

Affirmation, Support, and Advocacy: Critical Race Theory and Academic Advising

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The research presented describes the unique challenges of students from historically marginalized communities, particularly Black students, attending predominantly White institutions. Challenges include overt and covert campus racism, daily microaggressions, and limited or no sense of belonging. How are these challenges exacerbated when a student's academic advisor is unable or unwilling to understand their daily experiences on a predominantly White campus? How can academic advisors work to affirm, support, and advocate for underrepresented students during their matriculation? Using critical race theory to improve practice for academic advisors, I call for advisors to gain and maintain a consciousness of the ways race and racism influence not only the experiences of students of color but also their relationships with academic professionals.

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Matriculating through college brings many challenges to students that range from getting connected to seeking academic resources. However, for a student from a historically disenfranchised or racially marginalized community, college matriculation difficulties can be exacerbated because of issues of oppression, experiences with isolation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), and struggles with a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Furthermore, when facing obstacles, for students who lack a key support system, such as one that includes academic advisors, on which to rely, the college experience can begin to feel like a spiraling descent into a hole.

Using critical race theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework, I present practical techniques that can be specifically used by academic advisors when working with students of color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Foundationally vital, CRT centers the experiences of students of color, normalizes racialized experiences, and provides a systemic context for institutional

oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In this article, the experiences of Black or African American students studying at PWIs were intentionally the focus for exploration of the culturally relevant academic advising practices that can address the historical and present day experiences with the racism that they may face. As elaborated herein, Black students find PWIs challenging for a number of reasons, but primarily the adversity stems from experiences with various forms of racism. Therefore, I highlight the ways academic advisors can work with Black students attending PWIs and place a specific focus on experiences of racialized oppression, power, and privilege within PWIs into a theory-to-praxis model.

Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions

PWIs are consistently enrolling more diverse students (Snyder & Dillow, 2015), yet Black students continue to report low levels of satisfaction at PWIs (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lee, 2016; Mitchell, Wood, & Witherspoon, 2010; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Black students and other students of color have dealt with alienation, isolation, and stereotyping at PWIs for decades (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). More specifically, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that since their study commenced in 1992, Black students reported significant degrees of dissatisfaction on PWI campuses.

Although Harper and Hurtado's (2007) meta-analysis has aged a decade, the reported experiences remain pervasive. In 2012, Hurtado and Ruiz reported survey findings from a national study of 4,037 participating students of color across 31 campuses. Their findings included higher numbers of Black students reporting racial incidents to campus authorities than their peers; more than one half of the Black students described feelings of exclusion from events and activities in peer environments while also experiencing racially hostile comments on a regular basis. In all cases and on all campuses represented, Black students reported more experiences of hostility than did other students of color.

Rivard (2014) conducted a similar cross-racial qualitative study and found that Black and White

participants experienced the same university climate in distinctively different ways. Black participants primarily described issues of hostility and segregation, while their White peers did not. In addition, consistent with examples of stereotype threat (see Steele & Aronson, 1995), Black study participants felt the need to prove themselves in the classroom.

In 2016, Lee conducted a qualitative analysis on the lived collegiate experiences of Black students at a PWI. All participants described daily experiences with hostility, racial microaggressions, poor relationships with White faculty members and staff, and blatant racism in the surrounding community. Consistent with Harper and Hurtado (2007), Hurtado and Ruiz (2012), Rivard (2014), and several higher education scholars (Fries-Brit, 2004; Harper, 2012; McDougle, Way, & Yash, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001), Lee maintained that PWIs were uneasy, uncomfortable, discriminatory, hostile, and oppressive spaces for students of color, in particular, Black students.

Racialized and discriminatory spaces for Black students include those where one is faced with daily microaggressions (see Solórzano et al., 2001), a sense of onliness (see Harper 2012), stereotype threat (see Steele & Aronson, 1995), and both overt and covert racism (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2001; Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013). Examples common to college campuses include racially incited vandalism, such as an Eastern Michigan University incident in 2016 (Slagter, 2016), or racially insensitive enterprises, such as blackface parties (Gebreyes, 2014; Kingkade, 2015; Sola, 2015). Facing such trials day in and day out can lead to *racial battle fatigue* (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), which can result in physical and socioemotional health complications for students. Therefore, when applied to praxis, critical- and social justice-oriented theories, such as CRT, can inform academic advising practice in important ways.

