Academic Advising's Hidden Role in Fostering Validation/Belonging Leading to Improved Grades

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Recognizing the increasing role academic advising has come to play in student success strategies, this quantitative study sought to explore the relationships between advising, validation/belonging, and students' college grade point average (GPA). The researcher also examined how students' marginalized status played a role in these relationships. A national sample of 7,211 graduating senior students was used to test a path model. Multiple regression analyses revealed that while there was no direct relationship between advising and GPA, advising had an indirect impact on GPA via students' experiences of validation/belonging. Moving forward, student success strategies should situate validating practices that foster belonging and validation at the center of advising interventions.

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In the past decade, academic advising has come to play an increasingly central role in institutional interventions to improve student success (Drake, 2013; Kimball & Campbell, 2013). With new retention and graduation initiatives driven by intentional advising relationships (California State University, 2023; Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2020), it is imperative that the advising community also fight deficit-minded discourse. Exploring the relationship between advising practices, students' sense of belonging and validation, and students' academic outcomes is key to begin this important inquiry.

Recently, scholars have called attention to the need for institutional agents including administrators, faculty members, and institutional personnel to embrace asset-based discourse to increase students' sense that they belong in and are valued by the institution (Bensimon, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, 1994, 2006; Yosso, 2005). These approaches to work call for campus community members to be accountable for their thoughts, words, actions, and influence on students. The problem this study addresses is that students from marginalized communities including first-generation, low-income, and students of color often experience less validation and belonging in college settings than their peers (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2012). Empirical studies find validation and belonging can have a positive impact on student experience and outcomes (Barnett, 2011; Means & Pyne, 2017). Given the connection between validation, belonging, and outcomes, it may be promising to explore how institutional representatives contribute to students' sense of belonging and validation. Although there is a great deal of research on faculty contributions to students' sense of validation and belonging (Barnett, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schademan & Thompson, 2016), there is less research about advisors' contributions to students' experiences and outcomes. As the student success movement increases advisors' involvement in students' academic careers (Drake, 2013; Kimball & Campbell, 2013), an exploration of their role in validating students is crucial.

Research Questions

The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore relationships among academic advising, students' sense that they belong and are valued at the institution and academic outcomes. Identifying and describing these relationships will help leaders and practitioners to make data-informed decisions about the allocation of resources, the focus of ongoing training, and the implementation of advising interventions. To accomplish this, I used data from a national survey of students from 4-year institutions to answer the following three questions.

1. What are the direct effects of (a) advising frequency, (b) advising satisfaction, and (c) students' experiences of belonging and being validated on college grade point average (GPA)?
2. What are the indirect effects of (a) advising frequency and (b) advising satisfaction on college GPA through students' experiences of belonging and being validated?
3. How do the results of this model vary based on the marginalized status of the students (i.e., first-generation student status,

low socioeconomic status, and/or identification as Latinx, Black/African American, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islanders, Native American)?

For this study, validation will refer to the feelings of being acknowledged, valued, capable, and welcome at the institution (Rendón, 1994). Sense of belonging will refer to feelings that students experience when they feel they connect with and fit into the institution and matter to others (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For this study, sense of belonging will be discussed in relationship to validation, as validation improves sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2010; Hurtado et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2015).

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

In response to the narrative of traditional forms of college integration and assimilation that focus on the student's need to change to assimilate into the institution, the theory of validation (Rendón, 1994) emerged to focus on the institution's role in shaping the tacit rules, guidelines, and culture that students must navigate, as well as the approaches that practitioners take in talking to and about students and how these factors impacted students. Rendón's theory of validation (1994) employed a multifaceted definition of validation that focuses on affirming the student's place at an institution by creating supportive spaces in and out of the classroom; improving students' sense of self-worth by celebrating thoughts, beliefs, and experiences; and showing them that they are "accepted and recognized as valuable" (p. 44). Similarly, Hurtado and Carter's (1997) work distinguished sense of belonging from other theories of integration by acknowledging that a student's sense of belonging at the institution is tied to their sense of being connected to and fitting within the campus community without needing to adapt who they are. Sense of belonging is shaped by various identities, and identity and the feelings associated with it can change depending on the situation (Strayhorn, 2012). These theories of validation (Rendón, 1994) and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) call for practices that acknowledge the lived experiences that each student brings, including students' intersecting identities as part of the tapestry of campus culture.

Disparities in Educational Experiences and Outcomes

Institutions graduate students from marginalized student communities (e.g., Black, Latinx, subgroups of the broader Asian American community, first-generation students, low-income students) at lower rates than their peers (Cataldi et al., 2018; Espinosa et al., 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005, 2012; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2018; Pell Institute & Pennsylvania Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, 2019; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017; Santos & Haycock, 2016; Teranishi et al., 2013). Institutional graduation rates that lag for students from marginalized communities point to institutional practices that fail to meet the needs of these student groups. One moderating factor in the outcomes of marginalized student communities was that they felt less validation and belonging at the institution (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014; Strayhorn; 2012). Thus, it is important to review the research that explores the relationships between these factors.

