large caseloads of advisees, and Mr. Montgomery suggests that student’s becoming more independent in terms of being able to self-register or utilize resources will free up time for the advisors so that they can work on different issues with students. He explained:
Depending upon the student more or less hand-holding might be needed at the beginning. But it’s really trying to come up with a practice or philosophy that doesn’t mean you’re still hand-holding at the end of this process. I think that is good for the institution as it allows the ability for advisors to work with more folks and not be tied down to folks. More importantly I think it’s good for the students because in the end I think advising has to be exactly that—advice, not a prescription. I think there’s a place for a mix of advising styles. I also think at our institution the need for intrusive advising is more present that at any other institutions I’ve work at or been affiliated with. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery’s statement illustrates the conflict that advisors often feel when trying to determine how much support to provide students. He acknowledged that the student population at SSCC, like other community colleges, often requires more support. In order for the advisor to make judgement about how much “hand-holding” to do, the advisor must utilize a culturally competent approach and really see each student as an individual. He provided a recent example of a student who came to him interested in pursuing a career in clock-making, a program that is not offered at SSCC or at any four-year institutions within the state. Mr. Montgomery did his best to work with the student and asked him questions about his knowledge about the career of clock-making. From their conversations, it was clear to Mr. Montgomery that the student needed to do more research. In addition, the student requested enrollment into courses that were not offered at SSCC or at most of the community colleges locally. In the end, Mr. Montgomery wanted the student to take more responsibility in doing research about what he wanted and his chosen pathway, but he realized that there would be instances where the advisor could help the student to a certain point but that the student would have to be an active participant as well. He
stated: “I do think it’s okay for advisors sometimes to recognize the limitations of what they can do. You have to occasionally forgive yourself that you can’t be everything to all students” (interview, October 2, 2018).

Ms. Gibson also shared a negative experience she had with a student as she struggled to find the balance between too much “hand-holding” and pushing the student toward independence. She described a student she had met with in a previous semester of whom she had spent an hour advising. Ms. Gibson believed that she spent enough time with the student and provided her with a solid foundation so that the student would be able to act independently in terms of figuring out how to register herself for her classes using the Visual Schedule Builder tool. However, the student sent Ms. Gibson seven emails over the course of four days, asking one line questions about her enrollment and other topics Ms. Gibson had discussed with her. Ms. Gibson finally responded in an email to the student stating, “I have 200 students I’m trying to serve. If you really need my help, please make an appointment” (interview, October 3, 2018). The student was angry at Ms. Gibson’s response and requested to meet with Dr. Hanson to request a different advisor. However, Ms. Gibson had already spoken to Dr. Hanson to apprise her of the incident. Dr. Hanson explained to the student that she would have to stay with the original advisor and that if she had multiple questions, she would need to make an appointment to meet with Ms. Gibson in person. Ms. Gibson explained that the student eventually took the time to figure out how to enroll herself and has become self-sufficient. She believes that some students have been conditioned to have other people take care of everything for them, but that she believes in holding them accountable and questioning them. She stated: Some don’t like to hear what you have to say like on that case. You try to make them [conversations] positive by all means but sometimes they can’t hear it” (interview, October 3, 2018).
Ms. Richards also acknowledged that struggle she faces when trying to balance much she should support students while also encouraging independence. She believed that some students at SSCC feel “uncomfortable when you do have them do something on their own” (interview, October 3, 2018). And, she admitted that sometimes it can be easier for the faculty member or advisor to do things for students rather than teaching the student how to do it for themselves. Yet by doing so, advisors are not adequately preparing students for the transition to a four-year institution at which self-sufficiency and independence will be expected. She stated that her philosophy involves helping students but also “teaching them kind of how to fish and then they’re able to do it themselves” (interview, October 3, 2018). She believed in the importance of making students feel comfortable and confident by the time they transfer to the four-year institution.

**Theme Six: Treating each Student as an Individual with Different Needs and Experiences**

One of the most important strategies for informing a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups and backgrounds that emerged from the interviews, observations, and discussion prompts involves viewing each student that walks into the advising office as an individual with his or her own specific experiences and needs. And then, as a result of acknowledging this student as an individual, connecting him or her to the appropriate resources, whether academic or non-academic, that will help them to be successful. Within this study, each of the four advisors acknowledged the need to treat students as individuals and to connect the student with the appropriate resources based upon the student’s specific needs.
Ms. Richards acknowledged the many different identity groups of her students and suggests that she has formed relationships and bonds with these students despite their differences. She explained:

I’ve formed good relationships with black students, formed good relationships with males, good relationships with gay males. I would say the majority of my students are different from my identity group in some way. I would say there are very few students that I meet where we check all of the same boxes. We may look alike, but our backgrounds are totally different. I guess it’s really meeting them where they are at and just treating everyone like a person, not like a number. (interview, October 3, 2018)

She believed in seeing them as individuals and in acknowledging their individual identity groups rather than simply looking at them as an enrollment or retention number. Ms. Flaherty echoed Ms. Richards’s views on treating and respecting each student as an individual and suggested that academic advisors should approach every appointment as separate from the one before because “we have no idea what these people have been through or what their background is” (interview, October 2, 2018). She believed that by taking the time to know the students and their individual backgrounds and experiences, advisors can make better informed decisions about their recommendations.

Ms. Gibson, too, believed in meeting the needs of every student as an individual and being aware of cultural differences. She shared the example of a Muslim student she was meeting with in advising whose cell phone alarm went off during the middle of the appointment. The alarm was a reminder of the student’s time for prayer. Rather than becoming annoyed at the interruption, Ms. Gibson acknowledged that this is something that she had to be respectful of for the student. She also shared that she thinks about when she needs to adjust the language that she
uses with students. At SSCC, the marketing department refers to this strategy as “Sarah-izing,” and involves moving away from using college-specific terminology that maybe only someone familiar with higher education would understand. Ms. Gibson shared the sample of using the term course pre-requisite. She explained that rather than saying a course is a pre-requisite for another course, she may say “a course you need before another course” (interview, October 3, 2018). She expressed a desire to be as clear as possible with her students and states:

I could talk and use big words with some people but when I’m with students I try to what we call “Sarah-ize.” It’s going to be simple and something they can understand better. If I feel they need to hear it differently, I’m going to adjust the way I talk definitely.

(interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Gibson adjusted the way she approached students based on the individual student needs and by doing so, she is better able to connect with them and to ensure that they have the knowledge necessary to be successful.