Academic Advising and Black Students

Various perspectives and approaches make up academic advising. In a foundational explanation, Trombley and Holmes (1981) defined academic advising as “the provision of educationally-related information and guidance to students confronted with choices and alternative paths in their education” (p. 2). Baxter Magolda (2003) defined academic advising as a practice promoting self-authorship, encouraging student exploration, re-

flection, meaning making, and understanding of personal identity as a learner and knower. Williams (2007) outlined several academic advising approaches including, intrusive advising (Earl, 1987; Heisserer & Parette, 2002), advising as teaching (Lowenstein, 2005), and strengths-based advising (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005), but the most well-known approaches, prescriptive and developmental advising (Grites & Gordon, 2000), were first explained in the 1970s.

Prescriptive advising is typically described as narrowly focused on curricular information and other academic needs that create a relationship where the advisor holds all of the knowledge and expertise (Crookston, 1972/2009). In this case, the student presents a need (e.g., register for classes), and the advisor prescribes the solution (e.g., a list of classes to take) and expects the student to follow the directions closely. In contrast, developmental advising was described as a more holistic approach, connecting academic courses to broad academic, career and vocational, and life goals (Crookston, 1972/2009; O'Banion, 1972/2009). Furthermore, developmental advising is practiced to lead students to self-authorship and the fulfillment of their own personal desires (Crookston, 1972/2009). O'Banion (1972/2009) argued for use of both, citing moments when prescriptive advising provides necessary information or is used to build relationships with students.

As frontline student-support professionals, advisors play a central role in student success (Mitchell & Rosiek, 2005). Research has consistently associated academic advising with positive student graduation and persistence outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and yet has been considered a primary issue for Black students (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2010). This sad situation has not changed since the 1980s when Burrell and Trombley (1983) found academic advising a top concern for Black students, who specifically reported feeling uncomfortable working with White advisors.

In addition to the practices of advisors, the physical spaces for advising have been seen as problematic. Through contemplation of advising policies that go beyond advisor-advisee interactions, Mitchell et al. (2010) explored the ways that advising offices and institutional approaches to advising ignore the racial nature of the environment: “Spaces are not race-neutral, and thus serve to entrap individuals of color in certain racialized representations, roles, contracts, hierarchies, and

other hegemonic processes” (p. 296). Using Foucault’s discussion, from the 1970s, of Bentham’s panopticon, from 1798, and a discussion on critical geography, Mitchell et al. (2010) argued that many advising offices were set up for the supervision of advisors and the efficiency and expediency of academic appointments, but not for meeting the needs of diverse students. Several researchers specifically explored the experiences of Black students and academic advising (Carnaje, 2016; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2005; Museus & Ravello, 2010), and others engaged in the necessary work of connecting social justice to academic advising (Cunningham, 2016; Harding, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2010; Mitchell & Rosiek, 2005; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Williams, 2007). This article provides an additional perspective to add to the discourse.

Consideration of Black students’ experiences with White advisors proves pivotal to the advising of students because the overwhelming majority of academic advisors at PWIs are White (Kena et al., 2015). When advisors, particularly White advisors, bring little knowledge, experience, or desire to advising interactions, they cannot understand the way racialized experiences may impact Black students or develop helpful relationships with all of their students. In such cases, advisors may find a CRT lens or other similar social justice and cultural competency theories and practices useful. Adopting a critical race framework or engaging in advising as a form of praxis allows advisors to challenge their normative practices around advising.

Understanding Critical Race Theory and Racialized Oppression

Although working in a practice-based field, academic advisors must find ways to connect theory to practice. Theory provides a foundation for expertise, practice, and knowledge (McEwen, 2003). Theories also explain ways practitioners can communicate about student experiences to provide a “common language” within a “community of scholars” (Knefelkamp, 1982, p. 380). As suggested in this article, advisors can utilize CRT and other such critical perspectives to connect student experiences and research outcomes to everyday practices.