Validation, Belonging, and Student Experience and Outcomes

Several studies outlined the relationship between validation and belonging and students' psychosocial and academic outcomes. Barnett (2011) used Rendón's (1994) validation theory to explore how validating experiences with faculty members can impact student persistence. After developing an instrument and employing it with more than 300 students, Barnett (2011) found a strong relationship between faculty validation and students' sense of academic integration with the institution and intent to persist. Barnett (2011) also identified specific faculty qualities that shaped students' feelings, including faculty members knowing and valuing their students, demonstrating caring practices and appreciation for diversity in their instruction, and mentoring capacity. Similarly, qualitative studies found that engaged, supportive, and affirming faculty members contributed to improved student engagement in the classroom (Deil-Amen, 2011) and students' aspirations to progress in their collegiate careers (Dowd et al., 2013).

The impact of belonging has also been explored by researchers, particularly those studying marginalized student communities. Hausmann et al.'s (2007) longitudinal quantitative study of African American and White students concluded that sense

of belonging was an important factor contributing to students' intent to persist. Similarly, Langhout et al. (2009) explored the relationship between social class, belonging, student well-being, and academic outcomes and found that increased sense of belonging positively impacted the students' emotional well-being and their intent to persist at the institution. Means and Pyne's (2017) qualitative study of low-income, first-generation college students found that students' belonging was impacted by the combination of implicit and explicit messages that they received at the institution. The authors also found that institutional agents such as faculty members, tutors, and advisors all contributed to these messages and shaped students' sense of academic integration and belonging. Means and Pyne (2017) established that there was a need for additional supports for marginalized student communities, professional development that included an emphasis on cultural competency for faculty members and institutional personnel, and social justice training for the entire campus community.

Research has also explored the relationship between validation and belonging. In fact, Hurtado et al.'s (2010) research on the Diverse Learning Environments survey suggested a strong correlation between validation and belonging. Newman et al. (2015) confirmed this connection. Using data gathered from the Community College Survey of Men, Newman et al. (2015) found that students' belonging increased with validating messages from faculty members. Similarly, Hurtado et al. (2012) determined that as students perceived validation, their sense of belonging increased. This validation could come from faculty members and institutional personnel and could occur both in and out of the classroom. Perhaps more importantly, validating experiences could mediate a sense of belonging for students who witnessed or experienced acts of discrimination or biases (Hurtado et al., 2012). Hurtado et al. (2012) established this relationship in their examination of several items on the Diverse Learning Environments survey tool. They affirmed the connection between validation and belonging, stating, "Students who do not have time for traditional college involvements or do not have as much peer contact . . . get their cues from faculty and staff about whether the educational environment is inclusive and welcoming" (p. 17).

Impact of Advising on Student Outcomes

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) identified several studies that describe a historical relationship between advising and students' academic outcomes, which included research by Metzner (1989), Peterson et al. (2001), Seidman (1991), and Tinto (2004). Additionally, McArthur (2005) found a relationship between faculty advising and persistence over time for community college students. Researchers have relied on the findings of these older studies as the foundation for their studies on advising; but while historical data is valuable, there are few recent studies on the relationships between advising and academic outcomes. In 2014, Kot examined the relationship between advising attendance, GPAs, and enrollment patterns. Analysis of data from 2,700 students at a large research institution found that students who attended advising sessions had higher subsequent GPAs and increased chance of persistence in future terms compared with students who did not attend advising in the first year. Similarly, Swecker et al. (2013) studied the relationship between number of advising meetings and retention rates and GPA in first-generation students and found that "for every meeting with an advisor the odds that a student is retained increases by 13%" (p. 49). Further, Kitchen et al. (2021) found that proactive advising interventions improved self-efficacy and academic planning skills for first-generation college students participating in a college transition program. All of these findings point to the critical role of advising in student success; however, it is important to note that they were limited in capacity or to specific student groups (Kot, 2014), are outdated (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), or do not reflect the increasing diversity of the college student population (Cataldi et al., 2018; NSCRC, 2018; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017; Santos & Haycock, 2016). In fact, only one recent, large-scale, quantitative study (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019) examined the relationships between advising and students' academic outcomes. Mu and Fosnacht (2019) found a positive relationship between multiple aspects of advising and students' self-perceived gains and grades. While these findings are promising, the increased focus on academic advising as a critical function for improving retention rates and other student outcomes (Habley & McClanahan, 2004) calls for additional verification and expansion of studies on advising and academic outcomes.

Academic Advising Contributions to Student Experiences

An examination of the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement data found that students'

experience of the institution's environment was strongly related to the quality of their academic advising (Kuh et al., 2006). This finding not only reinforced the need for continued examination of the relationship between advising and academic outcomes but also the importance of exploring the mechanism behind advising relationships (Museus & Ravello, 2010). For example, in their qualitative study, Rendón et al. (2014) found that for low-income students of color, "advising was a real issue for most students as they went through the maze of registering and basically trying to navigate a new campus life" (p. 14) and asserted that all university practices, including advising, were incomplete without culturally validating practices.