Mr. Montgomery emphasized the importance of connecting students to the appropriate resources and cautions that advisors cannot assume the student is coming in with a blank slate and that asking intentional questions is critical to understanding the needs of the student as an individual. He believed that the diversity of students at SSCC required that advisors be willing and able to connect them with the appropriate academic and non-academic resources that will help them to be successful. He noted that SSCC, unlike some of the four-year institutions, does not have the financial capability to provide the comprehensive support that students need such as mental health or counseling services, childcare, and other support. As a result, Mr. Montgomery suggested that he and other advisors must begin to “look through the prism or paradigm of other students to figure out how to help them solve the issue at hand” (interview, October 2, 2018).
Mr. Montgomery and Ms. Flaherty also addressed the need to adjust the advising session based upon the needs of the student. When advising the student, Nancy, who came to the appointment with two young children who quickly became restless, Mr. Montgomery admitted that there were important items of information that he did not cover because he knew that the student would not be able to process the information if she was worried about her children running in and out of the office. He wanted to be sensitive to her experience and needs and to be sure that she left with her goals met. Ms. Flaherty also acknowledged times in which she has adjusted the advising session based upon the student in front of her. She stated that there have been times in which students with children have come into the office and she has had to shorten the advising session. She explained:

You know for instance the girl that comes in with three kids and they’re screaming and she’s apologizing, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, and sometimes it’s frustrating. But I get it. You didn’t have a babysitter. You got all these babies that are screaming and I know that if that mom sits down here, she’s got to be quick. We got to get it over with. I’m not going over that whole blue folder. We’re getting her schedule. We’re checking the A, B, and C and we’re getting her out of here. I think it’s just making sure that you make them comfortable. (interview, October 2, 2018)

The ability to view the students as individuals and to gauge their needs at the moment they are in the advising session is a key aspect of being a culturally competent advisor. Ms. Flaherty expressed that she was frustrated when the student had children in the office with her screaming. Mr. Montgomery may have been frustrated when Nancy’s young boy kicked the desk or the young girl spilled her crackers. However, both Ms. Flaherty and Mr. Montgomery understood
that they needed to do whatever they could to meet the needs of the student at that moment in
time without judgment.

**Theme Seven: Continuing Education, Transparency, and Dialogue around Cultural Competence**

An additional theme that emerged within the study involves the desire for continued
education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence as it relates to privilege, bias, and diversity. This theme is tangible to both of the research questions as it speaks to the
advisors’ own awareness of how their experiences with privilege and bias shape their understanding of the students they advise as well as the strategies (or lack of strategies) they use to inform culturally competent advising practices. Each of the advisors within the study expressed the need for widespread, college-wide transparent dialogue and education about cultural competence. While some were specific in their ideas of how this could be accomplished, other expressed a general desire for more knowledge.

Ms. Richards and Mr. Montgomery possessed the most formal knowledge and awareness around concepts of privilege and bias, and each suggested that the college needs to engage in continued dialogue at a broader level. Ms. Richards believed that SSCC is making progress in terms of increasing diversity in new students enrolled but believed these efforts are only part of the conversation. She asserted that broader discussion of diversity and inclusion is necessary and stated:

There is a focus on enrolling diverse populations which to be honest is good but that’s just part of it. We had something at our college wide meeting that was a diversity presentation, but it’s not really discussed. I would not say privilege and oppression are discussed. Or, the people that discuss them are the people that don’t need to discuss
them, right? Like, I’m not saying I’m the most enlightened person in the world but I know about it because it’s part of my education. But some of the other teachers and I think other teachers and administrators don’t know about it. Unless you’re exposed to it, you don’t know and it’s just not talked about. (interview, October 3, 2018)

Ms. Richards shared that she believed that individuals other than just those working in fields like social work should be involved in the conversation and expressed a sense of fatigue and stated, “I teach about this all the time and stuff like that, but it’s kind of like, there are other things I’ve got to do” (interview, October 3, 2018). Though the concepts are important, Ms. Richards believed they should be discussed and emphasized college-wide rather than being the responsibility of individual departments.

Mr. Montgomery also suggested that the college, and many higher education institutions in general, are not yet willing to engage in open, honest, and at times—uncomfortable—conversations about the topics of privilege, bias, and diversity. Much like Ms. Richard’s statement regarding recruitment of diverse populations being a good first step but not enough, Mr. Montgomery expressed a similar sentiment. He stated that he is more guarded when expressing his views than he may have been in the past. He provided an example of a time in which he was asked to teach a class at a college where he was employed full time. The institution had entered into a partnership with an organization in Saudi Arabia, and Mr. Montgomery had agreed to teach a summer class for students coming to the United States. Mr. Montgomery was frustrated that the course was scheduled to be an evening course which met from 6:00-8:00 in the evening over the course of four to five weeks, which took place during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan during which time individuals fast during the day. Mr. Montgomery questioned the logic of scheduling a course at a time during which the students
would not have eaten for close to twelve or more hours. He also had concerns about the support being offered to the students, the majority of whom were under the age of 18 and were away from home for the first time in a new country. When Mr. Montgomery voiced his concern to the administrative staff overseeing the project, he was accused of stereotyping the students. He explained to the administrators that he was trying to ensure that they were prepared and could ensure a smooth transition for the students. As Mr. Montgomery reflects upon the experience, he is still frustrated by the response of the administrators at what should not have been such a challenging conversation. He has since found himself in other situations in which he thought he could approach the subject of race or bias, but found that the conversation did not go well. In turn, he was more reserved and selective about when he engages in conversations. He explained:

There are just folks who are so uncomfortable with the conversations. They would rather not have conversations about race, ethnicity, differences and bias and gender. And so if I’m honest, I’m probably a little more guarded about the conversations. I’m still willing to have them, but I’m less comfortable. My feeling is there’s just a lot of folks who would rather not have the conversation and that’s dangerous because then you’re purposely staying blind to student needs. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Mr. Montgomery’s response is significant in that he is someone who exhibited a heightened awareness about the issues of privilege and bias, and yet, he does not feel that he can be completely open in discussing these topics despite his acknowledgement that they are critical for ensuring that the needs of individual students are being met.

