

Discovering the “why”: A qualitative study exploring alignment between an individual’s purpose  
in life and their work in academic advising

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2003  
M.S., Fort Hays State University, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs  
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Manhattan, Kansas

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## **Abstract**

Finding and articulating purpose in life has been both an individual pursuit and a line of research for individuals and scholars for decades. Viktor Frankl (1959/2006) noted that purpose in life is profoundly human, individually unique, and exists in each person. In recent decades, the research on purpose in life has grown substantially and has revealed that individuals who have a clear sense of their purpose in life also exhibit a variety of positive life characteristics both personally and professionally. Scholars are beginning to explore the associations between purpose in life and various career groups such as priests, nurses, and social workers. However, at the time of this study, no research has been found around purpose in life as it relates to academic advisors in higher education.

This narrative inquiry engaged the theoretical frameworks of Frankl (1959/2006) and Dewey (1938) to enhance understanding of the data. Qualitative analysis revealed that the exploration of life stories allowed primary-role academic advisors to connect with emotions which led to the ability to interrogate the individual meaning assigned to the experiences and, subsequently, a deeper understanding of themselves. Having an unbiased partner to help interrogate those life experiences was an important part of the process. Furthermore, having an awareness of their purpose led to a more intentional focus on the relational aspect of the advising relationship while enhancing individual feelings of resilience in their work. Finally, primary-role academic advisors acknowledged potential conflicts between their purpose and the goals of their institution. Participants identified resources that they felt would help to mitigate these challenges and shared that having an awareness of their purpose would help guide them in their professional goals and potential career moves. Following the presentation of the data, implications for

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the students, colleagues, and friends who were the inspiration for me to pursue this degree and line of research. You have made me the professional I am today. It is also dedicated to my children and my husband who get to see me live out my own purpose and passion every day.



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 2018, I attended the annual conference of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA). During that conference, I chose to participate in a session that focused on helping academic advisors find their “why,” or their purpose, cause, or belief that is the motivation behind everything a person does in their life (Sinek, 2009). After attending that session, not only was I aware of and able to articulate my own “why” (referred to in this study as purpose in life), but I personally experienced the power that came with being able to do so. It transformed my perspective on everything from my personal life to my professional career as an academic advisor. I would later come to realize, through this study, that I had experienced a purpose moment (Leider, 2015). As I reflected on this insight, I began to wonder about helping others, such as academic advisors in higher education, find their “why” and how this awareness may influence the important work that they do. This powerful personal experience coupled both my professional career in academic advising and my passion for helping others live their most full and authentic life formed both the foundation and my motivation for conducting this qualitative study.

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for the current study which shows the importance of academic advisors and academic advising, summarize the necessity to retain these valuable employees, discuss how a purpose in life connects to employee retention, and highlight a gap in the literature around purpose in life for academic advisors in higher education. The research purpose and questions that directed the study are introduced, followed by operational definitions of key terms used throughout the content. Two theories that framed the study are summarized which include Viktor Frankl’s (1959/2006) *Will to Meaning* and John Dewey’s (1938) *Theory of*

*Experience.* The methodology and methods chosen for this qualitative study are briefly introduced. Finally, my positionality, subjectivities, and limitations of the study are presented.

## **Rationale for Study**

The importance of academic advising in higher education is well documented in literature. Academic advising is critical to individual student success “by helping students understand and navigate the institution, making connections between academics and future goals, and helping students to feel connected to the institution” (Hawthorne et al., 2022, p. 2). From an institutional perspective, administrators and leaders are most interested in the effect of academic advising on student retention and persistence (Cuseo, n.d.; Elliott, 2020). Despite these documented benefits of academic advising, institutions are struggling to retain advisors.

The definition of academic advising has been a topic of discussion for many years. As the profession evolves, scholars are coming closer to a widely accepted definition of advising. In 2018, Larson et al. employed an analytic induction research method to draft a definition of academic advising “created from the words of academic advisors” (p. 81). Larson et al. (2018) defined academic advising as the following: “Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education” (p. 86).

There are many professionals in higher education who engage in the practice of academic advising. These individuals may include primary-role academic advisors, faculty, peer (student) advisors, or administrators. While each group provides a set of valuable skills and resources to both students and the institution, this study focused on primary-role academic advisors. These advisors are individuals whose primary responsibility is to engage in advising interactions and advising-related work (Grites et al., 2016). Although many advisors report that they find their

work rewarding, reports of increased stress and burnout have been the focus of scholars in recent years (Couture & Tyson, 2022; Gregerson et al., 2022; Solon et al., 2022). Because of these factors, academic advisors are leaving the profession at alarming rates.

Academic advisors and others working in higher education have been vacating their positions in large numbers over the past few years. Recent research has indicated that higher education professionals feel overworked, undervalued, underpaid, and have little opportunity for advancement resulting in high turnover (Ellis, 2021; Figueroa, 2015; Owens, 2022). The cost of employee turnover to both the institution and individual students is significant. Navarra (2022) summarized that there are both direct costs, such as necessary salary costs, and indirect costs, such as loss of institutional knowledge, when an employee leaves. Additionally, Smith and Cunningham (2022) highlighted that a key component of academic advising is the relationship between the advisor and the student. When the advisor leaves their position, this relationship is broken and must be rebuilt between the student and the new advisor.

For these reasons, it is in the best interest of both the student and the institution to retain effective academic advisors. While there are many factors that leaders may consider when evaluating employee turnover, one growing area of scholarship is the correlation between a “why” or purpose in life and happy, engaged employees. Sinek (2009) reported that individuals who are aware of their “why” generally enjoy going to work and are more productive and creative in the workplace. They are happier with their families, lives, colleagues and clients they may serve.

As a result of the growing literature surrounding purpose in life, scholars have noted a variety of correlations between positive life characteristics and an individual’s awareness of their purpose in life. Hill et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between individuals’ awareness of

their purpose in life and improved healthful activities such as desire to exercise, consume a healthy diet, and obtain better sleep. Additionally, awareness of a purpose in life was found to have a positive correlation with the ability to manage day-to-day stress (Hill et al., 2018) as well as associations with greater life satisfaction through multiple stages of life from adolescence through adulthood (Bronk et al., 2009). Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between an individual's awareness of their purpose in life and both healthy cognitive aging (Sutin et al., 2021) and increased longevity of life (Hill & Turiano, 2014). While these studies do not prove that these positive factors are caused by an awareness of a purpose in life, multiple scholars continue to show positive correlations in both the personal and professional lives of individuals.

Extending the scholarship, some scholars have conducted studies with specific career groups. For instance, Crea and Francis (2022) studied a group of Catholic priests and found positive indicators between an awareness of their purpose in life and a reduced risk of burnout in the profession. In a study that considered social workers who had a greater sense of purpose in life, Chen et al. (2020) found that these individuals appeared to report greater well-being and overall health. Although these studies on particular career groups have been conducted, professionals in higher education have been left out of this important research. Therefore, research needs to be done in the area of purpose in life as it relates to higher education professionals and, specifically, academic advisors.

## **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand, through narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brought awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors and how this awareness of their individual purpose in life enlightens their work in academic advising. Additionally, this study explored how primary-role advisors navigate

limitations and/or challenges of living out their purpose in life within the context of their institution.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions directed the focus of the study:

- ***R1.** How does the exploration of life experiences bring awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors?*
- ***R2.** How does the experience of bringing awareness of their individual purpose in life enlighten their work in academic advising?*
- ***R3.** Given the new awareness of their purpose in life, how do primary-role academic advisors navigate limitations and/or challenges of living out that purpose in life within the context of their institution?*

## **Operational Definitions**

Key terms for this study are defined below and are based on current literature and scholars in this area:

- **Academic advising** – “Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education” (Larson et al., 2018, p. 86).
- **Primary-role academic advisor** – “the group of academic advisors who spend the majority of their time in direct academic advising or advising-related activities (managing, assessing, training, advocating, etc.)” (Grites et al., 2016, p. xxx).
- **Purpose in Life** – Pfund and Hill (2018) defined purpose in life as “a commitment to a clear set of aims or causes that direct actions while also leading to the sense that life is meaningful” (p. 1).

- **Frankl's (1959/2006) *Will to Meaning*** - despite the most unimaginable circumstances, man can find meaning in life. That meaning can then have a profound impact on man's perspective and the course of his life.
- **Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience*** - people learn through interactions with other individuals and the world around them. These interactions, called experiences, may have educative value that can be positive or negative in nature.
- **"Why"** – Sinek (2009) suggested that a person's "why" is a purpose, cause, or belief that drives everything that individual does in life. This study will focus on the "purpose" aspect of this concept.
- **Narrative** – According to Kramp (2004),  

what distinguishes narrative as a mode of inquiry is that it is both a process, a narrator or participant telling or narrating, and a product, the story or narrative told.... It is both the means by which you as researcher, gather data, and the discourse or form of the data gathered. (pp. 104-105)
- **Narrative Inquiry** – Connelly and Clandinin (2006) defined narrative inquiry as,  

the study of experience as a story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)
- **Unbiased Partner** – a secondary person outside of the active participant who may have little to know knowledge of the participant's life and background and who can listen objectively to the participant's life stories.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

Two theoretical frameworks were used to provide insight and perspective into the data gathered during this study. The first is from the logotherapy model developed by Viktor E. Frankl (1959/2006). In this model, Frankl described a person's *Will to Meaning*. Frankl posited that all humans have a primary motivation to find something or someone to live and/or work for which provides meaning to their life. This meaning may be discovered through work, experiences, or suffering. Frankl's will to meaning was used to understand how the exploration of academic advisors' life stories may bring awareness to their purpose in life.

