

Article

“Not Every Advisor Is for Me, but Some Are”: Black Men’s Academic Advising Experiences during COVID-19

Jesse R. Ford ^{1,*}, Dawn Y. Matthews ², Derrick M. Woodard ³ and Cassandra R. Kepple ³

¹ Department of Teacher Education and Higher Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1300 Spring Garden St., Greensboro, NC 27412, USA

² University College, North Carolina Central University, 1801 Fayetteville St., Durham, NC 27707, USA; dmatth23@ncsu.edu

³ Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Florida State University, 1114 W. Call St., Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA; dwoodard@fsu.edu (D.M.W.); ckepple@fsu.edu (C.R.K.)

* Correspondence: jrfordjr@uncg.edu

Abstract: Contemporary research indicates that Black American men encounter multiple obstacles in higher education settings. Understanding the complexities of how Black men perceive and make sense of academic environments requires addressing a number of elements that influence their academic success. The purpose of this study is to investigate the academic advising challenges faced in virtual environments by Black men during the COVID-19 pandemic. This qualitative case study provides detailed accounts of ten Black men navigating academic advising practices in a virtual setting at large research one historically white institution using focus groups as a method of data collection. Implications and suggestions for future research highlight the significance of supporting Black men in virtual academic advising spaces to create equitable and sustainable practices.

Keywords: Black men; academic advising; college students; COVID-19



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Historically, race and racism have had long-standing implications in the United States, which has still a residual influence on the experience of Black Americans in many social systems, and in education [1]. As such, the experiences of Black students historically and contemporarily remain a topic of heavy discussion in higher education in the United States [2–5]. More specifically, Black men student experiences are explored frequently in higher education literature [5,6] and are often characterized by racialized microaggressions, issues with discrimination, and a lack of a sense of belonging on college campuses [2,5–7]. Additionally, while facing these hurdles within their academic journey, Black men in the US face a slew of additional challenges, many of which are linked to negative perceptions of their race, class, and gender. While there are a variety of elements that might affect the enrollment and retention of Black men in college, more recently, COVID-19’s influence and the ongoing media attention to the killing of Black and Brown people have added to the difficulties this community faces. Numerous unarmed Black men and boys have been killed as a consequence of racial injustice, and COVID-19’s implications for this demographic add yet another dimension to their experiences in the US [8]. Even though these two factors are not necessarily related, no one has looked at how COVID-19 and racial injustices have impacted American life. Additionally, these same elements influence the guidance given to Black men in academic advising spaces as one of the first touch points in their academic journeys.

Academic advising, according to Pascarella and Terenzini [9], can have a significant impact on a student’s persistence and likelihood of graduating, as well as an indirect influence on grades and aspirations. More specifically, academic advising, frequently cited as a critical factor in student retention and development [10–12], is sometimes disregarded despite being a crucial aspect of student success [13]. However, the complexity of advising has developed significantly, just as higher education institutions have evolved. As

such, this study's aim was to understand the long-term effects of these two distinct yet related influences on the lives of Black men in college. The two questions that guide this qualitative research case study are: What are the academic advising experiences of Black men in the United States at a historically white institution (HWI) during the COVID-19 pandemic? How does racial battle fatigue faced by Black men affect their academic advising appointments? For this study, racial battle fatigue is defined as the impact of the generational, sociological, and psychological context of racial microaggressions on the long- and short-term influence of struggling, battling, and surviving in spaces with racialized stressors [14,15]. Additionally, we adopt Bonilla-Silva and Peoples's [1] definition of HWIs as institutions with "a history, demography curriculum, climate, and a set of symbols and traditions that embody and reproduce whiteness and white supremacy" (p. 1491). Before presenting the methods and findings of this study, a review of the existing literature will be provided to contextualize the body of research on Black men's experiences in higher education and academic advising.

1. Literature Review

Kuh [16] asserted that academic advising is a significant component in college student persistence and success; nevertheless, Black men's experiences with academic advising throughout COVID-19 are not documented. Consequently, this evaluation of literature is separated into four sections: the impact of COVID-19 and racial injustice, traditional academic advising practices, academic advising experiences of Students of Color, and Black men's experiences in higher education. As research on the advising experiences of Black students is rare, we provide each subsection as part of the missing narrative on Black men's experience in higher education during the era of COVID-19 and racial injustices in the United States.