Though Ms. Flaherty does not have the formal education or training around issues of cultural competence, much like the other advisors in the study, she suggested a need for training, transparency, and discussion. She explained:
We don’t talk about it [privilege, bias, diversity]. I think that as a college we talk about it but in my advising kind of bubble with my colleagues, we don’t talk about it a lot. I wish we did because I’m sure my coworkers have tips and tricks that they do or backgrounds that they have…I don’t know how they’re having conversations with students. I would hope that they’re giving them the resources that we have. But we don’t talk about it a lot unfortunately. (interview, October 2, 2018)

Ms. Flaherty admitted that she is still exploring her own understanding of privilege and bias and the ways in which this impacts her advising practices, and she wants to learn strategies to ensure that she is engaging in advising that is culturally competent. She also expressed a desire to see students engaging in conversation about difference. She believed it would be a good opportunity for students from different identity groups to come together before or after class to get to know each other. She referred to the students she advises in welding and automotive and said,

A lot of times those automotive and welding guys, they walk in, and they’ve got their big trucks out there [in the parking lot]. They grew up on a farm. They go in the welding class. They’ve never probably talked to anybody of a different nationality ever. It we could as a college help students to do that, that would be a great thing. Sometimes what we do is segregate people We have this thing called Super Sunday and we’ll pull all the kids from Calloway and they’re hanging out with kids from Clinton. Let’s put the Calloway kids with the kids from the country and see what happens. It would be awesome if we could do something like that. (interview, October 2, 2018).

Ms. Flaherty’s desire to bring different identity groups together so that they can share stories and experience reflects her own growth. As an advisor, she became more aware of privilege and bias once she began meeting and hearing the diverse stories of the students she advises.
Ms. Gibson expressed a similar desire to create a space for students to share their differences in culture. She shared a story from her experience working at a company which employed a large number of staff from India. During the Christmas holiday, the company imposed the policy of stating Happy Holidays rather than Merry Christmas. Ms. Gibson explained that one of her team members from India asked her why she was not celebrating her holidays. She responded “We wouldn’t want to offend you.” She shared that her team member replied, “Well, we came to America to celebrate your holidays.” Ms. Gibson believes that there is often a misconception about what might be offensive “when we never really ask about it” (interview, October 3, 2018). She believed that SSCC should allow for more intentional and visible celebrations of holidays no matter what religion is represented. She believed that by being more open to celebration of different cultures, awareness and acceptance of difference would increase.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

The advisors’ lived experiences, privileges, and biases as well as their cultural competence inform their advising practices and the strategies they utilize for informing a culturally competent advising experience for students. Each of the advisors in the study demonstrated at minimum an awareness of the concepts of privilege and bias and provided examples of the complicated nature of how experiences within their own lives impact their interactions with the students they advise. They suggested that seeing the student as an individual and making a connection were two of the most fundamental aspects of advising. The ability to view students as individuals and make connections is directly related to the advisor’s own lived experience and awareness of their privileges and biases. Mr. Montgomery illustrated this idea when he reflects upon the strategies he employs to connect with students from different
identity groups. He cited Maya Angelou’s poem “I rise” to illustrate his belief that advisors should be able and willing to connect with students no matter their identity group. He explained that though Angelou is writing the poem from a female, African-American identity, persons across multiple identity groups may find commonality within the poem. As a White male, Mr. Montgomery may not identify with the experience of an African-American woman, but he can listen and learn and find common points of empathy.

Each of the advisors demonstrated an understanding and awareness of the concepts of privilege and bias and adapted their advising practices to reflect this awareness. However, the depth of the individual advisor’s awareness of privilege and bias shaped the practices they utilize in advising.
Chapter Five: Discussion

According to the literature, cultural competence is a critical competency for those working in the helping professions such as college counseling and advising (Barr & Strong, 1988; Cheatham, 1991; Harper, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford, 1998; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Pope, 1995; Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2004). In addition, the literature illustrates a significant connection between strong academic advising and student retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Muraskin & Wilner, 2004; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Upcraft, Mullendore, Barefoot, & Fiddler, 1993). Yet, practitioners within higher education, including academic advisors, often do not receive adequate training in the areas of privilege, bias or cultural competence (McEwen & Rooper, 1994; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Pope & Reynolds, 2997; Talbot, 1996; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). However, McClenneney (2013) suggests that colleges must invest in the faculty and staff who engage in work related to student success such as advising.

Research Findings

The objective of this case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which academic advisors’ lived experiences as well as potential hidden or implicit biases influence their approaches to the students they advise. The study also sought to understand how well the advisors understood their experiences with privilege and bias. The following research questions were examined:

1. How do an advisor’s lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?
2. What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?
The data analysis produced a number of themes, which were present within all four of the advisors within the study. These include: belief and bias shape all aspects of an advisor’s work with students, personal awareness of privilege positively impacts the advising experience, lived experiences shape us and our work in advising, building relationships is necessary for culturally competent advising, advising students toward independence with support, treating each student as individual with different needs and experiences, and continuing education, transparency, and conversation about privilege, bias, and cultural competence. These findings are significant in that they have theoretical and practical implications for the body of knowledge surrounding advising theory and practice and student success and retention, specifically within the two-year college setting.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study seeks to expand upon the work of Pope and Reynolds (1997) who adapted guidelines for multicultural competence within the field of student affairs from the field of counseling psychology. Sue et al. (1982) and Pederson (1988) produced the decisive multicultural work in counseling psychology by identifying multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills as the foundation of multicultural competence (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011). Though multicultural competence has been emphasized in the area of student affairs, there are few studies (Ume-Nwagbo, 2011) on multicultural competence levels of post-secondary faculty or academic advisors. Yet when counselors mistakenly ignore or minimize the impact of oppressive social structures on their clients, they may unwillingly perpetuate discriminatory practices (Cook, Lusk, Miller, Dodier & Salazer, 2012, Sue & Sue, 2008).

Seven themes emerged from the data analysis and are presented within the context of the current literature on academic advising, multicultural competence, privilege, and bias. The study
examined how advisors’ lived experiences and awareness of privilege and bias informs their advising practices as well as the strategies they utilized to practice culturally competent academic advising.

**Theme One: Belief and bias shape all aspects of an advisor’s work with students.**

Each of the advisors within the study shared at least one interaction with a student during which time their own personal beliefs and assumptions shaped the advising session. Three out of four of the advisors acknowledged that the way they approached the student’s individual situation was influenced, at least initially, by biases or beliefs that they developed from their own lived experiences. This further supports the theories of implicit cognition developed by Greenwald & Krieger (2006) which suggest that a number of mental processes function outside of consciousness and that past experiences influence behavior despite the fact that the individual may not remember or be aware of the experience.

Each of the advisors disclosed having specific beliefs regarding what characteristics successful students exhibit. Their responses included: academic ability, intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation (making life better for family), a willingness to proactively reach out to faculty and staff, including advisors, coming to college with clearly defined goals and plans, demonstrated engagement “having some skin in the game,” and being in college “for the right reasons.” The advisors’ perceptions support the literature of Greenwald & Krieger (2006) which posits that implicit attitudes, much like implicit memory, remain unidentified to the individual but may produce favorable or unfavorable feelings and attitudes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Conversely, an attitude that is explicit operates under the assumption that the individual is aware of his or her favorable or unfavorable opinion and has been able to reflect upon the rationale for the associated feelings. The advisors’ perceptions
regarding the characteristics of successful students are informed by both implicit and explicit attitudes.