The second theoretical framework used in this study was John Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience*. According to Dewey, people learn through interactions with other individuals and the world around them. These interactions, called experiences, may have educative value that can be positive or negative in nature. Dewey's theory was used to understand how the experience of bringing awareness to their purpose in life provided educative value to their work in academic advising.

## **Methodology**

This study utilized a social constructivism epistemology (also described as interpretivism). In social constructivism the goal is "to understand the world" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 34) while also recognizing that an individual's own lived experiences, background, history, and culture influence their interpretation of the research. Within the social constructivist paradigm, the belief is the nature of reality (ontological belief) consists of "multiple realities" that "are constructed through...lived experiences and interactions with others" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). The participant's unique perspectives and values (axiological beliefs) are respected.

Through the lens of social constructivism, the researcher acknowledges that the nature of truth is unique to the individual, and the researcher works with the participant to co-construct reality and meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the present study, I engaged with the participants to understand and to co-construct their understanding of their purpose in life, while also exploring how this purpose in life illuminated their work in academic advising. Additionally, we explored ways they would navigate conflicts between their purpose and their institution's goals. The exercise, developed by Sinek et al. (2017), asked that one person (in this study, me as the researcher) serve as a facilitator to explore the participant's life stories and uncover themes that will lead to their purpose in life statement.

In addition to the social constructivism approach, this study utilized the methodology of narrative inquiry. Riessman (1993) stated that narrative inquiry, "as a research approach...provides an effective way to undertake the 'systematic study of personal experiences and meaning'" (p. 70). Kramp (2004) further explained that the emphasis is on the story told by participants and that this story is the "basic unit of analysis" (p. 105). Not only should the researcher attune themselves to the content of the story but also to the way the story is crafted and told which also provides important perspective into where the participant places emphasis in their story (Kramp, 2004).

Kramp (2004) further highlighted a key aspect of narrative inquiry which aligned with the current study that "narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience" (Kramp, 2004, p. 104). The researcher can utilize context provided by the participant (or storyteller) to connect disparate events and construct meaning with them. Finally, narrative inquiry places emphasis not on the researcher, but on the participant such that "the subject of our research is not the object of observation but is the narrator, the



storyteller” (Kramp, 2004, p. 111). Through this study, emphasis was placed on the academic advisors who shared and explored their life stories with the goal of bringing awareness to their purpose in life and how this awareness affects their work in academic advising.

## **Methods**

Participants for this study were primary-role academic advisors who were chosen given that much of their time is devoted to the work of academic advising. Additionally, the selection of participants included those who have engaged in the profession of academic advising for one year or more. Recruitment material included a questionnaire requesting the following: name, email address, institution, institution type, advising role. Those responding were asked to answer the following question: On a scale from 1 (low-level reflection) to 5 (high-level reflection), to what extent would you consider yourself to be someone who is reflective and who enjoys thinking about their life stories and the personal importance of your professional work?

With permission from the NACADA Research Committee, participants were recruited by utilizing the association’s all-member listserv asking for volunteers to participate in the study. A monetary incentive of \$100 was offered to participants who fully completed the study. A deadline was included in the recruitment email for responses to the call for participants. Due to the large number of respondents to the invitation, participants who rated themselves a “5” when answering the self-reflective survey question were filtered and formed the participant pool for the study. Participants who self-identified as being highly reflective and who enjoyed exploring life stories were more likely to genuinely engage with the exercise. The ability of these individuals to deeply engage with the exercise with a high level of self-reflection produced rich, qualitative data for the study.

Participants in this pool were grouped by institution type to ensure that there were participants from each designation. A random draw tool was used to select three participants from each of the following groups: 1) public four-year, 2) private four-year, and 3) community colleges and technical schools. The final participant was selected at random from the entire participant pool, resulting in ten participants for this study.

Data for this qualitative, narrative study were gathered through two sessions with each individual participant. An introductory meeting was held to introduce myself, to provide information about the research process, and to share Sinek et al.'s (2017) *Finding Your Why* activity. The two sessions were semi-structured, open-ended interviews where the participant and I first explored their life stories with the goal of bringing awareness to and articulating their individual "why" or purpose in life. In the second session, we investigated how this activity brought awareness to their purpose in life, how that awareness may illuminate their work in academic advising, and how they plan to navigate any conflicts between their purpose and their institution's goals. Member-checking and debriefing steps were conducted via email following the sessions to ensure that participant experiences and statements were understood and accurately represented in the analysis.

### **Positionality and Subjectivity**

As a research instrument, qualitative researchers bring with them a set of identities, values, beliefs, and assumptions that affect the research process (Peshkin, 1988). Through this qualitative study, my identity and perspectives included various assumptions, values, and beliefs which both informed and bounded my knowledge as I interacted with participants.

I acknowledge that I brought multiple identity classifications into the research process; many of which fall into majority and privileged classifications. I identify as a White,

heterosexual, middle- to upper-class, Christian, English-speaking woman. Additionally, I served as an academic advisor for 11 years and currently serve as the managing editor of publications for NACADA which both informed and bounded my perspective. In many ways, the identities that I have just listed are privileged categories. On one hand, these identities allowed me to connect with and understand participants who also identify with these categories as our lived experiences may be similar. For instance, I was able to more deeply connect with participants who are women when they discussed certain aspects of how their work aligns with their purpose in life and how they articulated emotional connections to their work as an academic advisor through shared language. Additionally, those participants who shared beliefs of Christianity discussed their experiences with purpose in life and the value of this tenet as it relates to their religious beliefs which provided a connection given that I also identify as a Christian.

### **Chapter Summary**

Scholarly literature has clearly indicated that academic advising is a critical component to both individual students and institutions of higher education. As such, it is in the best interest of institutions to retain knowledgeable and effective academic advisors. The literature shows that individuals who have a sense of purpose in life may be happier in their work and easier to retain in the workplace.

As previously defined, “Purpose in life can be defined by a commitment to a clear set of aims or causes that direct actions while also leading to the sense that life is meaningful” (Pfund & Hill, 2018, p. 27). A growing number of studies are showing positive correlations between a variety of positive life factors and an individual’s awareness of their purpose in life. Although research in this area has grown substantially over the past decade, no literature has been found around purpose in life as it relates to academic advisors.

The purpose of this research was to understand, through narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brought awareness to purpose in life for participants who are primary-role academic advisors. Additionally, this study explored how this awareness of their purpose in life enlightened their work in academic advising and how they will navigate conflicts that arise between their purpose and the goals of their institution.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

When conducting a qualitative research study, it is important to examine the literature that already exists surrounding the topic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “Besides providing a foundation...for the problem to be investigated, the literature review can demonstrate how the present study advances, refines, or revises what is already known” (p. 91). In this chapter, I present literature that introduces and explains the importance of the academic advising profession, the importance of advisor well-being, and the cost of advisor attrition. I discuss the concept of purpose in life, including areas of the current literature that discuss associations between purpose in life and positive life characteristics, employee retention, and the gap in the literature related to academic advisors in this area. Sinek’s (2009) concept of a “why” is introduced which was used as an exercise with participants in the design of the study. Finally, the two theories which will ground, frame, and provide perspective throughout the study are discussed.

### **Academic Advising**

At the time of this study, a comprehensive, agreed-upon definition of academic advising in higher education has been and continues to be a source of debate among scholars, practitioners, and leaders in the field (Larson et al., 2018; McGill, 2019). Larson et al. (2018) used an analytic induction method to articulate a definition of academic advising using the words of practitioners in the field: “Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education” (p. 86).

Research suggests that academic advising is a critical part of student success in higher education. Elliott (2020) summarized, “Amidst declining state revenues, high transfer rates, and

low student retention rates, academic advisors play increasingly crucial roles in attracting and retaining students at their institutions” (p. 1). Furthermore, Cuseo (n.d.) provided a strong connection between academic advising and student persistence and retention as there are positive correlations between advising and “(1) student satisfaction with the college experience, (2) effective educational and career planning and decision making, (3) student utilization of campus support services, (4) student-faculty contact outside the classroom, and (5) student mentoring” (p. 1). These studies and others highlight the importance of academic advising, not only to individual student success, but to institutional, state, and federal markers such as retention and graduation. With this knowledge, it is important to consider the health and well-being of individual academic advisors.