1.1. *The Impact of COVID-19 and Racial Injustice*

In recent years, multiple obstacles have altered the daily lives of people in the US. COVID-19 and growing concerns about systematic racism continue to impact how People of Color navigate daily life in the United States [8]. While COVID-19 and racial injustices exist independently, both have influenced the everyday experiences of the people in the US, as both disproportionately affect the Communities of Color due to the continuous killings of Black and Brown people [7,8,17] and the exacerbated socioeconomic disparities caused by COVID-19 [18,19]. Collectively, Elias and colleagues [13] highlight these multiple layers of oppression as "COVID-racism," or the combined impact of both COVID-19 and systematic racism on marginalized populations, including Black Americans. These challenges are evident in all facets of U.S. life, but perhaps most prominently on college campuses, where technology has become an additional barrier for Students of Color, specifically during COVID-19. For example, scholars highlight the challenges associated with being a Student of Color and being less likely to have access to virtual spaces [18], which has showcased issues around access to technology for Students of Color [20]. These challenges were amplified by Students of Color leaving college campuses to return home due to COVID-19 [17]. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students no longer went to classes, talked to faculty, spent time with friends, or took part in campus activities in person, leaving a host of mental health challenges as many students lost face-to-face interactions [18].

In concert with the issues related to COVID-19 and racial injustices, mental health issues have seen a rise on college campuses for Students of Color [17,21–23]. While these issues are not new, with the increased challenges related to isolation and lack of engagement with peers due to COVID-19 and the ongoing racial injustices, Students of Color are spending more time in virtual spaces [24]. For example, McCready and team [24] found that "everyday online discrimination may be a more salient relationship on mental health for this population" (p. 190) within online spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, academic advising also shifted to online engagement, which became a critical part of how faculty, staff, and students interacted with each other. While COVID-19 restrictions are

being lifted in many areas across the country, online practices are becoming viable options for institutions looking to retain, support, and advise college students.

1.2. Traditional Academic Advising Practices

In the past, advisors have utilized prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising techniques [25,26] to guide decisions about their education. Prescriptive advising, for instance, aims to prescribe a viable strategy for students to adhere to, including curriculum, guidelines, and regulations, to accomplish the student's goals and targets [11,27]. Although the effectiveness of prescriptive advising has varied, it does not account for racial, cultural, ethnic, or socio-emotional factors of a student's identity [27]. Developmental advising takes the components of prescriptive advising and extends them by establishing a relationship with the student. Academic advisors are expected to assist the whole student during developmental advising, including their cognitive and social mechanisms of understanding [25]. Intrusive advising, as a proactive approach, employs an intervention that encourages students to seek assistance when they need it rather than delaying until the situation becomes critical and impacts their success [27].

COVID-19 added an additional layer to understanding the unique academic advising of Black students, as prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising techniques are traditionally practiced in person. While academic advising was practiced online at some institutions before the pandemic, it became the only form of academic advising offered during the COVID-19 pandemic. As colleges and universities closed their campuses to avoid the effects of COVID-19, advising, like many other ways of getting students involved, moved online. However, historically there have been instances of online advising being effective. For example, Feghali and colleagues [28] found online student advising to be advantageous and efficient. However, academic advising for Students of Color frequently requires recognizing their multiple identities [21,29], which has often been emphasized in face-to-face academic advising experiences.

1.3. Academic Advising Experiences for Students of Color

Academic advising benefits the retention, matriculation, and graduation of Students of Color. While there are many approaches to academic advising, the facilitation of the process remains a critical part of this conversation. An advisor should serve as a guide in an interactive relationship to assist the student in goal attainment and degree completion [25]. For Students of Color, this often means creating environments that are culturally responsive and culturally engaging. Museus and Ravello [30] determined that advising Students of Color using culturally engaging methods contributes to a sense of belonging and connectedness to college environments. Additionally, Museus [31] found that culturally engaging advising takes into account approaches that are humanizing, holistic, and proactive to better assist Students of Color, which is often needed due to the unique challenges these students face on college campuses.

In conjunction with Museus [31], the findings of Strayhorn [32] and Johnson and colleagues [33] advocate for cultural understanding in the process of assisting Black students. Strayhorn [26] found that advisors should be familiar with their students' names, backgrounds, the types of cultural capital students bring with them, and their strengths and weaknesses. Bloom and team [34] emphasize the need for appreciative advising techniques as crucial components of understanding student goals and aspirations as a part of their journeys, which also highlights this level of support. The findings of Museus and Ravello [30] also underscore the need to humanize advising practices when working with Students of Color. Additionally, culturally engaging support, as highlighted by Museus [31], enhances the motivation and sense of belonging of Students of Color. Johnson and team [33], as well as Strayhorn [32], suggest that advisors should act as cultural navigators. Strayhorn [32] explains that

Cultural navigators know something about the culture—how it operates, how to get things done, how to be part of it, and feel a sense of belonging. They share that

information with students, help them adjust to college life, and make themselves available as trusted go-to resources whenever possible.