**Theme Two: Personal awareness of privilege strengthens the advising experience.**

Each of the advisors within the study acknowledges the idea of privilege whether in terms of race, gender, or socioeconomic class, and identified specific examples from their lives during which time they benefitted from privilege. These incidents included: the expectation of attending a post-secondary institution, having housing and food security, being surrounded by two-parent households, being white in a predominately White community, and not having to think about privilege by virtue of being privileged. Each of the advisors asserted that having an awareness of their privilege allows them to be more informed advisors. This finding supports the literature of Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) which suggests that self-awareness, which they define as being aware of one’s own biases, assumptions, worldview, and areas of discomfort, is a crucial component of “developing culturally sensitive and affirming helping skills” (p. 86).

In addition to acknowledging the ways in which they have benefitted from privilege, each of the advisors identified at least one way in which their awareness has helped to improve their work in advising. These included: adjusting language to be more friendly to first-generation college students, checking their individual assumptions about a student’s motives and decisions, avoiding making generalizations about students based upon how they “look on paper,” and reflecting upon their initial negative reactions to students who may share information that they do not agree with. These strategies require the advisor to examine an individual student’s situation from different perspectives and may allow for a better understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who are different in race, class, gender or sexuality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).
Theme Three: Lived experience informs an advisor’s work with students. The concepts of privilege and bias are embedded within the advising experience both from the advisor’s own lived experiences and background and with the lived experiences of the students. Each of the advisors in the study was asked to reflect upon their identity group as it relates to race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. Within the discussion about identity, each of the advisors disclosed examples from their personal history that illustrated their knowledge of privilege afforded to members of some identity groups. They also disclosed examples of their own personal biases and reflected upon why they may feel this way about a specific identity group. Each of the advisors also discussed at least one experience with a student which challenged or influenced their individual biases or assumptions. Personal experience as it intersects with student experience, informs the ways in which the advisors in this study work with students. Each of the advisors identified a minimum of one experience with a student during which time the student’s story intersected with their own beliefs or assumptions. This intersection led the advisor to pause and to begin to reflect upon their reaction, whether positive or negative, and helped to inform future advising sessions. This theme and emerging discussion from the advising interviews and discussions supports the literature of Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller (2004) who assert that an understanding of the diverse experiences of others can create insight and openness. Failure to develop this type of awareness may lead those in the counseling or helping profession to make negative assumptions or come to inappropriate conclusions. Awareness, knowledge, and skills are critical components of work in student affairs and in academic advising (Reynolds, 1995b). In order to ensure that they abide by this ethical creed, counselors and those working within helping professions, such as academic advising, must have an understanding of the issues that their clients and students experience. Through utilizing
practices within the advising that are informed by their own understanding of privilege and bias, the advisors can minimize making negative assumptions and ill-informed recommendations.

**Theme Four: Building relationships is necessary for culturally competent advising.**

Each of the advisors within the study acknowledged that the establishment of meaningful relationships with students is critical to successful advising. However, the strategies the advisors employ to connect with students differ depending upon their educational and career backgrounds, their philosophy of advising, and their own biases and assumptions about what students need to be successful. Though the individual advising philosophies differed, there were a number of commonalities including: the need for active listening strategies, the ability to connect students to the appropriate resources, finding a connection or something in common with the student, building trust, being willing to have honest or difficult conversations, and sharing empathy when appropriate. The advisors’ philosophies support the literature for building effective relationships with students. Reynolds (1995b) asserts that basic helping and advising knowledge and skills necessary for effective relationships with students, faculty, and staff include micro-counseling skills (active listening, empathy, nonverbal skills, paraphrasing), conflict and crisis management, problem-solving, confrontation, relationship building, consultation, and mentoring. The strategies they utilize, specifically in regard to empathy and connection, support Pope and Reynolds (1997) assertion that culturally competent student affairs practitioners have the “capability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from themselves” (p. 271).

The advisors’ philosophies also support literature related to academic advising, including that of Appreciative Advising, which involves an intentional and collaborative effort to ask
positive, open-ended questions designed to optimize a student’s educational experience and assist them in reaching their goals (Bloom, Huston, & He, 2008).

An additional aspect of relationship-building involved the space in which students are advised. Two of the four advisors were intentional about creating a warm and inviting space for students, which helps to facilitate the advisor and advisee relationship. In addition to the standard advising materials on the walls and desk (catalogs, academic calendars, rights and responsibilities, safety information), two of the advisors had more than a few personal photographs of family, pets, or other students, signs or wall hangings with inspirational sayings or words of encouragement, and boxes of tissues or candy. This intentional creation of a welcoming space supports AA strategies, specifically the Disarm phase during which time relationship building is the most crucial (Bloom, Huston, & He, 2008).

**Theme Five: Advising students toward independence with support.** One significant theme that emerged from the study involves the dichotomy of facilitating a trusting relationship with students, especially those who are most vulnerable, and yet at the same time not wanting to encourage too much “hand-holding.” Three of the four advisors within the study spoke to this dichotomy and expressed varying levels of comfort in regard to how much high-touch support should occur within the advising relationship. The advisors’ struggle supports the work of Proactive Advising theorists, however, who assert that though the proactive model of advising emphasizes the relational, it does not involve hand-holding or parenting (Varney, 2013; Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). Proactive advising seeks to create intentional interactions with students before issues occur and involves an active concern for a student’s academic progress and a willingness to help student explore and utilize resources that will help them in increasing their success (Varney, 2013).
The approaches that the advisors utilize for moving students toward independence vary depending upon their individual beliefs and assumptions and also relate to their implicit or explicit attitudes. Two of the advisors who have more formalized education and training about the concepts of privilege, bias, and cultural competence, acknowledge that they believe that students should become self-sufficient yet they also understand that the students they work with at Silver Springs need additional support in order to become self-sufficient. They believe in engaging in honest conversations with students, but they also believe that students must make decisions based upon what will work best for the situations. One of the other advisors takes a more direct approach with students and asserts her beliefs about the appropriate pathway for them. She acknowledged that she expects them to be independent and self-sufficient and is rigid in her expectations. Finally, in contrast to the other advisors, one advisor did not acknowledge the need or desire for students to become independent and through her philosophy of advising and interactions with students, demonstrated a willingness to provide high-touch practices for students throughout their time in college.