Observations that advisors play a role in the experiences of marginalized student communities prompted investigation of advising practices that validated student experiences. Studies found that students from historically marginalized communities benefited from engaged and intentional advising (Chirdon-Jones, 2018), particularly in areas related to sense of responsibility, self-efficacy, and perceived support (Young-Jones et al., 2013), as well as students' self-perceived gains in various tasks ranging from writing and speaking to problem solving and teamwork (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Museus and Ravello (2010) found that advisors were able to engage students through key behaviors such as being welcoming and "human" (p. 53), approaching advising holistically by seeing the student as a complete person, and engaging with students proactively. Likewise, Lee (2018) found that small and implicit gestures of support, connecting with students beyond academic needs, and demonstrating care and effort effectively engaged students in the advising relationship. Advisors may serve as mediators for marginalized students by acknowledging the values, resilience, familial support, work ethic, and experiences that students bring with them (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Method

This study used data collected from the 2017 College Senior Survey (CSS), developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (HERI, 2020a). Designed to be administered to graduating seniors, the 45-question survey connected "academic, civic, and diversity outcomes with a comprehensive set of college experiences to measure the impact of college" (HERI, 2020a, para. 1). The 2017 data set was selected because it was the most recent survey data available at the time of inquiry. The 2017 survey was distributed to 77 four-year institutions across the United States (Cooperative Institutional Research, 2020). Of the 77 participating institutions in 2017, 12 were public institutions, 59 were private, four were Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and two were designated by HERI as not fitting into these categories of stratification (HERI, 2020b). Institutions administered the survey to graduating seniors and HERI provided a resulting data set of 7,211 participants who had also completed survey items from both the CSS and HERI's First Year Survey (FYS). The FYS data provided the variables related to parental income and parental education, which were not available in the CSS.

Research Question 1: Direct Effects

For the first research question, the independent variables included the frequency of meetings with an advisor/counselor to discuss career plans (3-point scale: *frequently, occasionally, not at all*) and satisfaction with advising in the college (5-point Likert scale). Students' experiences of validation/sense of belonging were also treated as an independent variable and were measured by the creation of a validation/belonging scale based on five items (all 4-point Likert scale): (1) At least one staff member has taken an interest in my development, (2) At least one faculty member has taken an interest in my development, (3) I feel valued at the institution, (4) I feel I am a member of this college, and (5) I feel a sense of belonging to this campus. The first two items related to faculty and staff interest were consistent with items used to represent validation in a previous HERI-based study of diverse learning environments (Hurtado et al., 2012). The final three items were similar to those used in studies that broadly capture experiences of validation and belonging (Barnett, 2011; Duran et al., 2020; Hurtado et al., 2012). The 5-item scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .869 for internal reliability. This, coupled with the literature that affirmed the use of the items in other studies and suggested that they are closely aligned, was sufficient to justify their use as a scale in this study (Cronbach, 1984).

The dependent variable for the first question was students' college GPA, which was self-reported as letter grades. Students were asked what their average

Table 1. Frequencies of Aggregated Categories: Race/Ethnicity, First-Generation Status, Family Income, and Major

Variables	*N*	%	Coding
Total Population	7211		
Sex			
Female	2769	38.4	1
Male	4439	61.6	0
Race/Ethnicity			
Historically Minoritized Racial Groups	1358	18.8	1
Non-Historically Minoritized Racial Groups	5853	81.2	0
First-Generation Status			
First-Generation College Students	1312	18.2	1
Non-First-Generation College Students	5842	81.0	0
Family Income			
Low-income (<$30,000/year)	659	9.1	1
Non-Low income (= >$30,000/year)	6552	90.9	0

grade was throughout their college career and were given the options A, A-, B+, etc. Caskie et al. (2014) found consistency between self-reported GPA and actual GPA, so self-reported GPA was deemed to be an effective measure. For analysis, the GPAs were coded on a scale of 2 through 8 (C = 2, C+ = 3. . ., A = 8).

Research Question 2: Indirect Effects

Because Research Question 2 focused on the indirect impact of advising experiences on GPA via validation and belonging, the dependent variable for this question was the validation/belonging scale ($\alpha = .869$). Frequency of meetings with an advisor/counselor to discuss career plans and student satisfaction with advising were the independent variables.