(p. 59)

To elaborate further on this finding, Johnson and his team [33] found and uplifted the importance of cultural navigators, particularly for Black men. The findings of Strayhorn [32] and Johnson and colleagues [33] advocate for cultural sensitivity when advising Black students. This is closely linked to the research of Carnaje [35], who discovered that academic advisors need to be sensitive to cultural backgrounds. These findings are extended by the Matthews and team [21], who add the significance of recognizing the importance of academic advising appointment times as a significant part of the process of constructing a collaborative, holistic, and supportive academic advising environment for Students of Color. Collectively, humanizing practices and understanding the experiences of Students of Color remain important parts of the advising process.

1.4. Black Men's Experiences in Higher Education

Black men's collegiate experiences highlight challenges related to race-related microaggressions, negative classroom environments, and stereotype threats [14]. While many of these issues are not new in the literature as it relates to Black men in educational spaces [14,33], their interactions with administrators and faculty add an additional layer to negative campus experiences. Research shows that Black students benefit from being in spaces with those who share similar racial identities [29,36], however, existing research also shows that the challenges white educators have with Black students. For example, research findings have shown that white faculty members frequently express suspicion regarding academic capacity and have doubts about the academic abilities of Black students [37–39]. Furthermore, Black students frequently report feeling isolated and withdrawn and experiencing racism when engaging with advisors and faculty members at HWIs [10]. In conjunction, Solórzano et al. [36] discovered that the racial microaggressions that Black students encountered from white peers, staff, and faculty had an impact on the value of those connections and even deterred some Black students from seeking out those relationships or capitalizing on student support services.

In addition, racial microaggressions have been known to impact the experiences of Black men on college campuses [14,15,38]. These experiences with racial microaggressions have been highlighted as causing race-related stress for Black men on college campuses [3,7,15] and more specifically academic spaces. Smith and team [15] point out that “Black men walk into the classroom or boardroom and experience racial climates that are replete with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme environmental stress” (p. 77). While this is not explicit about advising spaces, it points to the challenges Black men encounter in their everyday experiences as college students. This is further complicated by Smith and team's [15] findings, as they share that “implicitly and explicitly, the social conditions in higher levels of education are discouraging African American male participation and completion by creating an unwelcoming and stressful educational environment” (p. 77). As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate how Black men perceive advising at a large public HWI, with an emphasis on the factors that contribute to their success in their advising experiences with academic advisors.

2. Racial Battle Fatigue as the Theoretical Framework

The Black American college student experience inherits the strain of handling racial discrimination from their respective historically white institutions. The attitudes of Black college students are primarily affected by daily interactions between peers, faculty, and staff, as well as current events regarding racial injustices. These factors contribute to Black students developing racial battle fatigue, a term coined by Smith and team [14] highlighted racial battle fatigue as “the physiological and psychological strain exacted on a racially marginalized group and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (p. 555). Experiences of racial battle fatigue also tend to

play a role in Black students' satisfaction with HWIs. Harper & Hurtado [40] determined that students of color from various historically white institutions have reported increasing dissatisfaction with that particular school based on alienation, isolation, and stereotyping. These discovered experiences expand on the need for Black student advocacy in spaces that have historically been ostracized by individuals from minority backgrounds.

In addition, as a consequence of racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue comprises three primary sources of race-related stress responses: psychological, behavioral, and physiological stress. Under this concept, Smith [41] defines stressors as microaggressions or negative encounters, experiences, and events that disrupt the allostatic equilibrium of the human body. The possibility of a racial encounter or interaction can serve as a trigger, and it is not uncommon for individuals to experience two or more stressors simultaneously. In addition, the accumulation of these events may lead to a variety of problems, such as melancholy or physical illness [42]. These racial stressors are associated with mental health issues and affect the life expectancy of Black Americans [15,42,43]. As a result, this scholarship, analyzed through the lens of racial battle fatigue, allowed us to understand the impact of COVID-19 and racial-related microaggressions on the experiences of Black men in advising sessions.