**Theme Six: Treating each student as an individual with different needs and experiences.** Within the study, each of the advisors expressed the importance of viewing students as individuals. They affirmed the idea that students do not come to college “in a vacuum” and that their role as advisors involves being aware of the complexities of the students’ lives. Each of the four advisors expressed a willingness to adjust their advising strategies depending upon the student’s needs. Advisors cited strategies including: adjusting the length of the advising appointment to fit the student’s schedule or needs, finding and connecting the students with the appropriate resources, determining how much to probe in terms of questioning, and adjusting the language they use to ensure that the student understands the information they
are receiving (for example saying “the courses you need to take” rather than “pre-requisite courses). This supports the literature of Kimball and Campbell (2013) who suggest that academic advisors should be “flexible, eclectic practitioners able to adapt their strategies in accordance with the needs of their students” (p. 6). The students that advisors serve are influenced by social, cultural, and academic backgrounds and interpret their unique experiences in ways that make sense within their framework. Advisors, in turn, must be able to truly see the student they are working with and understand and respond to student diversity and difference, which requires them to adapt their approaches for the individual student (Drake, 2015).

Theme Seven: Desire for continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around the concepts of privilege, bias, and cultural competence. Within the context of the study, each of the four advisors expressed a desire for continued education, transparency, and dialogue about the concepts of privilege, bias, and cultural competence. This supports current literature from the most recent national survey of Academic Advising in 2011 from NACADA, which found that many institutions are failing to provide academic advisors with the adequate training and professional development necessary to positive impact student success (Voller, 2011). Past president of NACADA, Casey Self, suggests that no matter who is providing academic advising at an institution, the success or failure of advising depends largely upon a solid training and professional development program. Self contends that “anyone assisting students with academic curricula, course registration, relationship building, and general or specific student success services must receive continuous support in the form of training and development” (Self as cited in Voller, 2011, p. 1). When institutions fail to provide adequate training and professional development for academic advisors, current and future students are negatively impacted by advisors who are ill-equipped to help them to persist (Voller, 2011).
Two of the advisors provided suggestions and ideas of how they would like to see their individual institutions become more engaged in conversations surrounding privilege and cultural competence not just within the area of academic advising but across the entire institution. Another advisor suggested that there was a need for more than just the programs traditionally associated with this type of work, such as Human Services or Sociology, to become engaged and responsible for promoting conversation and professional development about the concepts of privilege and cultural competence. Despite their varying levels of awareness and understanding, four out of four advisors expressed a strong desire for continued support and conversation about the topic.

**Practical Applications**

Despite the importance of academic advising to student success and retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Muraskin & Wilner, 2004; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Tinto, 1999; Upcraft, Mullendore, Barefoot, & Fiddler, 1993) as well as the need for culturally competent student affairs practitioners (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004), there remains a gap in the literature and professional development and training for academic advisors, specifically within the community college setting. Community colleges, with open access policies, have emphasized access for traditionally underrepresented students but have yet to design systems to support the success of these students (McClenney, 2013). Inadequate time and resources have been allotted for training and professional development. In the most recent NACADA survey in 2011, many institutions were not providing adequate training and support necessary for impacting student success (Voller, 2011). As states move toward performance-based funding models, student success and retention are crucial for securing state appropriates (McKinney &
Hagedorn, 2017). Advising may be positioned as critical to student success; however, advisors must have access to training and professional development particularly in areas such as cultural competence. Practical implications for this study involve providing access to culturally responsive training and professional development opportunities for advisors, specifically for those at the community college level, offering standardized advising and culturally competent materials and practices across campuses and colleges, and developing cultural competencies specific to community college advisors.

**Enhanced training and professional development experiences for advisors.** Self (as cited in Voller, 2011) suggests that the success or failure of advising depends upon whether or not a comprehensive professional development program is provided. Each of the advisors in this study expressed the desire for additional professional development as well as a platform for continued conversation. SSCC, as part of a larger system, may not have funding available to send each of its advisors to a national conference; however, work could be undertaken at the local or system level to develop standardized and comprehensive culturally responsive training and support. Within the study, Ms. Richards, Ms. Gibson, and Ms. Flaherty mentioned the inclusion of diversity language and initiatives at the college; however, there was no widespread move toward a standardized definition of diversity and inclusion. In addition, there was not a cohesive understanding of how to incorporate the diversity and inclusion initiatives within their advising practices. For example, Ms. Gibson mentioned that diversity and inclusion would be a part of their performance measures as advisors; however, she did not express a clear understanding of how she would be evaluated.

Academic advisors come from a wide variety of educational and career pathways and may serve in multiple capacities within the college (Gordan, Habley, & Grites, 2008). Though
higher education master’s degree programs preparing individuals for careers in student affairs have long emphasized the need for diversity training, advisors are not typically required to hold this type of degree. The diversity in background for academic advisors makes comprehensive training even more critical. However, the NACADA survey of advising in 2011 found that almost one tenth of those surveyed had received no formalized training or development (Voller, 2011). The development of a standardized, culturally responsive advising training would provide a foundation for enhancing student success and retention.

One challenge to adopting and providing standardized, comprehensive, culturally responsive advisor training is limited resources for professional development, especially at the community college level. Colleges like SSCC, which are part of a larger community college system, could collaborate and share funding to develop materials to be utilized across the system. Though attending a national conference such as NACADA may not be possible for all professional advisors at a college or within a system, with administrative or grant support, purchase of an institutional membership would provide access to current research and materials that could be disseminated. At the state level, individual institutions—both four and two year—could work to grow and promote state partnerships with NACADA. Though advising departments may not be financially able to send advisors to national conferences, state conferences could provide an opportunity for alignment with NACADA guidelines and for substantive work on building standard cultural competencies for advisors throughout the state.

A final challenge to providing comprehensive and culturally responsive training involves limitations of time. This may be a greater challenge at community colleges, where there is an almost relentless push for enrollment. Community colleges typically have rolling deadlines, and advisors may find themselves involved in registration and enrollment activities year round.
Training and professional development, specifically when working to develop one’s cultural competence, require that participants have time for training, research, dialogue, and reflection. Online and highly interactive training modules will provide an opportunity for training that will be less intrusive on an advisor’s time; however, opportunities for in-person professional development is critical. Administrative support from the college president, vice-presidents of academics and student affairs, and grants/foundations is another crucial component to building the type of professional development necessary for creating culturally responsive advising.