### **Importance of Advisor Well-Being**

As awareness of the value of academic advising continues to increase, the well-being and retention of the individuals who provide these valuable services increase as well. After presenting on advisor well-being at a variety of conferences, Gregerson et al. (2022) reported the following consistent themes related to advisor well-being as they met with attendees:

- “Volume of work” – “Many advisors expressed the sheer volume of work...[which] could be due to a large advising load, offices and teams being understaffed, needing to balance other administrative duties, and (particularly during the pandemic) the volume of email” (para. 5).
- “Burnout, compassion fatigue, and emotional labor” (para. 6) – Authors reported participants feeling emotionally exhausted due to compassion fatigue and felt they could not adequately address student stress.

- “Lack of institutional support and resources” (para. 7) – Conference attendees reported financial constraints as well as other issues with resource support from their institutions which increased their stress levels and resulted in advisor distress.

Further evidence of concerns related to the well-being of advising and student affairs staff and the retention of these important employees can be found in the literature.

Ellis (2021) reported that while the COVID-19 pandemic affected the well-being of students, staff, and faculty across higher education institutions, there were concerns about a “great resignation” (large numbers of employees leaving higher education) prior to this major event. The author summarized, “Researchers who study employees’ experiences in the field point to overwork and few opportunities for advancement as structural challenges that cause staff members to leave” (Ellis, 2021, para. 40). Additionally, Owens (2022) highlighted that staff in higher education are more likely to leave their institution due to feeling unappreciated and undervalued.

Figueroa (2015) reported that factors related to employee attrition varied based on position within the institution. For instance, administrators in higher education chose to leave their positions due to “low engagement, low organizational commitment, poor sense of value, little growth opportunities, a void of staff development and low compensation” (p. 92). Faculty vacated their positions due to gender-based salary differences, office conflicts, work-life balance, and poor communication from institutional and departmental leaders. Furthermore, women and minority faculty reported moving to different positions to follow career advancement opportunities that were not available to them at their current institution. The attrition of these employees, whether staff, faculty, or administrators, is costly for the institution in several ways.

## **Cost of Academic Advisor Attrition**

If an academic advisor chooses to leave their position, there are many costs associated with their attrition. From a financial perspective, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) estimated that the cost to hire a new employee can be three to four times the cost of the position salary with 30 to 40% of those costs being “hard costs” (actual dollars) and 60 percent being “soft costs” (para. 3). Navarra (2022) explained that soft costs include indirect costs such as time spent by other employees on the recruitment and hiring processes, decreased productivity of the team due to lower staffing levels, loss of organizational knowledge from the former employee, and the emotional toll these have on remaining employees.

In addition to the direct and indirect costs to the department and institution, having an academic advisor move on to another position impacts the students they work with as well. A key component of academic advising is the relationship between the student and the advisor. This is evidenced in one of the pillars of academic advising endorsed by NACADA: the *NACADA Core Competencies* (Smith & Cunningham, 2022). In this model, the competencies emphasized the relational component whereby effective academic advisors are to be proficient in respectful and inclusive communication which helps to build rapport with the student. These relationships take time to build trust. Therefore, when the advisor leaves, the student must begin building a relationship with a new person.

For the reasons listed above, it is in the best interest of both the institution and individual students for leaders to retain effective academic advisors when possible. Despite the “great resignation,” there are ways supported by the literature that administrators can work to increase employee engagement and retain them. One of those ways is to explore how an individual’s internal motivations, or purpose in life, may align with their work or career.



## **Purpose in Life**

Over the past decade, research on purpose in life has grown substantially. Pfund and Hill (2018) explained, “Purpose in life can be defined by a commitment to a clear set of aims or causes that direct actions while also leading to the sense that life is meaningful” (p. 27). Lewis (2020) expanded this definition to describe that purpose in life as “a component of psychological well-being” (p. 1). As noted by Chen et al. (2020), “Purpose in life, therefore, is a potential psychological asset that helps foster better health and well-being” (p. 2). Scholars have continued to extend the research in this area and have found multiple positive correlations between a person having an awareness of their purpose in life and positive life characteristics.

### **Purpose in Life and Well-Being**

Scholars have noted a wide range of positive correlations between an individual’s understanding of their purpose in life and their physical and mental well-being. These studies have shown positive benefits for individuals in both personal and professional settings. For instance, having a sense of purpose in life has been linked to a healthier lifestyle in a variety of ways. Hill et al. (2019) discovered a positive correlation between purpose in life and moderate exercise, healthy diet, and improved sleep quality. They suggested that those who have awareness of their purpose in life are more motivated to care for their health. In another study, Hill et al. (2018) found that having a clear purpose in life helped to mediate day-to-day stress due to the person acknowledging a larger life goal, direction, and mindset. On a broader scale, Bronk et al. (2009) studied a group of 806 participants ranging in age from adolescent to adult and concluded that “having identified a purpose in life is associated with greater life satisfaction in adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood” (p. 506).

Purpose in life has also been shown to have a positive correlation with cognitive functioning and longevity of life. When considering the purpose in life on the incidence of Alzheimer's and dementia-related illness, Sutin et al. (2021) highlighted a positive connection between purpose in life and healthy cognitive aging which, if leveraged, may align with decreased risk of cognitive illnesses. Furthermore, in a study of purpose in life and mortality, Hill and Turiano (2014) found that purpose in life throughout the lifespan was positively correlated with increased longevity of life even when controlling for other variables that typically affect mortality.

A few studies related to the impact of purpose in life have been conducted with specific career-related groups such as religious staff, social workers and student affairs administrators. Crea and Francis (2022) studied the impact of a clear purpose in life as it related to professional burnout among Catholic priests and religious sisters in Italy. By utilizing various measures of purpose and satisfaction in life, authors concluded that positive indicators of purpose in life were also associated with lower incidence of burnout suggesting that connecting with one's purpose in life provided some protection against professional fatigue. Additionally, Chen et al. (2020) investigated antecedents to purpose in life in a group of social workers and suggested that working with individuals to connect with a greater sense of purpose in life may result in "benefits for wellbeing and overall health" (p. 12). Finally, Craft and Hochella (2010) conducted a study including 24 student affairs administrators and found that participants identified feelings of "joy, comfort, and/or confidence with themselves and/or their jobs" when they felt they were "where they ought to be" (p. 5). Not only have there been studies finding implications for a healthier, happier life when an individual is aware of their purpose in life, employers have discovered that there are also positive associations with employee retention.

## **Purpose in Life and Employee Retention**

Employee attrition poses many challenges both logistically and financially for an organization. For this reason, it is in the best interest of a company to retain employees. Literature highlights that employee awareness of their purpose in life and how it connects to their work can have positive associations with employee engagement and employee retention within an organization (Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, 2019). When considering purpose in life related to work and employee engagement, scholars have suggested, “Purpose is thought to be central to people’s satisfaction in their work lives and career, particularly among those who view their careers as something more than simply a way to make money” (Kosine et al., 2008, p. 133).

When considering the literature surrounding the many benefits of purpose in life, Pfund and Hill (2018) noted a variety of professional benefits. First, the authors suggested that individuals “with higher sense of purpose could potentially be able to function in their jobs more effectively, and not feel as defeated by daily issues” (p. 8). Additionally, a sense of purpose was noted as being associated with the pursuit of goals which could lead to an increase in positive behaviors and productivity. Finally, Pfund and Hill (2018) concluded that these characteristics were all associated with employee engagement in increased desirability in the workplace.

While exploring the correlations between purpose, employee engagement, and organizational commitment of both employed and unemployed individuals at a professional services firm, Dai et al. (2021) “found a significant relationship between purposefulness at work and employee engagement” (p. 68). The authors noted that organizations often spend significant financial resources to implement programs to improve employee engagement, organizational commitment, and employee retention. However, their findings suggested that allowing employees “more freedom to follow their hearts” led to employees’ feeling more purpose in their

individual work and “engender[ed] higher level[s] of purposefulness and employee engagement” (p. 68) than these costly, motivational programs designed to increase engagement.

This study is further supported by research conducted by other scholars. Charles Leija et al. (2023) collected data from 937 professionals in Mexico with the goal of assessing the impact of meaningful work on happiness and work and turnover intention. The authors found “having a job that contributes to people’s life purpose, feeling appreciated, and enjoyment of daily tasks reduces turnover intention” (p. 1). Furthermore, in a study examining the associations between employees’ “calling” in life and their intention to stay with an organization, Presbitero and Teng-Calleja (2020) found that employees were more likely to remain with a company if their calling, which included purpose in life, aligned with their day-to-day work. The authors noted that this alignment promotes a positive attitude toward their job which enhances productivity in the workplace. Presbitero and Teng-Calleja (2020) encouraged supervisors to offer guided exercises that assist employees in discovering their calling or purpose. Furthermore, employers were encouraged to consider how the employees’ purpose or calling aligns with the organizational goals and to work with the employee to find ways within their job that they can “live out his/her calling” (p. 333).