3. Methodological Approach

This qualitative study was designed using a case study methodological approach to understand the experiences of Black men undergraduate students in academic advising sessions. Accordingly, a case study approach is appropriate for this study, as its primary goal is to discover through the firsthand personal accounts of Black men, who attended a HWI, during COVID-19. Additionally, the experiences of People of Color are complex and often depend on how they make sense of things based on how they see them [44]. Building on this, Rossman and Rallis [45] share that "case studies seek to understand a larger phenomenon through intensive examination of one specific instance" (p. 103). The following criteria were used to perform this case study using purposeful sampling: undergraduate students and self-identifying Black men students at One Two University (UTO, pseudonym). This university, which has a public predominantly white student body, is a renowned academic institution located in the Southeast of the United States. The advising center at UTO has a team of advisors focused on providing advising support to all students, with a strong emphasis on advising practices within the first year of undergraduate education. The advising center requires all students to meet with an academic advisor each semester of their first year. In the second year and beyond, students are required to have one meeting with their advisor and are strongly encouraged to meet with advisors for an additional time, but this is not required.

To best understand the firsthand personal accounts of the participants in this case study, focus groups were selected as a method to collect data, as the researchers were most interested in the exchange of multiple viewpoints and perspectives [46]. Due to the impact of COVID-19, focus groups were conducted on Zoom, as face-to-face meetings were not permitted. Additionally, it became increasingly important for the researchers to use focus groups to build rapport with the participants [46]. Two focus groups were held to better understand the experiences of Black men at UTO; with four and six men participating. It was difficult to host one focus group due to the personal and professional obligations and timetables of the participants.

3.1. Participant Selection and Data Collection

Prior to starting the data collection process, the Institutional Review Board approval was granted, and an institution-wide email was sent to students at UTO to gauge student interest in the study. For those who expressed interest, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to being invited to participate in a focus group. The demographic questionnaire considered questions to collect demographic information such as age, academic majors, and a number of advising appointments to assist with under-

standing the experiences of Black men at UTO. Additionally included was a consent form that explained the goals of the study for each participant. Each participant was invited to take part in a semi-structured, in-depth focus group that lasted between 60 and 90 min over Zoom. As compensation for their time, participants who completed the demographic questionnaire signed the consent form and participated in the focus group were given a \$20 e-gift card.

Open-ended questions were used in each focus group to elicit in-depth answers from participants and produce substantial data for the data analysis [46]. Some examples among the focus group question include: “How often do you communicate with your academic advisor?” “How has the pandemic affected your experiences getting academic advice?” The use of extra probing inquiries allowed researchers to learn more about the participants’ unique life experiences. The casual conversations between participants and researchers in each focus group [46] led to the researchers and participants asking more in-depth questions, which made the data collection process smoother. There were ten Black men participants in this study. Four individuals shared their experiences in the first focus group, while six men shared their stories in the second. Additional subject background information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Academic Major	Number of Visits with Advisor
Royalty	Male	Black	History	3
Bryce	Male	Black	Pre-Med	2
John	Male	Black	Biology	3
BJ	Male	Black	Criminology	3
Will	Male	Black	Criminology	4
Noah	Male	Black	Biology	3
Chris	Male	Black	History	2
Tom	Male	Black	Communication	3
James	Male	Black	Criminology	4
August	Male	Black	Spanish	3
Chris	Male	Black	History	2

3.2. Data Analysis

Each focus group was recorded and sent to a professional transcription company. Data transcripts and participant names were safeguarded in this process. As such, Black men selected pseudonyms in this research to protect their identities. The accuracy of conversation transcriptions was checked by all participants, and each focus group’s audio and video files were compared to the transcriptions to ensure their correctness. Additionally, observational data were collected by the research team to capture the participants’ non-verbal cues. For data analysis, all of the transcripts, demographic information about the subjects, and analyst observation notes that recorded body language, nonverbal signals, and facial expressions were uploaded to NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis program [46].

The data analysis process started with each member of the research team reviewing the focus group and observation data. The data analysis process utilized two types of coding, as Miles and Huberman [47] highlighted the significance of generating codes to “analyze and interpret data” (p. 58). Additionally, the coding process was an ongoing and repetitive process that involved summarizing and organizing key parts of the data to find themes and concepts [46]. Two types of coding were used in this process: open coding and in vivo coding [48]. In vivo coding is highlighted as a method to unitize the actual words spoken by the participants to understand specific words and phrases in their

interactions within a study. We chose this specifically because of the use of Black Vernacular English by our participants. Additionally, Strauss and Cobin [49] highlight this process as “open coding” to create themes that can be collapsed into smaller, similar categories. Using open coding, the data were broken down into minute segments to make sense of participant experiences. Additionally, in vivo coding was selected as the primary coding technique for the first round of coding to ensure that the participants’ voices remained key to the analysis [48]. Following this procedure, each researcher conducted a second round of coding, utilizing existing literature and the theoretical framework to further understand the participant’s voices.