**Development of culturally responsive advising practices, training, and dialogue.** By providing standardized, culturally responsive training, colleges can positively impact student success. The Proactive and Appreciative Advising (AA) structures provide solid foundations for facilitating culturally responsive advising and should be incorporated into any culturally responsive advising training (Glenen, 1975; Upcraft & Kramer, 1995; Earl, 1998; Varney, 2013; Bloom et al., 2013). Within Proactive Advising, the advisor utilizes culturally competent advising strategies such as listening, becoming an active part of the student’s life by communicating at regular intervals of time, and intentionally looking beyond the surface to identify what students really need (Varney, 2013). The advisors in this study emphasized that they are more than registration clerks and that successful advising practices must go well beyond surface interactions. Their philosophy supports the literature which suggests that proactive advisors understand that a student’s academic success is directly impacted by their overall well-being (Varney, 2013).

AA (Bloom et al., 2013) supports culturally responsive advising practices in that allows the advisor to form a meaningful relationship with students. Because it utilizes a social constructivist framework and is rooted in appreciative inquiry, there in an emphasis on
leveraging positivity to mobilize the student toward action. AA would work well as a culturally responsive advising strategy and could be standardized across colleges and systems as it provides advisors with a “theory-to-practice” package with concrete suggestions (Bloom, Huston, and He, 2013). Communication, whether verbal or non-verbal, is a fundamental tenant of AA and allows both students and advisors to “extend their cognitive understanding beyond that determined by educational settings and experiences” (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2013, p. 88). These types of strategies are necessary for informing culturally competent advising practices.

Advising administrators should develop standardized advising strategies and training that promotes culturally responsive advising. These strategies should be visible on the advising website and within individual advising offices. Each advisor should be encouraged to develop their philosophy of advising with consideration for how they are engaging in meaningful, culturally responsive advising practices. As advising administrators on-board new advisors, dialogue and training about the topics of privilege, bias, and cultural competence should be ongoing. Advisors should have opportunities to dialogue with other advisors within their areas as well as others throughout the college. Advising staff could participate in book chats with all individuals reading a common text that promotes understanding about the students they advise. Frequent student feedback should be encouraged and made available for advisors to discuss and reflect upon. Open dialogue and reflection, in concert with proactive and AA advising strategies, will help to ensure that the advisors are engaging in culturally responsive advising practices.

**Development of cultural competencies specific to community college advisors.**

Though Pope and Reynolds (1997) developed multicultural competencies for student affairs practitioners, they do not always directly align with the unique role and responsibilities of advisors. NACADA refers to tenants of cultural competence within its core values of advising
and suggests that advisors be aware of the individual experiences of the students they serve; however, NACADA stops short of suggesting that all advisors be culturally competent. Advisors within the community college setting must be attuned with the needs and experiences of the diverse populations they serve; therefore, a standardized set of competencies related to cultural competence, privilege, and bias could make a significant positive impact on their advising practices and ultimately student success. Harding (2008) asserts that it would be difficult to build widespread multicultural competence into the field of academic advising as there are limited numbers of graduate level programs in advising. In an effort to address this gap, he provides a guideline for assessing an advisor’s level of multicultural awareness and the associated skill that is demonstrated. While these would provide a foundation for the development of competencies to be utilized for community college advisors, additional work needs to be done regarding the demonstrated skills for each competency. For example, Harding (2008), suggests that as advisors grow in their levels of cultural competence, they begin to understand their own responsibility in providing culturally competent advising. However, acceptance and acknowledgement of difference occurs as the third level of Intercultural Awareness on Harding’s (2008) continuum. With advisors at different levels on the continuum, it will require targeted training depending upon the unique needs of each advisor. Within a community college setting, advisors may not have that amount of time for development of awareness and acknowledgement given that the majority of their students are likely coming to them from different places of identity and experience. An advisor must be able to acknowledge and accept difference early on and develop skills and strategies for finding positive ways to approach this difference and ultimately build strategies for building upon the value difference
brings. Comprehensive, culturally responsive training and professional development must be available to all advisors and in multiple formats.

**Development and implementation of culturally competent hiring practices.**

Culturally responsive training programs are essential for ensuring culturally competent advising practices, yet an additional component involves the hiring of diverse advising staff. Though NACADA’s most recent (2011) National Survey of Advising did not request that advisors provide information regarding identity (race, ethnicity, gender), participants were asked to indicate their role, whether professional staff or faculty advisor, at the college. In general, the majority of institutions surveyed indicated that both professional staff and full-time faculty were responsible for advising. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report on the *Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty* (2016) indicates that a majority of full-time faculty at institutions nationally are either White males (41 percent) or White females (35 percent). Though this figure does not account for full-time professional academic advisors, it suggests a gap in diversity among faculty advisors who are engaged in significant advising interactions. Additional data should be collected regarding the demographic identities of professional staff advisors, though at the community college where the study was conducted, a majority of the advisors were White and seems to reflect the trend at similar colleges in the area.

In order to ensure diversity within advising staff, advising administrators must work with college leadership to solicit robust hiring pools. Placing position advertisements in professional organizations emphasizing traditionally underrepresented groups would allow colleges and universities to reach a larger, and more diverse, audience. An additional consideration for hiring advisors as the community college level involves recruiting staff from different academic backgrounds. For example, one of the advisors in the study had been a student at Silver Springs
Community College. Though she had not yet earned her Master’s degree, she had a unique perspective and knowledge about the college and the experiences of the students she advises. Her perspective of having been a first-generation, working parent and student at a community college provided her with a unique opportunity to connect with students in a way that the other advisors were unable to despite having higher levels of education. Advising administrators must take into consideration factors beyond education level alone and look at potential candidates holistically.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations within the study that should be considered for future research implications. The first is related to the diversity of the participants within the study. Though there is diversity related to socioeconomic class, gender, and educational pathways, each of the advisors who participated in the study is White. While this is representative of the advising demographics at SSCC as well as institutions nationally, future research in a different geographic area could result in more diversity among participants. Another consideration is the size of the institution and overall number of traditionally underrepresented students. It would be beneficial to conduct the study at a larger or more diverse institution with advisors from different identity groups to explore additional emergent themes and variability.

**Future Research**

Further research could complement and expand upon the themes that emerged from this study. A study focusing on faculty advisors could provide additional insight in that the faculty advisors may view advising as simply a mandatory function—whether positive or negative—of their full-time role within the classroom. The faculty approaches to the intersection of the lived experiences between student and faculty could result in themes for additional exploration and could inform differentiated approaches to culturally responsive training for faculty advisors. In
addition to focusing on faculty advisors, the inclusion of the student voice could lend an important perspective. It could be insightful to study the ways in which interactions with advisors who are culturally responsive impact students. Just as listening to student stories and sharing experiences may contribute to an advisor’s understanding of privilege and difference, it could be useful to examine the ways in which a student’s mindset and beliefs change or grow as a result of culturally responsive advising practices and relationships. A study which includes racial diversity of the advisors could provide insight into how their lived experiences shape their relationships with students and what differences there may be in terms of their approaches to advising.