### **Purpose in Life and Advisor Retention**

As evidenced in the sections above, there are positive associations between a person’s awareness of their purpose in life and life implications both personally and professionally. Although the amount of research conducted on purpose in life is growing and scholars are beginning to look at specific career groups (Chen et al., 2020; Crea & Francis, 2022), no literature exists on academic advisors and the connection between their work and an individual purpose in life. Research is needed to understand how the exploration of life stories may assist

academic advisors in bringing awareness to their purpose in life. Furthermore, understanding purpose in life may enlighten an individual's work in academic advising. When this understanding occurs, institutions can support this alignment which, as the literature suggests, may assist with retaining these critical employees. The current study explored these areas through an understanding of how an advisor's "why" (or purpose) aligns with their work. This concept of a "why" is described in the following section.

### **Sinek's (2009) "Why"**

Simon Sinek (2009), author of *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, encouraged readers to find their "why." He stated that those who understand their "why" "love going to work [and] are more productive and more creative. They go home happier and have happier families. They treat their colleagues, clients, and customers better" (p. 7). Sinek (2009) stated that a "why" is a "purpose, cause or belief" (p. 41) that drives everything in an individual's life. When considering a person's "why," Sinek (2009) emphasized that every person has a unique, internal drive that motivates and inspires them throughout the various realms of their life be it personal, professional, relational, etc. The goal of this study was to focus on the "purpose" aspect of Sinek's work, more specifically purpose in life, and to assist academic advisors in bringing awareness to their purpose.

Sinek emphasized the importance of individuals bringing awareness to their "why" (referred to as purpose in life in this study). In the book, *Finding Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team*, Sinek et al. (2017) provided an exercise that guides individuals through the process of uncovering their "why" through the exploration of life stories. This technique is seen in other areas of literature. For instance, Leider (2015) stated, "The first step toward unlocking your purpose is to mine your life story for major threads and

themes that reveal your lifelong gifts, passions, and values” (p. 3). The examination of themes through the exploration of life stories was used in this study to assist participants in revealing their purpose in life. Further, participants were asked to consider how and awareness of their purpose in life assisted with their work in academic advising. The work of these authors aligned with that of scholars who have developed the theoretical frameworks that ground and provide perspective in this study.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

To understand how exploring life experiences of academic advisors might bring awareness to their purpose in life and then understand how the experience of bringing awareness to their purpose in life assists with their work in academic advising, this study utilized two theoretical frameworks. The first is a tenant of Viktor E. Frankl’s (1959/2006) logotherapy model, called *will to meaning*. The second theory used to frame this study is John Dewey’s (1938) *Theory of Experience*. This section summarizes the basic tenants of these frameworks which were used to provide insight and understanding throughout the study.

### **Frankl’s (1959/2006) *Will to Meaning***

In his book titled, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1959/2006) described his experiences in four different Nazi concentration camps between 1942-1945. The premise of Frankl’s work is that, despite the most unimaginable circumstances, man can find meaning in life. That meaning can then have a profound impact on man’s perspective and the course of his life. Frankl suggested individuals should be encouraged to think about the meaning or purpose of their life which reorients their perspective toward the future. According to Frankl (1959/2006), “Striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man” (p. 99).

Frankl (1959/2006) noted, “We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering” (p. 111). According to the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy (n.d.), “The will to meaning is our primary motivation. Humans are drawn to find something, or someone, worthwhile to live and work for” (para. 2).

Additionally, Frankl (n.d.) stated,

Life has ultimate meaning (meaning of life). There is a deeper, overarching meaning of our lives. Because there is meaning moment-to-moment, meaning can be found in every situation. Meaning is discovered through a connectedness with something beyond and greater than oneself. (para. 3)

While utilizing this theory as a lens to understand participant experience was beneficial, it is important to acknowledge important assumptions within the theory.

### ***Assumptions of Frankl’s Will to Meaning***

Along with these basic tenets, Frankl also outlined the basic assumptions of the framework which are highlighted by the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy (n.d.). Frankl suggested that freedom of will includes the *responsibility* to make appropriate choices based on what is right for them in all situations. The Institute described another assumption as *self-transcendence*, the ability of an individual to “rise above and beyond themselves in regard to circumstances” (para. 6). *Self-distancing* is defined as an individual’s ability to “detach and look at themselves and their circumstances objectively...[which] provides clarity, allows us to see potential solutions and the freedom to choose our attitude” (para. 6). Finally, Frankl described *conscience* as “an intuitive ability unique to humans. It allows us to self-transcend and to discover meaning” (Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy, n.d., para. 6).

Frankl's (1959/2006) theory illustrated two important points that framed and informed this study. The first is that every individual has a deeper meaning or purpose to their life, "a primary motivational force" (p. 99). This purpose is deeply personal but is often unknown or unconscious to the individual unless the individual is given the opportunity to bring awareness to it. Therefore, according to Frankl, each of the participants in this study had a purpose or meaning to their life. Additionally, according to the assumption of self-distancing, participants were able to review their life stories in an objective way that allowed them to notice themes in the meaning they assign to those experiences.

Frankl (1959/2006) noted that humans can find meaning in every situation. This notion aligns with Sinek's (2017) activity of exploring individual's life stories to uncover the underlying meaning and purpose that they assign to events in their life. This study used this assertion that the exploration of life stories uncovered overarching themes which led to the articulation of an individual purpose in that participant's life.

The second important point from Frankl's theory used in this study was that of self-transcendence. Both Frankl and Sinek asserted that an individual's purpose in life is not only a benefit to that person. Their purpose in life has a self-transcendent component meaning that their purpose also benefits others or the greater good in some way. Sinek's exercise asked participants to craft their "why" statement in this way. The first part of the statement considered the benefit to themselves. The second part of the statement asked the participant to reflect on the benefit to others. Frankl (1959/2006) stated,

being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one



forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. (pp. 110-111)

Frankl's (1959/2006) theory was used in this study to frame findings of the first research question which explored how examining life experiences led to an awareness of purpose in life for academic advisors. Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, discussed in the following section, was engaged to provide perspective on how the experience of bringing awareness to their purpose in life assisted with their work in academic advising and how that experience provides educative value when navigating conflicts between their purpose and their institution's goals.

### **Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience***

John Dewey (1859-1952), a well-known American philosopher, wrote of the need for a theory of experience in his book, *Experience and Education*. Dewey (1938) explained that experiences have educational value and stated that there is “an organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 12). Further, he stated that the meaning of experience “is part of the problem to be explored” (p. 13).

According to Dewey's theory, people learn through interactions with other individuals and the world around them. These interactions, called experiences, may have educative value that can be positive or negative in nature. As summarized by Kim (2016), “when we experience something, we do something with it...then we suffer or undergo the consequences” (p. 70). Dewey highlighted two principles that constitute an experience: the *principles of continuity* (or *the experiential continuum*) and *interaction*. These principles “provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience” (Kim, 2016, p. 70).

Dewey (1938) described, “the *principle of continuity* [emphasis added] of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and

modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 27). In other words, individual experiences were informed by a person’s previous experience while also having an influence on future experiences. Additionally, present experiences (while building on previous ones) can influence the trajectory of that individual’s future experiences. For example, if a child learns to read, this experience opens the door for future experiences of growth and development. If a person experiences criminal behavior, this can have an impact on their trajectory as well, which may include additional criminal acts.

The second principle of Dewey’s (1938) theory is that of *interaction*. Dewey stated, “experience does not occur in a vacuum” and is not solely internal to the individual (p. 34). *Interactions* are the result of both internal (to the individual) and objective factors (from the environment). The interplay of these factors is what Dewey terms a *situation*. Dewey explained that individuals live in the world which means “they live in a series of situations” (p. 41). There is a constant interplay between interactions which create situations for the individual which, subsequently, create experiences. Dewey summarized, “An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 41).

Dewey’s theory informed two aspects of the current study. The first is that each life experience explored by the participant has happened and is perceived in the context of the experiences that happened before it. These connections provide educational value for the experiences that follow. As these life experiences were discussed, Dewey’s theory highlights how these experiences are connected to one another. These connections were then elevated as themes that were used to develop the participant’s purpose in life statement.

Secondly, the participants and I not only explored the experiences of their life, how they were connected, and the educative value of them, but also how those experiences and their purpose connect to and assist their work in academic advising. Additionally, the experience of the exercise to bring awareness of their purpose informed how they would navigate conflicts between their individual purpose in life and the goals of their institution.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the profession of academic advising along with the importance of advisor well-being and the cost associated with losing these valuable employees through attrition. The concept of purpose in life was introduced with its association to positive life characteristics, employee retention, and the gap in the literature in this area regarding academic advisors. Sinek et al.'s (2017) work on *Finding Your Why*, which was used as an exercise with participants was summarized. Finally, two theoretical frameworks which grounded and informed the study were discussed. The following chapter describes the methodology of the study.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology of the study. An explanation of this qualitative study which employs a narrative methodology research design is provided. Participant selection and data collection is detailed through description of the research design. Procedures for data analysis and management are summarized, and the alignment of the study with widely accepted standards of rigorous and ethical qualitative research are documented.