The following themes emerged during discussions of the data: microaggressions, advisor interactions, and advising experiences. Both iterations of coding were done using the NVivo 12 program and included both descriptive and pattern coding [48]. We read and coded the data several times to make sure we understood it well enough to use it in thematic analysis. We were able to magnify the voices of the participants through the discovery of themes in the data based on “theory-driven” data patterns [50]. The study crew regularly met as a group and continuously analyzed the data they had collected. After the research team analyzed the data, each team member looked at the similarities and differences between their own analyses to better understand the results and add to the body of knowledge in the field.

3.3. Trustworthiness

The researchers first developed a relationship with the participants by asking them more in-depth questions about their lives before we began gathering data. This sparked a discussion and helped us place the students’ experiences within the framework of the research. We were able to follow up with individuals to conduct member verification as a result. This helped avoid bias and make sure the results were real by letting participants who agreed to look at the finished transcription papers look at the results. It was important to get feedback from the participants and check that the data collected was accurate as a form of member checking [46]. The peer review process increased the researchers’ confidence in the findings and interpretations of the data. Participants received thorough transcriptions of our synthesized data so they could ruminate and offer explanations as required. This gave people the chance to offer feedback on any possible data distortions. To accurately depict each participant’s experience holistically, we also sent them our interpretations of the data analysis. Additionally, the trustworthiness of the data was used to increase the significance of the findings [46]. As a result, minor adjustments were made, which enabled us as scholars to present the full story of the subject’s experiences.

3.4. Research Positionality

According to the research of Bourke [51] and Foote and Bartell [52], positionality draws attention to the researchers’ ideas and experiences that they already had. As a result, we have over two decades of experience on college campuses as students, faculty, administrators, and supporters of campus communities. Author one self-identifies as a Black man; author two identifies as a Black woman, author three identifies as a Black man, and author four identifies as a White woman. Despite our diverse identities, we each contribute different perspectives to the work as we attempt to determine who we are and eliminate our prejudices. As educators, we believe it is our responsibility to create inclusive learning environments for all students, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or other socially constructed identities.

4. Findings

This qualitative study used focus groups to gather information so that all participants could share their points of view. When feasible, direct quotations were used to demonstrate the relevance of each finding. As such, three prominent themes emerged from the data collection and analysis process. The themes that emerged were: “This is Starting to Feel

Like Too Much”: The Stress of Navigating Academic Advising During COVID, “It Feels So Impersonal”: Academic Advising During COVID-19, “There Is Definitely a Racial Difference”: Advising Interactions with Faculty and Staff. These three themes emerged to show the collective experiences of Black men in these spaces.

4.1. *“This Is Starting to Feel like Too Much”: Racial Battle Fatigue in the Midst of Navigating Higher Education during COVID*

Black men’s experiences with managing life during this time varied from other students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant described the challenges of trying to manage the stress of their Black racial identity, unknowingly connecting their experiences to racial battle fatigue. While the men in this study did not have the language to name their race-related stress experiences, the outcome of these met the criteria within Smith and team’s [15] racial battle fatigue framework. For example, Royalty highlighted his feelings on the start of the world and the impact of COVID-19,

It just feels like, psychologically, with everything that’s happening, the world is getting worse, so it feels like I should be doing more. And my achievements don’t seem as big to me as they should be, so I feel that, mentally, I’m breaking down, because of everything that’s going on.

Royalty’s experiences were complex and multifaceted as he was trying to navigate education while also watching the killings of Black and Brown bodies on social media. Bryce added, “Bro, every day you turn it on, someone dies.” After Bryce made this comment, both Jay and Chris nodded their heads heavily in agreement. There seem to be commonalities in their collective experiences around being a Black man in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic and seeing racial injustices on social media. BJ shared

It’s kind of hard as a Black person, because as a Black man you already don’t have as many chances. And once you run out of those chances, you’re either going to be incarcerated or you’re going to be caught up in the system.

BJ’s comments reflect a larger conversation around how Black men in the United States are concerned about historical systemic issues during the pandemic. Royalty added, “You know it is always something for Black people in America.” In addition to those challenges, BJ would later add,

Personally, I suffered from anxiety and depression and a lot of suicidal thoughts and all that stuff growing up, so I kind of felt like when I got to college and experienced even more stress and even more traumas, my resiliency was already there with coping and having an understanding of how I felt.