**Summary of Chapter Five**

As colleges become increasingly diverse and emphasis on student success and retention grows, academic advisors must engage in culturally responsive advising practices. Though none of us can ever be fully knowledgeable about all cultures and identities, being aware of and reflecting upon our own experiences, privileges, and biases can allow us to make meaningful connections. Advisors, specifically those at community colleges, are situated in spaces in which they can have a significant impact on students from the moment the student sets foot on the college campus. Whether or not the student finds the experience to be positive rests on the advisor’s ability to be culturally responsive. College administrators must continue to invest efforts, both time and monetary, in providing professional development opportunities for staff and faculty advisors at their institutions. These opportunities must go beyond general college policy and academic update meetings and should allow for honest and open dialogue about privilege, bias, and cultural competence. Advisors must be open to appreciating and celebrating the rich diversity of experience of their students.
Appendix A

Informational Interview Survey

1. What is your role at Silver Springs Community College (SSCC)?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. What is your educational background (Highest Degree Level, Degree conferred, etc.)?
4. How did you come into your current role at SSCC?
5. What types of students do you advise (first-year, transfer, ESL, etc.)?
6. Who are your students—What are the demographics of your student body? (For example: racial, linguistic, geographic, ESL/International, etc.)
7. Have you participated in formal training and/or coursework in the areas of race, privilege, or cultural competence? If so, please explain.
8. How would you define diversity (no more than 2-3 sentences)?
9. How would you define privilege (no more than 2-3 sentences)?

Following completion of the Informational Interview Survey, semi-structured, in-person interviews will take place approximately 2-3 weeks after the initial survey. All interviews will be recorded via digital recorder. Each participant will be asked 8-10 questions.
Advisor Interview Protocol

**Philosophy of Advising and Student Success**

Q1. What is your philosophy of advising?

Probe ➔ What factors are most important in cultivating the advisor/student relationship?

Q2. Please identify significant interactions you’ve had with students in an advisor capacity—one positive and one negative.

Probe ➔ In the positive experience, why was it positive?

In the negative experience, why was it negative?

Q3. What traits do successful students exhibit?

Probe ➔ Advisors must steer students along pathways. How do you determine whether a student can be successful on a specific pathway?

Please provide me with an example of a student you’ve worked with who you redirected to another pathway.

**Personal Educational Pathway and Experience**

Q4. Tell me about your educational pathway and how you ended up working in Higher Education and advising.

Probe ➔ Where there certain individuals who served as mentors for you?

Did these mentors belong to a similar identity group (racial, gender, socioeconomic class)

**Personal Awareness and Knowledge of Race, Privilege, and Cultural Competence**

Q5. What did you know about the concepts of privilege, bias, and cultural competence before this study?

Probe ➔ How do you see these concepts being applicable to the field of academic advising?
How comfortable do you feel having conversations about these concepts with your colleagues?

Q6. What is your identity group? Or to which identity groups do you belong?

Probe→ Do the ways we present our identities change depending upon who we are with?

Q7. How do our intersecting identities shape our perspectives and the way we experience the world around us?

Probe→ Can you think of an example within your own life?

What might we learn from the lived experiences and perspectives of others different from ourselves?

Q8. As an advisor, how do you connect in meaningful ways with students who are from different identify groups?

Probe→ How do you know that you are connecting with students?

Has there been a time when you’ve been unable to connect with a student from a different identify group?

Q9. Can you tell me about how your views on privilege, bias, and cultural competence have changed over time?

Probe→ What caused this change? If possible, please provide a specific example.

If your views have not changed over time, please explain why and reflect upon what might cause them to change.

**Campus Climate**

Q10. How are issues such as privilege, bias, and cultural competence treated on campus?

Probe→ Other Faculty/Staff?

Students?
Alumni?

Board of Trustees?

Conclusion

Q11. Is there anything else that you would like to share that you deem would be relevant or important to this study?
Appendix B

Coding, Reduction, Clustering, and Thematic Development

RESEARCH QUESTIONS WITH FINAL THEMES

1. How do advisors lived experiences, privileges, and biases inform their advising practices?
   1. Belief and bias shape all aspects of all advisor’s work with students
   2. Personal awareness of privilege strengthens the advising experience
   3. Lived experiences shape advisors and their work in advising

2. What are the strategies advisors use to inform a multiculturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?
   1. Building relationship is necessary for culturally competent advising
   2. Advising students toward independence with support
   3. Treating each student as an individual with different needs and experiences
   4. Desire for continuing education, transparency, and dialogue around cultural competence

FIRST CYCLE DEVELOPING CLUSTERS

Advising students toward independence

- Balance between hand-holding and push toward self-sufficiency
- Advisor has the ability to have honest and sometimes difficult conversations with students
- Students should do the leg work or at least “have some skin in the game.”

Individual advisor beliefs and bias impact approach to students

- Students in college for the “wrong reasons”
- Assumptions about what pathway a student should pursue/what the student can handle
- Differing ideas about what makes a student successful (intrinsic motivation, reaching out for help, student engagement, academic ability)
Building rapport and meaningful relationships with students

- Office space—warm and welcoming versus sterile environment
- Active listening
- Asking intentional questions
- Treating each and every student as an individual (adjusting conversation, tone, and language as appropriate)
- Expectation of mutual respect
- No one size fits all approach

An understanding of how lived experience shapes us and our work

- Not everyone is like you—direct quote
- Middle class mindset approach
- Lived experience is the best teacher—direct quote
- Judging students based upon their past
- Assumptions and strategies for countering our assumptions

Working in a community college setting is eye opening experience

- Continually challenging assumptions
- Changing mindsets after forming relationships with students and hearing their stories

Need for transparency and ongoing dialogue surrounding topics of diversity, privilege, and bias

- What are my colleagues doing?
- Am I approaching students in the best way?
- Desire for more training and support and open conversation
- More than just increasing diverse applicant pool