Research Question 3: Variables Related to Marginalized Student Status

Research Question 3 explored how the results of the model developed in questions 1 and 2 varied by students' marginalized statuses. I defined marginalized statuses as students who identified as first-generation, or from low-income backgrounds, or students who identified as part of historically minoritized racial groups (e.g., racial or ethnic groups who have been historically disenfranchised in the American educational system). Racial and ethnic groups included in this category vary by study; however, for this study, African American or Black, Latina/o/x, Native American, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asian students are included in this group (Espinosa et al., 2019; NSCRC, 2018; Teranishi et al., 2013). First-generation status was defined using federal TRIO support program guidelines. Those guidelines classify students as first-generation when neither parent has a bachelor's degree (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2021). The United States Census Bureau (2021) reported that the average family size in 2017 was 3.26 family members. For this study, low-income student status was defined as any student with an income below $30,000, the cut-off for the salary range closest to the federal income eligibility guideline (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Control Variables

The control variables for all questions included student characteristics (sex, high school GPA) and students' college behaviors that are historically connected to positive academic outcomes (relationships and communication with faculty and involvement in clubs, sports, research, and internships). The control variables were included in the model to acknowledge their existence as part of students' lived experiences and are needed as part of the regression analysis to account for their impact. Table 1 displays the frequencies for these aggregated categories. Table 2 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics for the following interval level variables: high school GPA, college GPA, the validation/belonging scale composite score, and advising satisfaction.

Data Analysis

Path analysis was selected for this study because it allowed for the exploration of the indirect relationships outlined in research questions 2

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Students' High School and College GPA, Advising Satisfaction, and Validation/Belonging Scale Scores

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
High School GPA	2	8	7.11	1.07	−1.245
College GPA	2	8	6.38	1.32	−0.730
Validation/Belonging Scale	1	4	3.30	0.58	−0.666
Advising Satisfaction	2	6	4.65	1.09	−0.611

and 3 because it is used to model "explanatory relationships between observed variables" (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006, p. 77) through the use of multiple regression analyses (Stage et al., 2004). For this study, the goal of the path model was to examine the relationship between advising (measured by advising satisfaction and frequency) and GPA via students' experiences of validation and belonging (measured by the validation/belonging scale), while controlling for students' identities and students' academic discipline. Once the model was created, I tested the specifications of the model using the error terms for the ultimate endogenous variable and the mediating endogenous variables. Then, I examined the decomposed bivariate correlations for each variable.

I used SPSS Statistics software to run multiple linear regression analyses to test the paths in the model. Multiple linear regressions allowed me to identify the relationships between the dependent variable and each independent variable. The R^2 provided the impact of all the independent variables together as a group on the dependent (Kline, 1998; Schroeder et al., 2017). In path analysis, variables that are never dependent are called exogenous variables. Variables that serve as dependent variables are endogenous. For the first question, the exogenous variables included all control variables as well as advising satisfaction, advising frequency, and the composite validation/belonging scale. To address the second question focusing on the indirect relationships between the variables, I tested the model with these three endogenous variables: validation/belonging scale, advising satisfaction, and advising frequency. To identify the impact of students' marginalized identities, I tested the model using the following exogenous variables: students' historically minoritized racial status, first-generation college student status, and low-income status, while controlling for student behaviors. The endogenous variables were the validation/belonging scale, advising satisfaction, advising frequency, and college GPA.

Procedures to Ensure Validity and Reliability

Several steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Most variables used in the study were self-reported, unidimensional items, including: (a) frequency of meetings with an advisor, (b) satisfaction with advising, (c) major, and (d) GPA. The validation/belonging scale was comprised of five survey items (all from CSS Question 23), which I selected based on research that ties these concepts together. Research using the Diverse Learning Environments survey (Hurtado et al., 2010) found a strong correlation between validation and belonging. Similarly, Hurtado et al. (2012) found that as students perceived validation, their sense of belonging increased. These findings confirm Nora et al.'s (2011) observations that while validation gained notoriety with Rendón's research, there is a history of work that suggested campus climate (Hurtado, 1994) and belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012) served as proxies for the concept.

Findings

Research Question 1: Direct Effects

Research Question 1 explored the direct relationships between satisfaction with advising, advising frequency, the validation/belonging scale and students' GPA. Table 3 displays all direct effects of the exogenous variables and college GPA. The proposed model accounted for 24.9% of variance in student's college GPA ($R^2 = .249$, $p < .001$). This included control variables, the validation/belonging scale, students' advising experiences (via satisfaction and frequency of meetings), and students' identification as part of historically marginalized groups. Figure 1 includes all significant, direct relationships. There were two main findings resulting from the model. First, there was no significant, direct relationship found between advising satisfaction and college GPA nor between advising frequency and college GPA. This means that, within this model, students' experiences with advising did not have an impact on college GPA. This finding

Table 3. Direct Effects (Regression Coefficients) on Ultimate Endogenous Variable (Overall GPA)