Professional communities such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), and NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) set social justice

and cultural competency as foundational skills for higher educational professionals, in general, and academic advisors specifically. Therefore, by not learning about historical implications and present day experiences of diverse students within postsecondary institutions, advisors undoubtedly compromise their relationships with others (Dreasher, 2014). For an academic advisor, cultural competency includes self-reflection and introspection on one’s own identity and positionality as well as biases and perceived stereotypes, but it also requires an interest and commitment to exploring the experiences of others (Cornett-DeVito & Reeves, 1999; Cunningham, 2016). By operating through a culturally competent lens or framework, such as CRT, academic advisors can greatly influence graduation rates, time to degree, and matriculation experiences for student populations marginalized by race (Harding, 2012).

Critical Race Theory

Because it is deeply embedded within U.S. society, racism is sometimes difficult to recognize and address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998); therefore, CRT is used to normalize and analyze racialized experiences within research and practice. In addition, CRT is exercised to challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourses on race, gender, and class because it reveals the way these social constructs intersect to affect people and communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Rooted in critical legal studies, the body of CRT literature expanded and was applied within education, particularly higher education. Over the past few decades, scholars have used CRT to explore collegiate experiences of students of color and to provide a space to combat any deficit language and thinking associated with historically marginalized populations (see Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

For academic advising with postsecondary students, CRT serves as a theoretical framework through which one can understand the way advising interactions and practices with students of color offer help or exert harm. Furthermore, it is useful for providing postsecondary practitioners with language to explore issues of racism and White supremacy. Also, under the assumption that every person is racialized and that all have racialized experiences (including White people), this framework encourages space for the critical

self-reflection necessary to explore the way racialized experiences affect one's views on the world and work with students.

Critical Race Theory and Education

Because CRT continues to expand into various spaces of practice, those within education have associated CRT with basic tenets that govern the practice of it. Within this theory-to-practice adoption, four precepts are highlighted as the vehicles through which advisors can adjust their practices with students:

1. CRT scholars believe that racism is endemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012); that is, racism is prevalent, ordinary, and nonaberrant within U.S. society. Carter Andrews and Tuitt (2013) compared it to smog; it is, indeed, all around such that it cannot be escaped or avoided; instead, people can only assuage the effects of it to the best of their ability.
2. CRT scholars aim to support the unique voice of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT is rooted in qualitative and experiential and lived knowledge. Furthermore, CRT is based on the argument that, although not all people of color experience it identically, they are collectively able to speak to issues of racism that White people cannot adequately address. Thus, according to CRT, experiential knowledge of people of color is valid, legitimate, and an integral part of analyzing and understanding racial inequality.
3. CRT is used within education by those with a commitment to social justice (Buenavista et al., 2009). The CRT framework was founded on the elimination of all forms of subordination of people. The use of CRT within education actively breaks down institutions that perpetuate and maintain racist ideologies.
4. Scholars stand on the social construction thesis of race as foundational for CRT scholarship and practice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The social construction thesis is posited as "race as a social construction; it is invented, and yet is embedded in our society and in our everyday actions with the world" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 3). Important to grasp, this distinction conveys that despite race

as socially constructed, very real social and material consequences affect both targeted and agent populations of racialized oppression.

Critical Race Theory and Advising

Advisors need to use the social construction thesis when considering the systemic nature of power, privilege, racism, and Whiteness, and the impacts of these constructs on interactions with students. Marable defined racism as "A system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, cultural, mannerisms, and color" (as cited in Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 24). The definition details the systemic nature of racism within which personal beliefs and actions are somewhat detached from the system of racism. For example, an academic advisor may say, "I am not racist, I care deeply for my Black students," which may be true, but Marable's definition suggests that a person need not "be racist" to engage in or perpetuate a racist system. Furthermore, Marable's explanation allows for the consideration of power and privilege within the broader system of racialized oppression found in higher education.