BJ’s collective comments point to the historical systemic issues facing Black men in the United States. While managing and navigating these feelings, the men in this study were trying to make sense of the ever-changing global society around them. John shared, “It is always us trying to manage racial issues, always.”

After sharing this, John highlighted that these challenges are ongoing, as COVID just exposed the stress of trying to manage family dynamics. This prompted BJ to share how he was the “fixer” in his family. BJ shared,

I feel like as Black men, we’ve got so much going on in the world, in our family lives, and even in our personal lives that there’s never any rest; we’re always trying to find out, “How can we fix this? How can we fix that?” Now, I’m currently in a position where I’m not fixing things, and I feel lost. I feel like I’m not doing enough. I feel like I’m sleeping too much, and I feel like I’m not completing all the assignments I want to complete, or doing everything I want to do.

These comments led to several head nods as the participants grappled with navigating the world around them. After sharing this, August stated, “it’s just nice to hear that I am not the only one.” This prompted Will to say, “me too.”

4.2. *"It Feels So Impersonal": Academic Advising and Virtual Classes While Home during COVID-19*

In addition to the problems they faced, because they were Black men and had to deal with racialized stress and the influence of COVID-19, the participants also had to deal with problems in academic advising spaces. Will, who was quiet during most of the interview, unmuted his Zoom and expanded, "It's harder to be home, and I must watch this stuff on the news with my grandpa. It's like so much is happening all at once and this is happening during class and advising. I'm just stressed." Will would later add, "Advisors need to understand that all of this is happening at once, but it feels so impersonal." Will's challenges in navigating school and the home environment were challenging and led to additional stress.

Moreover, the grappling of these experiences became linked to their advising experiences, for example, Jay shared, "It is hard to focus on class while this is happening in the world. Then you must try to figure out more classes with an advisor who is motivated while you are at home with your younger siblings." In this quote, Jay is explaining the realities of both seeing the challenges facing him and serving as a caretaker for his younger siblings. Each of these was happening while also trying to navigate coursework and advising. John later continued,

It (racial injustices) made me not even want to do the schoolwork, the assignments, or the papers, and stuff like that, because it's like my people are dying out here and we're still fighting for our lives through the pandemic, and Corona is hitting these low-income communities harder, and we are in these low-income communities.

John would later add,

When I look at certain things on social media or on CNN about another Black man getting killed, it makes me not want to do my homework. I do not want to talk to people talking about advising. I do not even want to drive at night if I have a late class, or any stuff like that. So it definitely has some mental effects on me, especially at this PWI and my life period. I remember meeting on Zoom with my advisor and I was thinking about how I have night classes on Zoom. I told her I don't want classes at night after COVID ends. And to this day, I have not had a late class.

Royalty, like John and Jay had similar thoughts about navigating the stress of navigating home life and school life, he shared, "So it's just all that additional stress, and being home, family is stressful as it is, so it's just like all that piled into one, it's just like, "There's no point in going to school, kind of. But I struggled through it, but yeah."

Overall, this set of findings strongly supports the need to understand how racial battle fatigue affects academic advising spaces, as the participants were dealing with multiple levels of stress because of the racial trauma of being there during COVID-19. Justin said, "I'm so stressed out that I don't care if I don't have any advice or classes for next semester." These challenges remained consistent throughout the experiences of the participants, who were also navigating interactions with academic advising staff and faculty.

4.3. *"There Is Definitely a Racial Difference": Advising Interactions with Faculty and Staff*

While receiving academic advising, the Black men in this study faced multiple challenges in relation to racialized stress and home life as students adjusted to being at home and juggling classes. The participants in this study described a host of additional challenges while interacting with advisors during this time. For example, John shared,

I would ask questions, and they would just point me to different websites and stuff like that, but I was really concerned about whether this going to make me money? Is this major going to help me set myself up, or am I going to just be another college student who can't really get a job and stuff like that.

John's facial expression showcased anger as he reflected on his experiences. When asked about his facial expression, he stated, "It's just frustration that no one will be real about how much money I will make in a major, but the advisor says to stay in this major; it is a good fit." "Like, how do you know?" Noah added,

For me, I would say, when the advisor has a rap sheet. If they're advising, "Oh, do this major, so this class," how has it been? How has it aided in a prior student's future endeavors, specifically when it comes to pursuing internships or anything like that.