Variables	Direct Effect
Control variables	
Female	0.050***
Identify as transgender	−0.011
Average grade in high school	0.397***
Institution control	−0.035***
Found a faculty or staff mentor	0.006
Communicated regularly with professors	0.066***
Joined a pre-professional or departmental club	0.053***
Played club, intramural, or recreational sports	−0.049***
Participated in: an internship program	0.031***
Participated in: an undergraduate research program	0.063***
STEM majors	−0.071***
Validation/belonging scale	
5-item validation/belonging scale	0.076***
Advising experiences	
Satisfaction: academic advising	0.015
I met with an advisor about my career	−0.016
Marginalized student status	
First-generation college student	−0.028*
Low-income	−0.054***
Historically minoritized racial group	−0.127***
R^2	0.249
F	130.710***
Error term	0.867

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

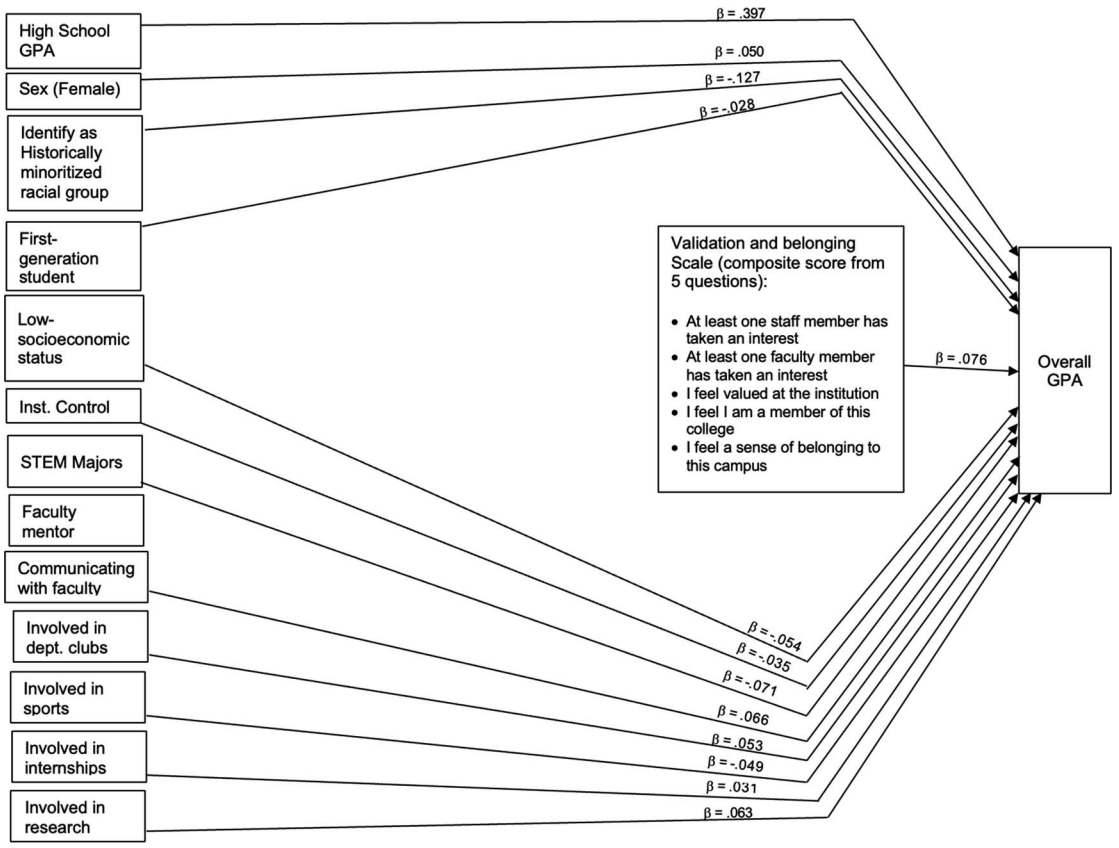
differs from past studies, which have suggested that there is a positive relationship between advising and GPA (Kot, 2014; Swecker et al., 2013). Second, students' experiences of validation/belonging (measured on the 5-item scale) positively predicted GPA ($\beta = .076$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who experienced validation/belonging were more likely to have higher GPAs compared with their peers. This finding aligned with past research that found that validation and belonging contributed to positive academic and personal outcomes (Barnett, 2011; Deil-Amen, 2011; Dowd et al., 2013; Hausmann et al., 2007, Langhout et al., 2009).

Question 2: Indirect Effects

The second research question sought to identify the indirect relationships between variables in the model where the validation/belonging scale, advising satisfaction, and advising frequency each served as endogenous variables. Table 4 provides an overview of the outcomes for the three analyses. When examining the validation/belonging scale as the endogenous variable, the model accounted for 26.2% of variance in students' experiences of validation and belonging ($R^2 = .262$, $p < .001$). Holding control variables constant, satisfaction with academic advising positively predicted scores on the validation/belonging scale ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who were satisfied with their advising experience were more likely to experience validation and belonging. In fact, satisfaction with advising was the strongest predictor of validation/belonging of all variables. Additionally, advising frequency also positively predicted scores on the validation/belonging scale ($\beta = 0.049$, $p < .001$), denoting that students who met with an advisor/counselor were more likely to experience validation and belonging. These results were consistent with previous studies that suggested that students appreciated advising experiences that reflect elements of validation theory (Donaldson et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