Experienced or perceived racialized oppression stems from actual or perceived racial identity. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) defined *oppression* as the combination of prejudice, power, and discrimination. Without power to influence culture, policies, and normative practices, prejudice and discrimination reflect mere personal acts to which an individual casts upon another. When power is added to these acts, prejudice and discrimination lead to systemic oppression. Within higher education, the sources of oppression might include university policies and procedures and interpersonal interactions of faculty members, staff, and advisors, among others. Privilege also plays an integral part in the perpetuation of racialized oppression on the part of advisors within higher education because it embodies the systemically conferred dominance and the institutional process by which the beliefs and values of the dominant group are "made normal and universal" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 57). That is, whichever group makes, defines, enforces, and defends the rules carries privilege; everyone else is forced to live

within the system that the privileged group devises.

The understanding of privilege within the context of PWIs, White advisors, and Black students requires a discussion of Whiteness. Leonardo (2009) asserted that many White people “do not grow up with race discourse, do not think of their life choices in racial ways and do not consider themselves as belonging to a racial group” (p. 107). Although true for many, according to CRT, all individuals must consider their racialized experiences and understand ways their racial experiences affect their interactions with the world. Such critical reflection allows advisors to consider their racialized positionality, associated privilege, and the ways these qualities either help or harm their relationships with students. In particular, it reminds White advisors that they must fully participate in antiracist behaviors to disengage from the system of racism.

Affirmation, Support, and Advocacy

In addition to specific academic guidance, academic advisors often support the holistic experience of the student, which may include giving advice on roommates, careers, and other salient student issues. To this end, the CRT framework encourages affirmation, support, and advocacy for the development of social justice and cultural competency. Although affirming student experiences, supporting students through oppression, and advocating for students are important for all student populations, because of the negatively racialized experiences faced by Black students at PWIs, the historic and prevalent nature of power, privilege, and oppression within higher education, the majority of advisors at PWIs being White, and the unique positionality of advisors to serve as change agents for Black students, use of CRT to inform daily practices proves incredibly useful for advising Black students at PWIs in particular. Therefore, I offer examples of CRT-informed daily academic advising practices that can lead to a more inclusive and supportive environment for Black students at PWIs, which thereby leads to inclusive campus community environments in whole. Although not an exhaustive list of ways advisors can better support students of color, specifically Black students, these suggestions provide ways to start.

Affirmation

Affirmation is considered emotional support or encouragement. When one feels affirmed, they feel heard, understood, and believed. Providing an

affirming environment for students can lead to high-quality interactions between students and advisors. Kuh et al. (2005) suggested that students who experience high-quality interactions within academic environments are more likely to persist than peers with low-quality interactions. Furthermore, Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) argued that students from historically underrepresented backgrounds perceive high quality interactions as not only those that encourage their academic success but also those that place value on their experiences.

First, advisors can affirm the racialized experiences on campus to support students of color at PWIs better. CRT posits that race is endemic to society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012); that is, although a socially constructed concept, racism is a common aspect of society such that the lived experiences of racism lead to real material and social consequences. Therefore, when approached by a student experiencing racism, discrimination, or microaggressions, advisors must assume and progress as if these reports are based on factual accounts and act accordingly; that is, advisors must acknowledge and affirm the student's experience, allowing each to share personal descriptions of anger, disdain, and hurt, or any number of other emotions. More specifically, advisors should not make excuses or question whether the person or situation that inflicted the distress was acting out of racism. Ignoring, distracting from, minimizing, or justifying the student's report of the primary issue experienced may hinder a student's relationship with advising staff and reinforce feelings of isolation.