Noah, then asked John, "Was your advisor white?" to which John replied by saying "yes." Following this, Noah shared,

You kind of hold back from asking those kinds of questions—the will I make money questions—especially when it comes to classes or majors. It leads to different levels of awkwardness, because some of the questions I may have, a white advisor may not know how to answer, especially since they haven't gone through those adversities or fully comprehend the struggles of going to a PWI.

Participants discussed the differences between Black and white advisors in each focus group. Chris explained that "Black advisors just get it." Jay followed up by adding, "You know, Chris, you are so right, bro, they just get it." In conjunction with Chris and Jay, BJ shared his experience with a Black advisor by saying,

So it feels like when you speak to a Black advisor they'll tell you the realness that, yes, this major may be something you like, but it's so filled with white people who may have deeper connections and may have higher GPAs, because they come from private [high] schools. It may be harder for you to prevail in those majors."

Noah, who shared that he changed majors, validated BJ's feelings by sharing,

When I did speak with a Black advisor for pre-med, I think his name was Mr. Johnson, he was very open and honest with a lot of the dialogue that kind of led us down that path. So it was pretty cool to see, okay, there is a difference in tones. Code switching is very real when you're with your white advisor. Whether or not you know you're doing it, it's very real that you're doing it when you are with your white advisor compared to Black advisors.

After sharing with the focus group, BJ added,

And as that compares to a white advisor, it was more of a, "Oh, you can do anything you want," kind of thing versus kind of that father figure or that father tone that he brought, which was very much needed, especially in a place like college, where we all want to be successful, but not everyone sits you down and tells you, "Okay, yes you want to be successful, this is what it takes, but also remember the originality."

Examples of advisors and their differing levels of support were highlighted throughout the participant narratives. As August stated at the conclusion of the focus group, "Not everyone is for me, but some are, and that's all that matters." Not only did participants feel this way about their interactions with each other in the virtual space as participants, demonstrating a level of communal understanding and support, as highlighted by Druery & Brooms [2], but they also understood the significance of knowing who was there to support them during their virtual academic advising appointments, as Noah shared, "even if my advisor doesn't always get it, I am glad to be in a space with others that do".

5. Discussion

Despite growing knowledge about the experiences of Black men, there is much to be learned from the findings of this study to enhance higher education's understanding of Black men's college and advising experiences. Utilizing racial battle fatigue as the

theoretical framework, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black men and their academic advising experience during COVID-19. By centering their experiences, this scholarship was able to understand more holistically the impact of COVID-19, the killing of Black and Brown bodies, and virtual academic advising on the students' experiences. The findings of our scholarship highlighted the ways Black men participants in this study had stark yet similar experiences at the same university. Based on the killing of Black and Brown bodies and the COVID-19 pandemic, these students reported how challenging academic advising was during this part of their educational journey. Many of these feelings led to the participants' lack of willingness to engage in their academics. As a result, each finding adds an additional layer to how we understand the experiences of Black men during this time.

The most significant findings of this work are the interlocking relationships between Black men trying to make sense of the racial stress they experience, support families, and push toward degree completion in the midst of racial injustices and COVID-19. Consistent with the findings of Elias and colleagues [8], the participants in this study managed multiple layers of oppression related to COVID-19 and the killing of Black and Brown bodies, which has been highlighted as COVID racism. The participants in this study specifically spoke of the challenges faced by those living at home during both the global pandemic and the racial injustices facing Black and Brown communities. Many of these challenges were seen in how participants navigated not only these challenges but also issues pertaining to navigating virtual environments. Participants shared numerous examples of how being at home impacted not only their educational experiences but also how their family lives impacted how they viewed many of the difficulties in society. Along with this, many participants talked about how hard it is to have racial battle fatigue in educational settings, especially when they are at home with their families. The different parts of identity-based stress all point to the effect that racial battle fatigue has on their lives. This finding centers the framework of this study and adds to the existing literature on Black men facing racial battle fatigue in their daily academic journeys [14,15]. This finding describes the impact of racial battle fatigue while trying to support family members and navigate academic advising and COVID-19, which adds to the findings of Martinez and team [17], who share the importance of addressing the needs of students and providing support for Men of Color. The findings of this study show the mental health challenges facing Black men, not only in academic advising spaces but beyond, as all participants highlighted race related stress and the need to figure out how to manage it. This consistency could be seen in the comments of all participants, as they shared stark views of not knowing how to "fix" things, as BJ shared. While not directly connected, this comment is connected to how Black men often think they must fix all problems within their families.