### **Qualitative Research**

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Creswell (2013) provided a definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

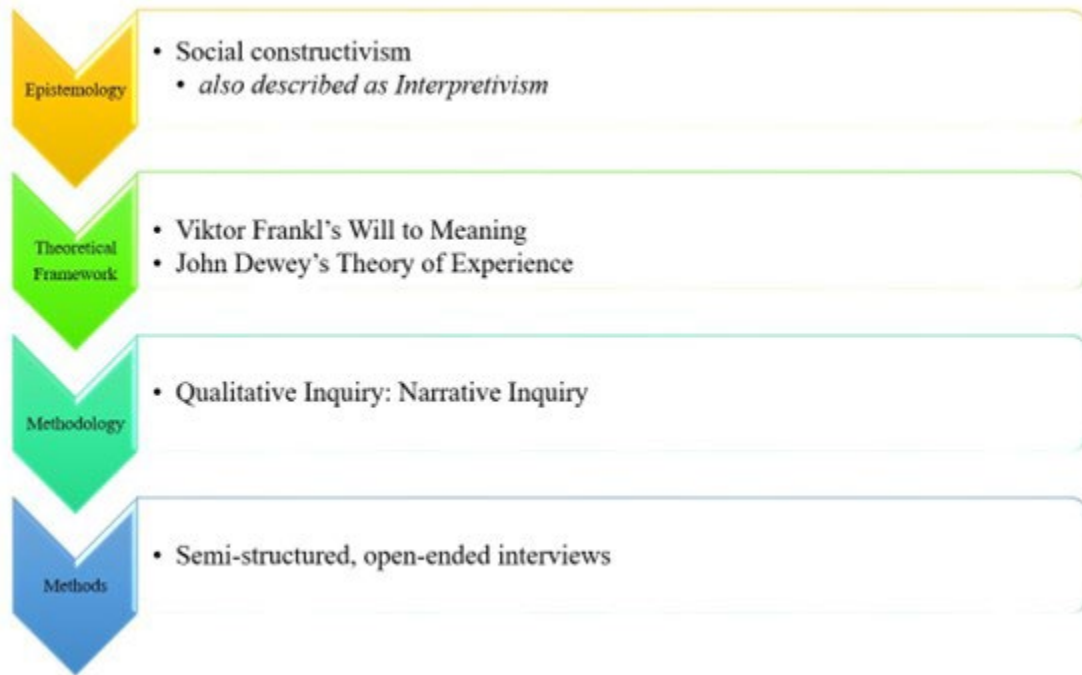
Building on this definition, other scholars have identified qualities that define the integrity and rigor of qualitative research.

Crotty (1998) highlighted that rigorous qualitative research demonstrates an alignment of four elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Figure 3.1 shows these elements of the present study. This study rests within the paradigm of social

constructivism (also described as interpretivism). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the goal of researchers within the social constructivism paradigm is “to understand the world” (p. 34) while also recognizing that their own lived experiences, background, history, and culture influence their interpretation of the research. Social constructivist researchers believe that the nature of reality (ontological belief) consists of “multiple realities” that “are constructed through...lived experiences and interactions with others” (p. 35). With this philosophical understanding, the researcher respects the participant’s unique perspective and values (axiological belief).

Through the lens of social constructivism, the researcher also acknowledges that the nature of truth is unique to the individual and the researcher works with the participant to co-construct reality and meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the present study, I engaged with the participants to understand and co-construct their understanding of their purpose in life while also exploring how this purpose in life assisted their work in academic advising. We worked together to identify current or future conflicts between their purpose and their institution’s goals and explored ways that they would navigate those conflicts. The exercise developed by Sinek et al. (2017) asked that one person (in this study, me as the researcher) serve as a facilitator to explore the participant’s life stories and uncover themes that will lead to their purpose in life statement.

**Figure 3.1. Philosophical Alignment of Current Study**



### **Narrative Inquiry**

In the book, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, Kim (2016) described narrative methodology as “an interdisciplinary, qualitative research that pursues a narrative way of knowing by exploring stories of participants” (p. xv). By using this methodology, researchers look to understand meaning within culture and society by exploring participants’ life stories. The author explained the difference between *narratives* and *stories*. Kim (2016) described a *narrative* as “a recounting of events that are organized in a temporal sequence, and this linear organization of events makes up a story” (p. 6). The author explained that the narrative pays attention to both sides of the story including the storyteller and the audience (usually the researcher). Furthermore, a *story* is a more detailed account of events that are not always in chronological order which make up a narrative. Kim (2016) emphasized that “a story has a connotation of a ‘full’ description lived experience, whereas a narrative has a connotation of a

‘partial’ description of lived experience...story is clearly a higher category than narrative as the latter constitutes the former; and they are deeply intertwined.” (p. 9)

As mentioned above, narrative inquiry explores the stories of participants. Kim (2016) emphasized that stories connect people regardless of their diversity of thought or culture. She stated,

telling stories is the primary way we express what we know and who we are...by way of storytelling, we allow stories to travel from person to person, letting the *meaning* [emphasis added] of story become larger than an individual experience or an individual life. (Kim, 2016, p. 9)

Narrative researchers focus not only on participants’ stories but look to dig deeper into those stories and discover the meaning of them for the participants as it relates to a larger cultural or societal phenomenon (Kim, 2016).

Narrative researchers must learn to *think narratively*, which includes developing stories out of experiences. Kim (2016) emphasized that “narrative thinking is an attempt to create a fit between a situation and a story schema about some experience or event that consists of who, what, how, and why” (p. 156). This connection requires the organization of experiences including the participant and researchers’ perceptions, thoughts, memories, and imagination (Kim, 2016).

Kim (2016) highlighted the work of Connelly and Clandinin (2006) who stated that there are four considerations that help *researchers* think narratively:

- “Imagining a lifespace” – Researchers must imagine the lifespace where the research will take place, the environment of the participant, and where experiences happen.

- “Living and telling as starting points for collecting field texts” – the practice of narrative inquiry involves engaging the participants in four actions which include living, telling, retelling, and reliving
- “Defining and balancing the commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place)”
- Temporality – acknowledge “that an event of a person is in a temporal transition” and these things are “described in relation to a past and present, projecting a future if possible”
- Sociality – narrative is “concerned with both personal and social conditions of the participant and/or the inquirer”
- Place – narrative “needs to acknowledge the aspects of place and place’s impact on the study” and “think through the impact of each place”
- “Investment of the self in the inquiry” – the researcher cannot remove themselves from the research process (Kim, 2016, p. 90).

Additionally, the author emphasized the work of Robinson and Hawpe (1986) who focused on three components of narrative thinking from the *participant’s* viewpoint:

- “Narrative schema” – the linking of essential information through causal relationships. This requires that the storyteller “examine the information available about an incident, identifying relevant facts, which then become part of the narrative schema”
- “Prior knowledge and experience” – the participant draws from their prior life knowledge and experience to build the story
- “Cognitive strategies” – This includes “selecting, comparing, inferring, arranging, and revisiting the past knowledge and experiences” which “guide the storytellers’ judgement about which details are relevant in the creation of the story” (Kim, 2016, pp. 156-157).



The combination of these components allows the storyteller to develop a story that includes understanding of others' actions and their own. Through both the four considerations and the three participant components described above, narrative inquiry is an iterative process that is “open-ended, emergent, and evolving” and “invite[s] participants to become co-researchers, co-constructors, co-narrators, and co-storytellers” (p. 99).

Kim (2016) emphasized the importance of *phronesis* [emphasis in original] in narrative inquiry. The author stated, “*phronesis* is the moral, ethical judgment to act wisely and prudently, which is more than the possession of *episteme* (general content knowledge) or *techne* (skills or techniques). It is the ability to put into action the general knowledge and skills with relevance, appropriateness or sensitivity to a particular context” (Kim, 2016, p. 105). Developing *phronesis* requires reflexivity which

has been understood as involving the researcher's critical reflection on the research process including what sorts of factors might influence the research planning and findings, and what kind of role the researcher himself or herself plays in the research process. The goal of reflexivity in this sense is to improve the quality and validity of the research and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research. (Kim, 2016, pp. 105-106)

The use of the theories and methodology described above grounded and provided perspective for the research design discussed in the following sections.

## **Research Design**

Participants for this study included 10 primary-role academic advisors who have been engaged in the profession of academic advising for one year or more and who self-identified as

enjoying reflective activity. Data was collected through two semi-structured, open-ended interviews held via a video conferencing platform.

## **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

This study employed criterion-based participant selection. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) defined criterion-based selection as a process whereby the researcher develops a set of characteristics that participants who participate in the study should possess. In a discussion of interview studies, deMarrais (2004) emphasized the importance of selecting individuals who have appropriate knowledge and experience that can speak specifically to the target of study.