Advisors can affirm student experiences and combat daily microaggressions by engaging in daily practices of microaffirmations. Rowe (2008) coined the term *microaffirmation*, and explained that it comprises small gestures extended on a daily basis that foster inclusion, listening, comfort, and support for people who may feel unwelcome or invisible in an environment. Because of the common experiences of Black students at PWIs, microaffirmations communicate important messages that students are welcome, visible, and capable of performing well, which lead to a greater sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and resiliency to persist despite the challenges faced (Powell, Demetriou, & Fisher, 2013). Different from general kindness or empathy, microaffirmations explicitly recognize and validate individuals in ways that empower them to

thrive while dealing with feelings of being marginalized, hopeless, or lost (Rowe, 2008). Daily microaffirmations include, but are not limited to, practicing active listening and recognizing, affirming, and validating student experiences and feelings (Powell et al., 2013). Advisors using microaffirmations in their daily advising practices create spaces where Black students, and others, can resist and combat ongoing racist experiences.

Support

On the surface, affirmation and support seem like similar means of communicating care; however, through the CRT lens, support is focused on lessening the burden experienced by Black students at PWIs. Hence, supporting students academically may include connecting them with academic resources and providing academic guidance for course selection, post-graduation plans, and career placement. Because of their daily experiences with racism and oppression, supporting Black students, in particular, means taking added responsibilities. Griffin and Museus (2015) suggested culturally focused organizations and spaces as ways to offer support. To this end, academic advisors must actively seek to engage, empower, and co-create counterspaces (Solórzano et al., 2001) to support the survival of Black students within PWI spaces.

Solórzano et al. (2001) considered counterspaces within higher education as settings promoting positive self-concepts among underserved students such that they engage in culturally affirming experiences. hooks (1990) referred to these spaces as places offering opportunities for “radical possibility” (p. 149), where culturally specific narratives and representations exist (Case & Hunter, 2012). In general, scholars have found such spaces instrumental in combatting feelings of isolation, marginality, and alienation for students of color (Kiang, 2002; Museus, 2008; Patton, 2006; Wang, Sedlacek, & Westbrook, 1992). Because counterspaces exist on a continuum of formal, such as student organizations or culturally specific rooms, to informal, such as friend, family, faculty, and staff networks (Case & Hunter, 2012), students can access them in a variety of ways, including relationships with advisors. Through creation and support of such spaces, advisors can contribute to a student’s ability to handle isolation, deal with negative stereotypes (Nuñez, 2011), and develop personal

identity that can encourage a sense of mattering and identity validation (Griffin & Museus, 2015).

Advisors must intentionally preserve spaces where “deficit notions can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solórzano et al., 2001, p. 70). Although the broader institution will not suddenly become nonracist or nonclassist, the creation of counterspaces (both formal or informal) can lead to campus environments where Black and other students of color feel validated, safe, and free to be themselves.

Advisors can support Black students by maintaining awareness of the common experiences of students on their campuses, particularly those associated with race, class, and marginalized identities. De Sousa (2005) argued that faculty members and staff at “high performing institutions are well informed about their students. They know where their students are from, their preferred learning styles, their talents, and when and where they need help” (p. 2). De Sousa’s contention stopped short of explicitly stating the need for advisors to know the daily experiences with racism faced by Black students at PWIs; however, they need to recognize that students of color do not share many of the experiences of White students. For example, some residence halls at many campuses come with a history of segregation, and an advisor with working knowledge of this history will not express surprise or confusion when a Black student discloses a racist situation experienced in one of these residence halls. As a result of this awareness, the advisor is more likely to initiate an appropriate response.

Also, while recognizing common challenges faced by Black students, advisors must not essentialize or overgeneralize the experiences of their advisees. CRT expresses a commitment to anti-essentialism in that it states that all individuals experience the world in unique ways such that no experience of one person is exactly the same as that of another person (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Despite a *unique voice of color*, which suggests that all people of color can speak to similar forms of racialized oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), the actual experiences of all people of color, and the ensuing impact of them, will vary by individual. Advisors can use the opportunity to communicate one-on-one to consider the broader context of racism encountered while providing the amount and type of support each individual needs by unique

circumstance. Such a multifaceted approach ensures that each student receives humanizing academic advising experiences through which the entire university experience, not just academics, is considered (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