Additionally, the findings also detail the challenges of navigating spaces while also recognizing the challenges happening in the greater United States. Like much of the existing literature on Black men [5,7], feelings of isolation and a lack of belonging were also the key findings of this study. The participants spoke about the absence of a physical campus space, which often resulted in a lack of connection between advisors and Black men undergraduate students. Additionally, something new in this scholarship revealed how challenging this truly was as the men in this study worked to navigate virtual advising and classroom experiences, while also dealing with many of the challenges Black men face historically on college campuses. The loss of a physical campus truly displayed the absence of community, as August, Will, and BJ shared a moment while saying each of them was navigating similar challenges. The findings of this work reinforce the findings of Feghali and team [28], which add to the narrative around how virtual spaces can be useful, but the men in this study showed that they need more connections with people in virtual advising spaces based on their experiences with their advisors.

Additionally, the findings also point to the importance of having culturally engaging advisors during COVID-19. The participant examples shared in the study point out the need to expand on existing literature as it relates to having experiences with advisors who

are sensitive to the lived experiences of Black men. In addition, the men in the study seem to have a connection with Black advisors as they, “just get it” as the participants shared. Musesus and Ravello’s [30] findings are expanded through this work, as there is a strong need for culturally engaging academic advising spaces. This is further complicated by the completely virtual academic advising spaces. Building on the work of Johnson and team [22], Strayhorn [32], and Strayhorn [26], our findings support the need for advisors to act as cultural navigators. This is more pronounced in the third theme of this work, which situates the need for academic advisors to consider student backgrounds. Additionally, the findings position the need to understand the intersections of race, gender, and class, as one of the participants named the high school realities that many Black men do not come from private high schools, which are known for having additional resources to support their students [53,54]. We also add to the findings of the previous works to show that cultural navigation is also needed in virtual settings. Furthermore, based on the narratives shared by the participants in this scholarship, humanizing virtual academic advising spaces that validate their individual lived experiences is a critical part of supporting Black men. We uplift the work of Bloom and team (2008) as their appreciative advising framework has been proven to be effective in supporting Students of Color in academic advising spaces [21,55].

6. Implications and Future Research

From the literature review of the experience of Black men in college, we offer three points of concentration that emerge from the recurring themes based on students’ needs. First, culturally engaging advising practices need to be adopted by all faculty and staff supporting Black men. Advising, which is often seen as an important part of student development and the student experience, must work to reach students who are marginalized in different ways than our traditional dominant cultural groups. We encourage institutions to find ways to honor the identities of Black men while working to provide meaningful interactions beyond the prescribed academic advising historical practices. We echo and uplift the findings of Suárez and Beatty [27] who call for more intentional academic advising practices. Second, our findings suggest the institutional culture of following white norms in advising Black men needs to be eradicated to teach and reimagine how we support Black men in virtual spaces. COVID-19 has changed how institutions view virtual environments, yet Black men and other Students of Color deserve additional support in face-to-face and virtual spaces.

Our findings show that traditional methods of online advising, while here to stay, must explore new models for supporting Black men. Therefore, new models, such as appreciative advising in virtual settings [29] should be created by marginalized populations within organizations to ensure acknowledgment of racial and virtual factors. In addition, institutions of higher education must be reconsidered and rebuilt to aid in the removal of insidious ideologies that alienate Students of Color and, for the purposes of this scholarship, Black men. Additionally, while focused on Black doctoral students, advising frameworks for Black doctoral students [56,57], also call for their racial and cultural experiences to be considered more holistically in the experiences of Black students and add to the much-needed conversation of how Black men’s experiences should be central in their advising experiences. Future scholarship should explore the impact of COVID-19 and the issues of racial injustice on Black men’s academic advising experiences in doctoral programs.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore the academic advising experiences of Black men during COVID-19 and amid racial injustices in virtual settings. Our findings illuminated not only the challenges associated with racial microaggressions, navigating home life while managing coursework, and academic advising but also the context of our ever-changing global society. To address the challenges presented by COVID-19, virtual learning and academic advising spaces, and racial injustices, higher education institutions must establish a space of transformation in academic advising practices that promotes

equity. To reestablish and redefine the entire system, true transformation in institutions must not only be endorsed and embraced by senior-level administrators but it must also be maintained by institutional members. Even though Black men were the primary focus of the study, all marginalized student populations would benefit from the proposed solutions to this concern.

Although advising is vital and effective due to shared identities within the advisor–advisee relationship, the support of marginalized students should not fall solely on the shoulders of another marginalized group of faculty and staff. Institutional responsibility for the recruitment and retention of Black men requires that all members of an institution make an intentional attempt to transcend current norms for the sustainability and expansion of possibilities through the creation of knowledge and professional development.

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