The amount of time it takes for employees to gain knowledge, experience, and proficiency in a position varies based on the role and measures of success outlined by the employer (Alvarado, 2015). Alvarado (2015) explained,

time to proficiency (T2P) is the length of time from the first day in a new job role to the day that the employee becomes proficient. Proficiency is reached when an employee can perform tasks without assistance and without errors. Essentially, proficiency is reached when the employee is independently productive. (para. 9)

While these parameters are detailed broadly, they were used to inform participant selection in this study.

No literature was found that reported the average time needed for an academic advisor in higher education to become proficient in their position. However, a Gallup study reported that “new employees typically take around 12 months to reach their full performance potential within a role” (Wigert & Pendell, 2019, para. 10). While proficiency in a position is not required for an individual to explore or articulate their purpose in life, foundational knowledge of their role as an academic advisor was needed for the participant to interrogate how their purpose in life aligns

with their work in academic advising. If one is unknowledgeable about their role as an academic advisor, it would be more difficult for them to explore how this role aligns with their purpose in life. For this reason, and based on the literature stated above, primary-role academic advisors who were in their current role for one year or more were targeted for this study.

With permission from the NACADA Research Committee, the association's all-member listserv was used to recruit volunteer participants for this study. The recruitment email included a survey that asked for the following general information: name, email address, institution, institution type. Those responding were also asked to answer the following question: On a scale from 1 (low-level reflection) to 5 (high-level reflection), to what extent would you consider yourself to be someone who is reflective and who enjoys thinking about their life stories and the personal importance of your professional work? The goal of this question was to recruit participants who were reflective and enjoyed thinking about their life stories and their professional work. Participants were offered a \$100 gift card if they completed the study and a deadline for response was listed in the email.

Survey results were extracted on the date following the deadline listed in the recruitment email. The survey indicated 470 unique, individual responses from potential participants interested in assisting with the study. Of those 470 interested individuals, 255 rated themselves "5" on the survey question indicating if they identified as self-reflective and enjoyed exploring their life stories. Given the significant response to the initial recruitment email, no follow-up emails were needed to reach the maximum number of 10 participants in this qualitative study.

The 255 respondents were filtered by institution type. Of the 255 responses, 168 were employed by a public four-year institution, 51 were at a private four-year institution, and 26 were at a community college or technical school. Ten individuals indicated "other" and indicated that

they had worked at multiple institutions or within other organizational structures. These participants that indicated “other” were not included in the present study. Therefore, 245 individuals were included in the potential participant pool. A random draw tool was then used to select three individuals from each of the institution types: public four-year, private four-year, and community or technical college. The final participant was selected at random from the pool. Appendix A shows the recruitment email that was sent to the association’s membership. Table 3.1 includes participant details. Pseudonyms have been used for participant names to maintain participant confidentiality.

**Table 3.1. Participant Information**

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Institution Type	Time Spent in Academic Advising
Scarlett	33	Female	Public 4-Year	1-2 Years
Bob	25	Male	Public 4-Year	1-2 Years
Linda	61	Female	Public 4-Year	11+ Years
Lynn	51	Female	Private 4-Year	1-2 Years
Daisy	29	Female	Private 4-Year	3-5 Years
Angela	34	Female	Private 4-Year	3-5 Years
Elizabeth	49	Female	Community or Technical College	11+ Years
Sophia	36	Female	Community or Technical College	3-5 Years
Heather	57	Female	Community or Technical College	11+ Years
Nicole	42	Female	Community or Technical College	11+ Years

Kim (2016) discussed the important challenge that qualitative researchers face when considering the appropriate number of participants. The author cited the work of multiple scholars who varied in opinions about the optimal number of participants required. Kim (2016), however, emphasized that the focus should be on the quality of data collected rather than the quantity of participants and/or interviews. The author noted,

If your focus is on collecting life stories, the sample of interviewees will usually be smaller and the interviewing may be a lengthy process. If your focus is on exploring themes across interviewees, the sample might be larger and each interview shorter. However, if your purpose is to understand the world as experienced by one specific person...you could rely on a single person. (p. 161)

The number of 10 participants in this study is grounded in the context of Kim's (2016) perspective. It was my desire to deeply understand the unique, individual experience of participants through this study. However, engaging more than one participant (in this case, 10), provided a broader and deeper range of individual perspectives and data while also contributing to data saturation.

When conducting qualitative research, it is recommended that the appropriate number of participants be determined by the point at which data saturation is reached. Data saturation "requires a researcher to collect data from informants to the point that no further information can possibly be collected" (Mwita, 2022, p. 414). Data saturation was reached when analysis of participant interviews revealed data emerging through analysis of both individual interviews and the collective of the transcripts.

## **Membership Role**

As the researcher in this study, I carry an insider role as a former academic advisor. Given that participants were primary-role academic advisors, I understood the context of their stories and connected with them through our shared experiences within the profession. Additionally, a few of the participants self-identified as Christian which aligns with my religious identity. Therefore, when they talk about how their faith aligned with their sense of purpose, I identified with those alignments. Finally, all but one of the participants self-identified as female which also aligns with my identity. Because of this, I was able to relate to some of the stories that they shared through the experience. While my personal identities that aligned with the participants subconsciously enhanced my understanding of their stories, there may have been details missed or deeper information gained through asking deeper or clarifying questions. With the alignment of these identities, as a qualitative researcher, I understand and acknowledge that these perspectives both informed and created blind spots in my ability to objectively review the data.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection for this study included two semi-structured, open-ended interviews with each participant. DeMarrais (2004) explained, “Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or set of experiences” (p. 52). Bhattacharya (2017) suggested that semi-structured, open-ended interviews require that the researcher have a few questions on hand with follow-up probes that could be used when needed. The author further explained, “The researcher focuses on using the key questions as probes to peel away a superficial understanding of one’s experiences to a deeper understanding of one’s experiences” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). Given that the goal of this

study was to gain a deep understanding, in-depth interviews were used as methods of data collection which aligned with the purpose of the study.

### ***Introductory Material for Participants***

Prior to the first session, participants received the following resources and documents via email:

- *Finding Your Why*, Chapter 1 (Sinek et al., 2017) – This book chapter gave an overview of Sinek et al.’s (2017) model and introduced them to its basic components.
- *Finding Your Why*, Chapter 2 (Sinek et al., 2017) – This book chapter introduced and explained the process of the “Finding Your Why” exercise so that participants knew what to expect.
- *Finding Your Why*, Chapter 3 (Sinek et al., 2017) – This book chapter provided participants information about how the “Finding Your Why” exercise would be conducted and provided participants with examples for how to develop their timeline of stories explored during session two.
- Project Summary for Participants – This summary provided the participant with information regarding the purpose of the study, time commitment, an outline for interview sessions, IRB information, and informed them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (see Appendix B).
- Informed Consent – This document provided the participant with information regarding the purpose of the study, procedures and methods, risks or discomforts anticipated because of the study, benefits anticipated from the study, the extent of

confidentiality during the study, and the terms of participation in the study (see Appendix C).

Due to the extensive time needed for the individual, one-on-one sessions, participants were emailed these informational resources that provided the foundation for individual sessions that would follow. Each participant agreed to read these resources and complete the story timeline prior to session 2.

Once participants were identified and I received their signed informed consent, I emailed each participant with the information listed above. I held individual introductory sessions to review research procedures, documents, and resources while answering any lingering questions from the participant. Two semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted individually with each participant. Following data analysis, I emailed each participant quotes and interpretations utilized in the study to ensure that I had accurately represented the meaning of the data they contributed.

### ***Introductory Meeting***

Session one included an introduction to the study, and explanation of the research process, and the opportunity to ask questions. The goal of this meeting was both relational and informational in nature. By introducing myself to the participant in this format (versus via email), I began to build rapport with the participant which led to a smoother transition to the second session where they shared their personal stories. During this session, I reviewed the introductory information that was sent to the participant via email prior to the session, discussed the project summary of the study, and answered any questions the participant had about these resources and documents. Finally, the participant was asked to develop a timeline of stories before the next interview session that were used to assist in bringing awareness to their



individual “why.” Session one lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes depending on the conversation and questions asked by the participant.

### ***Sessions 2 and 3: Semi-structured, Open-ended Interviews***

Session two consisted of leading the participants through the “Finding Your Why” exercise. As their partner in this process, I led them through an exploration of their timeline of stories developed between interview sessions one and two. This exploration and conversation maintained the goal of narrowing down to their individual “why” or purpose in life. By Sinek et al.’s (2017) design, the time for this session may take 1 to 2 hours or more depending on 1) the number of stories the participants choose to discuss and 2) how deeply the participant chooses to engage with the exercise through conversation. This session lasted two hours with each participant. At the end of this session, we explored their feelings and insights about the experience and their new awareness of their purpose in life.