The regression analyses with advising satisfaction and advising frequency as endogenous variables completed the model as they addressed

Figure 1. Significant Direct Relationships in the Path Model



variance in the model resulting from the control variables, students' marginalized status on these factors. Because question 3 specifically addresses marginalized student status, these will be addressed in the next section; however, they are included in Table 4. The complete path model, which includes all significant, direct, and indirect relationships, is displayed in Figure 2. The complete model also includes the error terms for each regression analysis, which represents the impact of items not accounted for in the model. The error term for the regression analysis of college GPA as the endogenous variable was 0.867. The error term for the validation/belonging scale as the endogenous variable was 0.859. Finally, the error term for the regressions that included advising satisfaction and advising meetings as the endogenous variables were 0.974 and 0.970, respectively.

Finally, Table 5 displays the sum of the direct and indirect relationships between all variables in the model. When accounting for both direct and indirect relationships, satisfaction with academic advising had a positive, indirect impact on college GPA via validation/belonging ($\beta = 0.020$, $p < .05$). Additionally, meeting with an advisor also had a small, indirect impact on college GPA via validation/belonging ($\beta = 0.004$, $p < .05$). The indirect impact of advising satisfaction and advising frequency on GPA via experiences of validation/belonging is in addition to the direct relationship between the experiences of validation/belonging and college GPA, which were explored in the first research question.

Question 3: Effects of Historically Minoritized Status

The final question explored how the model varied by students' marginalized statuses. First-generation student status ($\beta = -0.028$, $p < .05$), low-income status ($\beta = -0.054$, $p < .001$), and students' identification as part of a historically minoritized racial group ($\beta = -0.127$, $p < .001$) all had negative, direct relationships with overall

Table 4. Direct Effects (Regression Coefficients) on Mediating Endogenous Variables

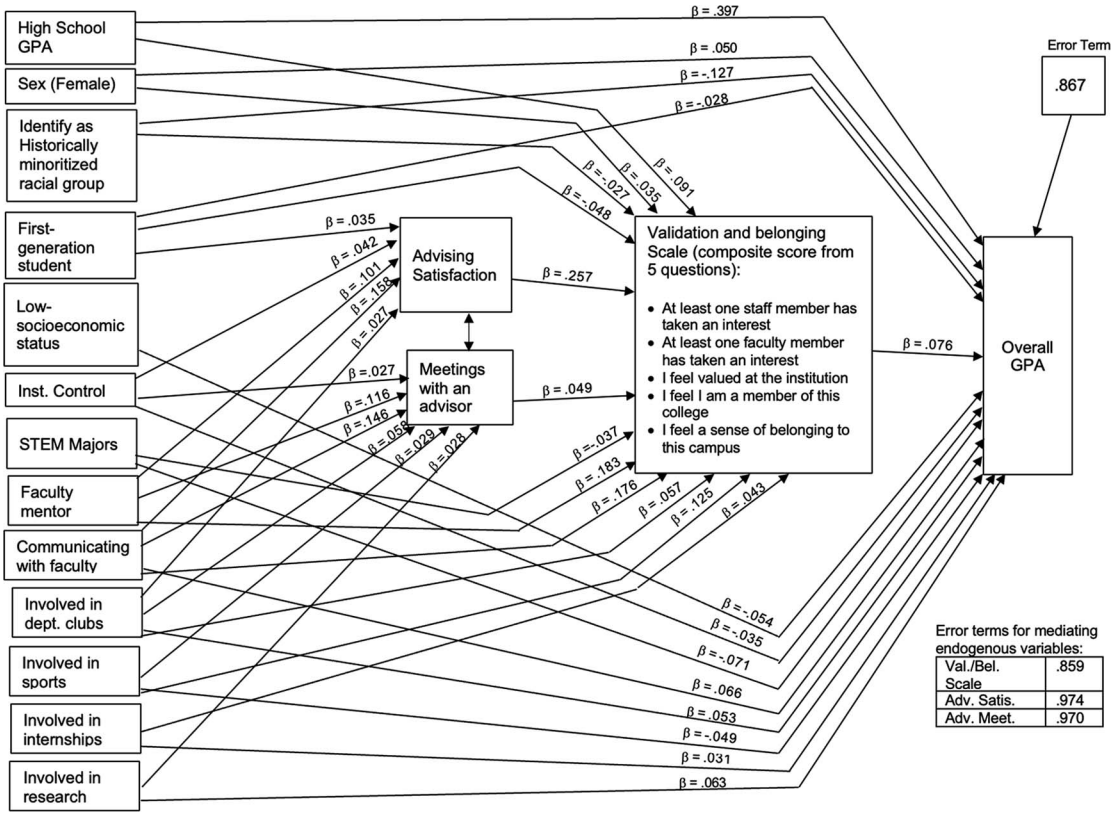
	Endogenous Variables		
Independent Variables	**Validation/ Belonging Scale**	**Advising Satisfaction**	**Meetings with Advisor**
Control Variables			
Female	0.035***	−0.017	0.019
Identify as transgender	0.008	−0.022	−0.028*
Average grade in high school	0.091***	−0.006	−0.019
Institution Control	−0.010	0.042**	0.027*
Found a faculty or staff mentor	0.183***	0.101***	0.116***
Communicated regularly with professors	0.176***	0.158***	0.146***
Joined a pre-professional or departmental club	0.057***	0.027*	0.058***
Played club, intramural, or recreational sports	0.125***	−0.006	0.029*
Participated in: An internship program	0.043***	−0.001	−0.010
Participated in: Undergraduate research	0.022	0.016	0.028*
STEM Majors	−0.037**	−0.025	−0.017
Independent Variables			
Satisfaction: Academic advising	0.257***	N/A	N/A
I met with an advisor about my career	0.049***	N/A	N/A
Marginalized Student Status			
First-Generation College Student	−0.048***	0.035**	0.024
Low-Income	−0.007	0.009	−0.004
Historically Minoritized Racial Group	−0.027*	0.007	0.008
R^2	0.262	0.051	0.059
F	148.430***	27.004***	31.584***