Advocacy

Advocacy for Black students at PWIs requires more than formed relationships, one-on-one academic advising, and “niceness” (Bemak & Chung, 2010, p. 374). In encouraging new K-12 counselors to embrace multiculturalism and act as social justice advocates, Bemak and Chung described many staff as *nice*: They are nice coworkers and companions who treat students nicely to promote harmony among colleagues and students. Unfortunately, the niceness of counselors promoting harmony often exceeds their willingness to advocate for change on behalf of students, especially if such championing may result in conflict or disagreement (Bemak & Chung, 2010). Although the counselors may sincerely believe in the importance of educational equity, especially for students from marginalized populations, the overarching concern, to be perceived as nice, leads them away from advocating for their students (Bemak & Chung, 2010).

In similar fashion to the counselors described by Bemak and Chung (2010), some advisors seek to present as nice to peers and colleagues to the degree that their efforts at niceness become detrimental to Black collegians. If advisors truly care for students by spending time being nice and showing care to them, but engage very little with advocacy practices that push for institutional-level change, then the niceness matters little; instead, *nice counselor syndrome* (NCS) emerges (Bemak & Chung, 2010). NCS is characterized by counselors, or advisors, who demonstrate a willingness to perpetuate social norms that reinforce inequities and racialized oppression by failing to speak out against or actively fight against institutional policies and conversations. As a result of neglecting advocacy, advisors with NCS reinforce the status quo. An advocacy-oriented advisor is not just nice; instead, this agent for change actively speaks up for student rights and concerns, thereby aiming to create an environment that serves the best interests of students (Bemak & Chung, 2010).

Fighting for departmental- and institutional-level change on behalf of students might prove the most important action for advisors working

with or for Black students and other students of color. Advocacy for students is rooted in the commitment to social justice and a daily call to action put forth in CRT to dismantle oppressive policies and institutional norms within education (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Advocacy-oriented advisors recognize the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural factors on student development and experiences (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003). They identify systemic factors that act as barriers to student development, academic success, and social engagement while simultaneously working to dismantle systemic barriers (Lewis et al., 2003). Therefore, advisors who are focused on equitable college campuses for students, identify institutional, communal, or policy factors hindering academic or social engagement; collaborate with stakeholders and cross-campus community partners to develop a vision for guiding change in established advising practices, the curriculum, the department, and the institution; and help students gain access and maintain the availability of needed resources (Lewis et al., 2003).

Summary and Implications

Students want to engage with advisors who treat them with authenticity and genuine interest in helping them succeed. Students enter higher education institutions as complex individuals with multiple identities that shape their college journey. No student has the same experience regardless of likeness in race, religion, gender, or other demographic characteristics; however, inspired by the unique voice of color, CRT provides a foundational understanding of the ways marginalized students share the structural oppression that hinders help-seeking behaviors with advisors and leads to further marginalization at PWIs. Therefore, using the CRT framework, I argue for a theory-to-practice consideration for academic advising at PWIs. To work effectively with students of color, advisors must consider the broader implications of systemic and interpersonal racialized oppression. Furthermore, they must actively work at being antiracist; that is, they must speak and fight against racist ideology, policies, procedures, and norms to begin the dismantling of the broader system. They also must consciously and consistently check their privilege, making adjustments accordingly, to ensure they are diminishing the racialized privilege and power dynamic consistently at play.

Herein, I discussed affirmation, support, and advocacy as they relate to academic advising for

Black students at PWIs. The usefulness of these areas of engagement extend to more than students of color and advisors; they can be utilized by faculty members, staff, and administrators working as allies for a variety of diverse and marginalized populations, including those based on race and ethnicity and those formed by gender and sexuality. Engagement through affirmation, support, and advocacy establishes safe physical and emotional spaces to encourage student development in a holistic fashion while acknowledging the varied experiences with structural oppression for students matriculating through college. hooks (2000) asserted that when marginalized individuals are moved from the outside to the center of discussions, programs, interventions, and theories, campuses emerge where everyone feels validated for their differences. The intentional practice of affirmation, support, and advocacy allows advisors to address issues other than academics in ways that validate differences and historical experiences while working for social justice.

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