The third session was focused on exploring the participant’s experience with the exercise more deeply. Participants were asked to reflect on how their purpose in life aligns with their work in academic advising and the value of having this knowledge. Participants were also asked their thoughts about navigating challenges or limitations of their purpose in life within the context of their current institution. Interview session three lasted one hour with each participant.

### ***Member-Check Debriefing***

During the second individual session, I revealed themes that had begun to emerge from analysis of the data during their first session. As I revealed the themes that I had noticed during their first session, I verified that these themes had accurately reflected their intent and voice during the original discussion. Participants were asked if the themes that emerged resonated with them now that they had had additional time to reflect and consider how their purpose in life had

illuminated both their understanding of themselves and their work in academic advising. Finally, after the third and final session, I emailed each participant my finalized, qualitative themes and asked them to specifically review their quotes to ensure that I had represented their content and voices accurately.

In addition to member-checking, I provided a debriefing statement via email to each of the participants along with a thank you for participating in the study (see Appendix D).

Information was provided via email for how to access their \$100 incentive for completing the study. Protocols and questions for each of the three sessions can be found in Appendices E, F, and G.

It was important to allow participants the opportunity for reflection both within and between interview sessions. As part of a purpose mapping exercise, Mark Trumbo, author and inspiration speaker on purpose, asked participants to “commit to a completed design in my program in 30 days” (M. Trumbo, personal communication, March 7, 2024). According to Trumbo, this allows individuals “plenty of time to sit in it, question it, socialize it, and commit to it.” In line with this guidance, sessions were scheduled with participants as follows:

- Introductory/Informational Meeting – set date with participant
- One-on-One Interview Session 1 – two weeks after introductory meeting which allowed participants time to collect and reflect on their life stories
- One-on-One Interview Session 2 – two weeks after the first one-on-one session which allowed reflection on their purpose in life statement

Each session was conducted using a video conferencing platform that allows both audio and visual recordings. Sessions were transcribed through transcription functionality of the platform which led to data management and analysis as described in the following section. Due to

copyright requirements, permission to use Sinek et al.'s (2017) exercise in this study was granted on July 28, 2021 (see Appendix H).

## **Data Management**

Bhattacharya (2017) explained when analyzing qualitative data, researchers follow processes and practices informed by theoretical and analytical frameworks and previous literature on the topic or phenomenon as well as their research purpose and questions. Saldaña (2021) defined a code “most often [as] a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 5). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) agreed that the coding process highlights data that is relevant to answering specific research questions. Through these analytic processes, the researcher

might look at all the raw data, chunk them into small analytical units of meaning for further analysis (usually called codes), cluster similar analytical units and label them as categories, and identify salient patterns after looking within and across categories (usually called themes). (p. 150)

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further described that categories are “conceptual elements” (p. 206) that are used to organize bits of data and clarified that “categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 207). Once data are organized into categories, researchers can then begin to analyze these categories into themes that signify findings within the data and begin to answer specific research questions.

Bhattacharya (2017) explained that data management is the process whereby researchers manage and organize data collected through the research process for analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized the importance of the organizational layout of the data from the

beginning of the data collection process and stated, “you need to know exactly what you have in terms of interviews, field notes, documents, artifacts, memos you wrote while collecting or thinking about your data, and so on” (p. 200).

As previously mentioned, sessions were conducted via a video conferencing platform that allowed both audio and visual recordings. Additionally, sessions were transcribed through the platform. Transcription data was reviewed and compared with the video recording to ensure accuracy of the data. This review also allowed for the entry of pauses, body language, researcher feelings and observations, and other analytic memos.

Following the sessions, data were managed and analyzed as described in the next section. Raw data from transcriptions were entered into the qualitative analysis platform, Dedoose. Descriptors collected through both the survey and conversations with participants were connected to each transcript which included name, pseudonym, age, gender, institution type, and time in advising. This allowed for easy tracking of participant information through the analysis process. The use of this tool also enhanced the ability to attach codes to individual excerpts from the raw transcripts, organize those codes into themes, and then connect those themes to relevant research questions. Individual data could also be filtered by codes and memos and subsequently extracted for analysis purposes.

### **Analytic Memos**

Saldaña (2021) stressed the importance of making analytical notes throughout the research process and not relying on memory to remember important insights. Bhattacharya (2017) stated,

While conducting data analysis, the researcher often maintains a journal to reflect on subjectivities, emotions, hunches, questions that arise, and ways in which s/he is making

sense of the data in association with theoretical, methodological, analytical framework, and research purpose and questions. (p. 150)

Additionally, Maxwell (2013) noted analytic memos can be used to record thoughts about items “not related to data analysis, such as reflection on your goals, methods, theory, or your prior experiences and your relationships with participants” (p. 105). To summarize, the goal of analytic memos is to summarize researcher’s personal thoughts and insights about the research process and data (Maxwell, 2013). Analytic memos from the present study were kept in handwritten form in a researcher notebook and were taken to record my thoughts and feelings about interview sessions and the research process. These were later reviewed to provide detail or further insight during the data analysis process.

## **Data Analysis**

Coding of all qualitative data as described in the above sections was conducted through a two-cycle process utilizing inductive analysis. Saldaña (2021) described inductive coding as “entering the analytic enterprise with as open a mind as possible – a ‘learn as you go’ approach that spontaneously creates original codes the first time data are reviewed” (p. 41).

### **First-cycle Coding**

Saldaña (2021) noted that first-cycle analysis involves breaking down data and “taking things apart” (p. 6). During this cycle, coding can include data as small as a single word or as extensive as a full paragraph or even a page of text. In the present study, analysis during the first cycle used In Vivo coding. In studies utilizing narrative methodology, this type of inquiry focuses on the stories (or voices) of the participants and holds these stories (and the meaning participants assign to these stories) as the target of analysis (Kim, 2016). In Vivo coding aligns with narrative methodology in that this type of coding is particularly helpful in “studies that

prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 138). When studying the data, researchers employing In Vivo coding use direct quotes from the participant to develop codes. With In Vivo coding, researchers use "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative record" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 137) for codes.

After uploading all raw transcript files into Dedoose, I reviewed each transcript with the recording of that session. While reviewing, I used functionality in Dedoose to highlight important excerpts within the transcripts which automatically created In Vivo codes. This organization allows for easy tracing between In Vivo codes and raw datum from the transcripts. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were reviewed, analyzed, and coded to provide insight into the participant's experience with exploring their stories and insights afterward. Following this initial analysis using the InVivo method, I transitioned to second-cycle coding using the processes described in the section below.

### **Transition from First- to Second-cycle Coding**

Saldaña (2021) emphasized the importance of intentional analysis when moving between first and second-cycle coding. Transition processes enhance "credibility and trustworthiness" as well as the organization of the data so that analysis can successfully move toward second-cycle coding efforts. The goal of being purposeful with these processes is to "cycle back to your first coding efforts so you can strategically cycle forward to additional coding and qualitative data analytic methods" (p. 280). For this study, I used code mapping through the Dedoose platform to transition between first- and second-cycle coding analysis.

Saldaña (2021) explained that there are three iterations in the code mapping process. In the first iteration, codes from first-cycle coding analyses are identified in the data. These In Vivo codes were then assigned shorter codes that captured the essence of the content in each In Vivo

code. Using the Dedoose platform allowed for easy code creating and assignment of those codes to the In Vivo excerpts highlighted in the first-round analysis.

Saldaña (2021) highlighted the benefits of code mapping given that it serves as an “auditing process” (p. 285) by recording the researcher’s process for categorizing and conceptualizing analytic processes. Saldaña (2021) noted that code mapping may be a method of transforming codes into salient patterns, themes, and high-level concepts and, as such, could result in no further analysis or coding process needed. In this study, second-cycle coding was needed to organize codes into themes and categories.

### **Second-cycle coding**

Second-cycle coding consists of bringing codes together that are similar in some way and organizing them into categories. This involves synthesis of the codes that assemble meaning in the data. These categories may use the same participant wording as the codes or may reconfigure codes all together (Saldaña, 2021).

In alignment with code mapping as a transition between first and second-cycle coding, pattern coding was employed for this study. According to Saldaña (2021), pattern coding is useful when the researcher is looking to explain a certain experience or phenomenon in the data set. Additionally, pattern codes help to pull data together for further analysis. The author explained that pattern coding should be used “as a stimulus to develop a statement that describes a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data” (p. 325). Through the functionality of Dedoose, individual In Vivo excerpts were connected to codes that captured or summarized the essence of the data. Similar codes were then organized into larger themes and those themes were then used to answer the research questions that guided this study. Figure 3.2 shows two examples of this process of data analysis.