college GPA, with the latter having the greatest impact of the three. These results indicate that students who were part of these groups were more likely to have a lower college GPA. These findings align with previous research that suggests students from historically underserved communities are less likely to have positive academic outcomes because of the historical and structural inequality that exists within the education system (Cataldi et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005, 2012; NSCRC, 2018; Spring, 2018).

In addition to the direct relationships demonstrated by the analysis, there were also indirect relationships. Figure 2 outlined the significant indirect relationships that occurred between students' marginalized student status and GPA. The model depicts the relationship between identification as a historically minoritized racial group and the validation/belonging scale ($\beta = -0.027$, $p < .05$) as well as first-generation student status and the validation/belonging scale ($\beta = -0.048$, $p < .001$). Both variables negatively predicted validation/belonging, demonstrating the students who identified as first-generation college students or as part of the historically minoritized racial groups were less likely to experience validation and belonging. This outcome is consistent with research (Rendón Linares & Munoz, 2011; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014).

Figure 2 also depicts the positive relationship between first-generation student status and advising satisfaction ($\beta = 0.035$, $p < .01$), which suggests that, in this model, first-generation college students were more likely to experience satisfaction with advising compared with their peers. A comparison of means demonstrated that advising satisfaction was higher for first-generation students than non-first-generation students ($t = -2.124$, $p < .05$); however, validation/belonging scale scores were lower for first-generation compared with non-first-generation students ($t = 6.916$, $p < .05$). This was noteworthy because research suggested that first-generation college students experience less validation and belonging than their peers (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). The findings of this study then suggested that, while the direct relationship between first-generation student status and validation/belonging was still

Figure 2. All Significant Direct and Indirect Relationships in the Path Model



negative, advising satisfaction served as a positive, moderating factor in this relationship, potentially ameliorating some of the negative experiences of validation/belonging.

Finally, there were no significant relationships between students from low-income backgrounds and advising satisfaction, advising frequency, nor validation/belonging. A summary of these outcomes can be found in Table 4. Additionally, the total indirect impact for each variable on college GPA is highlighted in Table 5. The total impact of all three variables on the model was determined by totaling the direct and indirect effects of each variable.

Discussion

The findings of this study provided additional quantitative evidence to support Rendón's (1994) theory of validation and Hurtado and Carter's (1997) work on belonging, which both situate students' experiences with institutional agents and culture as an important piece of the framework for student success. These findings counteract deficit-minded and meritocratic narratives that place the burden of success on the student, and instead remind scholars and practitioners that the institution and its community have a significant role to play in helping students to succeed.

For advising administrators and policymakers, the results of this study serve as evidence that the advising relationship has an important role to play in student success. The indirect relationship between advising and GPA via validation and belonging indicates that it is not necessarily through prescriptive knowledge sharing but instead through meaningful interactions that foster belonging and validation that students can succeed academically. As such, decision-makers must consider how advising models, policies, and processes foster or impede sense of belonging and validation. In question 3, I specifically focused on the experiences of students of historically marginalized groups because institutional structures continue to fail these students (Espinosa et al., 2019; NSCRC, 2018; Teranishi et al., 2013). This study