SECOND CYCLE CODING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Cycle Coding (Digital Coding Process) 83 Codes – Combined with 1st cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping Students to Be Independent/Being Helpful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Rapport/Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm and welcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student has clear expectations/preparedness for the advising session</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student preparedness for advising engagement/Advising is a two-way street</td>
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<td>Support but helping to build independence desire for students to become self-sufficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student motivation/intrinsic motivation necessary for achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic ability important to success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time management important to success/Students live complicated lives/Non academic issues</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honest and/or tough conversations with students/reality check moments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privilege defined/concept of privilege</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students here for the wrong reasons/Advisor assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparent discussion of diversity/people who need to discuss aren’t/lack of awareness of teachers and administrators unless working in the field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Already immersed/familiar with topics/ diversity work needs to be all of the college’s work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of privilege/difficult for people/aware of different perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal experience shapes our interactions/Middle class mindset</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not everyone’s like you.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not judging others’ decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting students where they are at in life/Treating each student as an individual—Question #2</td>
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<td>Respect must be mutual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admitting when wrong/rapport building</td>
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<td>People as individuals/ lived experience is the best teacher</td>
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<td>People as individuals; respect and tolerance</td>
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<td>What are other people doing? Desire for conversation about privilege with colleagues and students.</td>
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<td>Being student driven. Being in higher ed for the right reasons. Desire to learn about privilege but different approaches.</td>
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<td>Student focused; helping students to navigate non-academic barriers; our students face obstacles; connecting through personal commonalities and experiences; treating each student as an individual; making students comfortable</td>
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<td>Listening; Moving students toward self-sufficiency and independences; providing a strong foundation</td>
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<td>Tough conversations; honest conversations; students not in college for the right reasons</td>
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<td>Judging students by past history; Difficult conversations; Students may or may not be open to listening; some are here for the money and to live off the system; “here for the wrong reasons”</td>
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<td>Making students comfortable; students must listen and be engaged to be successful</td>
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<td>Drive and intrinsic motivation needed for success; academic ability is only one part of success; successful students are engaged and proactively reach out; parent interference in advising.</td>
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<td>Nursing not the right pathway; student has kids so can’t do specific program; And now they graduate</td>
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<td>Putting students on a logical path; children dictate a career choice</td>
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<td>Experience with different cultures/ tolerance when convenient/must adjust when necessary</td>
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<td>Eye opening; lack of awareness; student obligations to family; socioeconomic barriers and rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES easier to talk about; tolerance for religious traditions and needs of students; diversity conversation expanding; perspective on diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusting speech based upon student need; awareness of student need and individual student; making language adjustments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience brings awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience and hearing stories helps bring awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>One aware, must act</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy and connection to the appropriate resources</td>
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</table>
Listening and connecting students to non-academic resources

Experience leads to awareness and compassion

Seeing each student as an individual. Adjusting for the individual student.

Advisor as advocate; empathy for the student; meeting the student and advisor goals

Building rapport through trust and communication

Student plans may not align

Advisor dedication; questioning the role of the advisor; how much help versus pushing self-sufficiency?

How much to help students versus pushing independence

Different pathways to college and to advising; relating to students through shared experiences

Relationships with students

Eye-opening experience talking with students and learning their stories; different backgrounds but can still have empathy

Still learning; eager to learn more;

Being aware of a student’s situation and trying to make informed recommendations

Desire for more open communication and opportunities to discuss the issues and to understand how colleagues approach these topics.

Relating with students through shared experiences; education at Silver Springs saved her

Acknowledge bias and tries to remedy or change

Acknowledging bias and how experience influences.

Pre-judging others, even colleagues

Assumption that people work at a cc because they really want to be there.

Making students comfortable and asking questions to build rapport

Students open up when comfortable and a connection has been made

Making students comfortable; meeting their needs; adapting for each student as an individual

Finding meaningful ways to connect with students from different identity groups.—rapport building

Finding a balance of hand-holding versus self-sufficiency; knowing when to provide which; advising as advice not a prescription

Influence of non-academic barriers; non-academic barriers are harder to recognize

Essential to learn about the student’s wants and needs; exploration is critical for relationship building

Advising limitations; you can’t be all things to all students

Persistence key to successful students

Bias comes from experiences

How bias shapes our approaches to advising

Never becoming complacent; just because we are aware doesn’t mean that we aren’t biased; just in it for the financial aid

Experiences influence bias

Struggle to move past ingrained or implicit biases

Making assumptions at face value

Awareness can lead to change

Warm and welcoming space, encouraging signs, personal items, student led awards

Reassuring students; making connections through compliments and asking questions, causal tone; informal and comfortable with the students
Solid customer service, friendly and causal conversations to put students at ease

**FIRST CYCLE CODING**
*(Pencil & Paper) -74 codes*

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<td>Teaching students to fish</td>
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<td>All about rapport</td>
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<td>Really knowing the students</td>
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<td>Knowing student strengths</td>
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<td>Having fun</td>
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<td>Space and set-up—not liking</td>
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<td>L-shape set up in office-advisor on one side, student on other</td>
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<td>Student must be willing to put in work as well</td>
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<td>Making students comfortable</td>
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<td>Learning experience in advising</td>
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<td>Connecting to resources</td>
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Appendix C

Process Map

Prior to Data Collection:
- Literature, Reflection, and Informal Observations
  - Read and explored literature on advising and multicultural competencies
  - Reflected on personal experiences of advising and multicultural competence
  - Informally observed advisors and interactions with students.
- Identified and Narrowed to Two Research Questions:
  - How do advisors live experiences, privileges, and biases inform advising practices?
  - What are the strategies advisors use to inform a culturally competent advising experience for students from different identity groups?
- Used Literature to Inform and Create Theoretical Framework:
  - Completed literature review
  - Theoretical framework is comprised of: Multicultural competence, privilege, implicit bias, and student success, retention, and engagement in relation to academic advising.

Data Collection
- Developed and Piloted Informational Survey and Interview Protocol
- Sent Follow-up Implicit Bias Assessment and Reflections Prompt to All Participants to Complete.
- Conducted Informational Survey
  - Scheduled Semi-Structured Interviews and Observations of Advising Appointments

Data Analysis
- Phase One, First Cycle:
  - Deductive and Inductive Analysis of data
  - Pencil and paper coding of all data collected
  - 74 codes yielded
- Phase One, Second Cycle:
  - Data was coded using an electronic table in Word
  - Incorporated and reduced codes from first and second cycle
  - 83 codes were yielded

Phase Two
- Reduced 83 codes into six clusters
- Member Checking was conducted

Phase Three
- Six clusters further reduced and developed into seven themes
- Consideration of theme presentation was designed

Findings
- Writing of Findings and Discussion with Reflective Process
- Revisions and Finalized Findings and Discussion

- Reflexive Journaling
- Analytic Memos Were Drafted
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