Table 5. Impact of Direct and Indirect Variables for all Predictors in the Model

	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Original Covariation	Non-causal
Control Variables					
Sex	0.050	0.003	0.053	0.086	0.033
Average grade in high school	0.397	0.007	0.404	0.440	0.036
Institution Control	−0.035	0.001	−0.034	0.074	0.108
Found a faculty or staff mentor	N/A	0.016	0.016	0.112	0.096
Communicated regularly with professors	0.066	0.017	0.083	0.131	0.048
Joined a pre-profes. or departmental club	0.053	0.005	0.058	0.142	0.084
Played club, intramural, or recreat. sports	−0.049	0.010	−0.039	0.013	0.052
Participated in: An internship program	0.031	0.003	0.034	0.082	0.048
Participated in: An undergraduate research program	0.063	0.000	0.063	0.144	0.081
STEM majors	−0.071	−0.003	−0.074	0.353	0.427
Validation/Belonging Scale					
5-item Validation/Belonging Scale	0.076	N/A	0.076	0.187	0.111
Advising Experiences					
Satisfaction with academic advising	N/A	0.020	0.020	0.060	0.040
Met with advisor about career	N/A	0.004	0.004	0.038	0.034
Marginalized Student Status					
First-Generation College Student	−0.028	−0.003	−0.031	−0.127	−0.096
Low-Income	−0.054	N/A	−0.054	−0.113	−0.059
Historically Minoritized Racial Group	−0.127	−0.002	−0.129	−0.200	−0.071

affirmed that students from historically minoritized racial groups and first-generation college students experience less validation than their peers. As such, equity-based initiatives that situate advising as a key intervention strategy need to consider the importance of advising practices aimed at validation and belonging as a key component of an effective model.

Limitations

An important limitation is that the institutions that make up the sample are largely private institutions. As such, they are not representative of the general student population. Additionally, students completing this survey were those who met the GPA requirements to complete their degree. The study used all the data for all students who completed both the FYS and CSS surveys, resulting in a nonrandom sample. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that students' experiences of validation and belonging are multifaceted and complex, and while this study only focuses on five components of these experiences, these items provide a simplified and quantifiable way to measure these important topics. While these limitations are important to acknowledge and consider throughout the data analysis process, they are offset by the substantial size and broad distribution of the sample offered by the HERI College Senior Survey data set.

Recommendations

The results of this inquiry invite ample opportunities for future studies. While previous research suggests that there is a direct connection between GPA and advising (Kot, 2014; Swecker et al., 2013), my results indicate that validation/belonging serves as a critical mediating factor in the relationship between advising and GPA. Advising's primary benefit to GPA is through its positive effect on validation and belonging. My study identified this key relationship, but it did not identify the particular ways that advising leads to validation and belonging. Qualitative studies can explore *how* advising satisfaction and advising frequency contribute to students feeling as though they are valued and that they belong to the university community. Beyond this, the results point to a need for additional research on the relationship between advising experiences that promote feelings of validation and belonging and other key outcomes of advising such as goal setting, critical thinking, help seeking, and other

important skills (Appleby, 2008). Finally, the most critical recommendation from this research, given the persistent structure inequity in higher education, involves the need for additional research that centers and amplifies the experiences of students from historically marginalized communities and their intersectional identities. A limitation of the current study was the overrepresentation of private institutions. Future research could add to these findings by using a sample that is also more representative of the broader make-up of American college students.

The results also call for scholars and practitioners to reexamine the core tenets of advising and what is valuable about the advising interaction. This study found experiences that foster validation and belonging are a critical mitigating factor in successful academic outcomes. To that end, advising core competencies and learning outcomes should include the critical components of validation theory and sense of belonging to ensure that students are meeting their academic goals.

At the institutional level, administrators can utilize the findings of this study to make better investments in advising infrastructure. Given that academic advising impacts GPAs via experiences of validation/belonging, administrators should enact advising models that validate students and foster a sense of belonging. This approach stands in contrast to models of advising that focus primarily on prescriptive course planning. While prescriptive plans and tools may provide useful information to students, alone they will not be sufficient to address the relational aspects of advising that contribute to students' success. Research suggests that advisors can do this by proactively reaching out to students (Donaldson et al., 2016), maintaining ongoing relationships via regular communications and meetings (Zhang, 2016), taking an interest in students' interests in goals beyond school (Lee, 2018), and seeing the student as a whole (Museus & Ravello, 2010). Creating an advising syllabus (Appleby, 2008) that is developmental and asset-based as well as advising learning outcomes (NACADA, 2006) that are grounded in validating practices are ways to ensure that advisors continue to focus their work on relationship-building as a means of supporting students' academic success.

Conclusion

Using a quantitative approach with a national sample, this study found that advising practices that employ behaviors and language that promote students' feeling of validation and belonging have an impact on student outcomes (Barnett, 2011; Hurtado et al., 2012; Means & Pyne, 2017; Museus & Neville, 2012; Newman et al., 2015). It is critical for researchers and practitioners to understand what role advisors can play in mitigating student success outcomes. The results of this study indicate that, while advising relationships did not directly impact GPA, they did have an indirect impact on GPA via experiences of validation and belonging. The findings call attention to the role that institutions and their community members play in student success and demand critical and urgent change in the form of advising interactions that demonstrate to students that someone is interested in them, that they are valued, and they belong to the campus community.

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