**Table 3.2. Data Analysis Representation**

1st Cycle Coding: InVivo	Transition Coding: Code Mapping	2nd Cycle Coding: Pattern Coding	Research Question Answered
<p>“I think about the why statement...and how...despite those feelings...this is a sense of purpose and optimism there. Despite those negative experiences...I’ve been able to attach a purpose to them now” - Daisy</p>	<p>Sharing stories allows for personal reflection and connection to feelings about those experiences</p>	<p>Feelings and emotions helped participants reconnect to meaningful experiences in their life which led to the ability to interrogate the meaning behind those emotions</p>	<p>RQ1: How does the exploration of life experiences bring awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors?</p>
<p>“I’ve spent more time putting...worksheets...away and just really digging in with them...like what’s life for you like right now? Like, what’s going on?” – Scarlett</p>	<p>Having a newly articulated “why” has informed their advising practice</p> <p>Articulating and understanding their why has led to more intentional focus on the relational aspect of the advising relationship</p>	<p>Articulating and understanding their purpose has led to more intentional focus on the relational aspect of the advising relationship</p>	<p>RQ2: How does the experience of bringing awareness of their individual purpose in life enlighten their work in academic advising?</p>

When designing a research study, it is important to have philosophical alignment between all the areas discussed above. Additionally, researchers must be attentive to the standards of quality and ethical considerations needed to ensure a rigorous study. The following section describes how the current study aligns with widely accepted standards of rigor and quality in qualitative research.

### **Standards of Quality in Qualitative Research**

The goal of qualitative research is to “understand, interrogate, and/or deconstruct,” through interpretation, the lived experiences of participants (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 18-19).



While quantitative research focuses on predicting trends and generalizing through broad analysis, qualitative research utilizes a small number of participants with the goal of an in-depth analysis of the data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) summarized, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further emphasized four characteristics important to understanding qualitative research. First, qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. Emphasis is placed not on the researcher’s perspective, but on meaning-making and interpretation of life experiences through the eyes of participants. The second key characteristic of qualitative research is that “*the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis* [emphasis in original]” (p. 16). Third, qualitative research is an inductive process, whereby the researcher uses pieces of data collected through a variety of methods (e.g., interviews, field work, documents) to look for patterns and themes. Bhattacharya (2017) advanced this thought stating, “inductive analysis in qualitative research refers to working ‘up’ from the data” and “assumes that the researcher is not starting the data analysis with any kind of preestablished testable hypothesis” (p. 150). The fourth and final characteristic of qualitative data is that it involves rich description whereby findings are described and supported through the use of direct quotes, words, and pictures rather than numbers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Tracy’s (2010) Eight Benchmarks for High-Quality Qualitative Research**

Tracy (2010) outlined eight benchmarks for high-quality, qualitative research. Each of these benchmarks are outlined below in addition to how this study addressed these criteria with the goal of creating a rigorous, qualitative study.

#### ***Worthy Topic***

Rigorous research in the qualitative realm is “relevant, timely, significant, interesting, and evocative” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Research has shown that there is significant value in both the study of purpose in life and the impact of purpose in life in a variety of areas. The current study extends the understanding of the impact of purpose in life in an area, the profession of academic advising, that has yet to be studied.

### ***Rich Rigor***

Tracy (2010) emphasized that qualitative researchers who concern themselves with rich rigor in their studies ask themselves the following important questions:

- “Are there enough data to support significant claims?” (p. 841) – Each category identified and used to answer the research questions contained a significant number of raw, In Vivo codes that supported that theme. During the second individual session, emerging themes were shared with the participant and alignment with between their experience with this exercise and those emerging themes were interrogated. Participants were asked to review both the content and the quotes that they provided within the context of the study to ensure that their voices and perspectives were accurately represented.
- “Did the researcher spend enough time to gather interesting and significant data?” (p. 841) – Three to four hours were spent with each participant to gather data related to the experience of exploring life stories and how that informed their advising practice. Analysis reached data saturation as indicated by the ability to connect identified codes to significant excerpts of data within the transcripts.
- “Is the context or sample appropriate given the goals of the study?” (p. 841) – Engaging 10 participants allowed me to reach data saturation. This was achieved by recognizing

that no new codes were being identified and/or created after the review of the transcript from the sixth participant.

- “Did the researcher use appropriate procedures in terms of field note style, interviewing practices and analysis procedures?” (p. 841) – All interviews and analysis were conducted according to procedures supported by qualitative scholars as indicated in the sections above.

In this study, I asked questions throughout the course of data collection and analysis. A significant amount of data was collected (as described above) and the goal of analysis was to develop categories and themes supporting claims that could be traced back to numerous raw data. While the number of participants is small in comparison to other research methods, the goal of this qualitative research was to look deeply at the data and not broadly. Therefore, a deep dive into the narratives and the meanings behind them were conducted and then evaluated through co-construction and member checking with the participants.

### ***Sincerity***

Tracy (2010) explained that “sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research” (p. 841). To uphold these criteria, I engaged in critical self-reflection throughout the course of the study regarding my thoughts, feelings, and curiosities. These were recorded as analytic memos in a research journal and reported in the membership section above. These will also be reported later in the limitations section.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is another hallmark of rigorous qualitative research and is “achieved through practices including thick description, triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality and partiality” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). *Thick description* includes showing (rather than telling) the readers how a researcher came to their conclusions and findings. This means that researchers “provide enough detail that readers may come to their own conclusion about the scene” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). A visual example of coding and analysis is provided in the data analysis section above. Additionally, numerous participant quotes are used in Chapter 4 to show evidence of the themes that emerged to answer the research questions.

*Triangulation* in qualitative research means that a finding is more credible if multiple methods of data collection result in the same conclusion. Additionally, *crystallization* “encourages researchers to gather multiple types of data and employ various methods, multiple researchers, and numerous theoretical frameworks” to arrive at the findings (Tracy, 2010, pp 843-844). In this study, I collected data through two interview sessions which were video, and audio recorded and transcribed. This approach allowed for free and open communication while also allowing me to observe the participant’s body language, pauses for reflection, and other non-verbal communication points.

*Multivocality and member reflections* require significant participation from the participants in the study. As stated by Tracy (2010), “Multivocal research includes multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report and analysis” (p. 844). Additionally, member reflections include a co-construction between researcher and participant in developing stories and building categories and themes from the data (Tracy, 2010). These criteria were addressed in the present study through the narrative methodology as the primary goal of narrative inquiry is to allow the participant an active participation in the research process.

### ***Resonance***

Tracy (2010) used the term resonance “to refer [to] research’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience. The research should have the potential to “transform the emotional dispositions of people and promote greater mutual regard” (p. 844). While it is difficult to understand the resonance of my study in the process, my goal was to provide sound implications through the support of my findings that encourage others to seek to find their own purpose and to encourage reflection on how supporting advisors in their purpose could have a positive impact on individuals and organizations.

### ***Significant Contribution***

Tracy (2010) explained that there are varying ways in which qualitative research can make a significant contribution. These contributions can be theoretically significant, have heuristic significance, be practically significant, or have methodological significance. In the case of the present study, the immediate goal was practical significance with the aim of extending purpose in life research into an area that has not been previously studied: academic advising.

### ***Ethical***

Although the ethics of the present study are discussed in deeper detail below, Tracy (2010) emphasized the importance of ethical practice in qualitative research stating, “We must consider the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work” (p. 846). Ethical considerations are addressed in the sections below.

### ***Meaningful Coherence***

Finally, Tracy (2010) stated, “Meaningfully coherent studies (a) achieve their stated purpose; (b) accomplish what they espouse to be about; (c) use methods and representation

practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms; and (d) attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings” (p. 848). The hallmark of meaningful coherence was approached in this study through both intentional reflection and focused guidance of the study provided by the research purpose, questions, and theoretical frameworks.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2009) has published standards for qualitative or humanities-based research. Many of these standards align with the standards of quality published by Tracy (2010) which were discussed in a previous section. AERA standards include significance, methods, conceptualization, substantiation, coherence, quality of communication, and ethics.

The first standard is significance. AERA (2009) stated that the topic should hold scholarly significance, should be appropriate for the publication audiences to which it is submitted, should rely on existing scholarly literature, and should contribute to the scholarly community. The focus of this study was to address purpose in life as it relates to academic advisors which has not presently been studied.

Secondly, AERA (2009) emphasized the importance of methods stating that the report must explain the research methods of the study. Additionally, those methods should be appropriately chosen to fit the goals of the study and design, and researchers should work to effectively and clearly execute the methods they described in a clear and concise manner. In the present study, I followed protocols and design supported by scholars and articulated the reporting of those methods in a clear and concise manner within this paper.

The third AERA (2009) standard is conceptualization. To meet this standard, the research should “provide a conceptualization of the work that brings its topic(s) and method(s) together in terms of a discipline, school, tradition, emergent approach, or specifically tailored conceptual framework” (p. 484). The study employed narrative inquiry was built on the foundation theoretical frameworks that align with the goals of the study.

Substantiation is the fourth AERA (2009) standard which includes “establishing the warrant for arguments, the adequacy of interpretations, or the credibility and usefulness of a portrayal of educational phenomena for raising significant questions or prompting exploration of new possibilities” (p. 485). Care was taken to develop categories and themes that led to findings and can be directly traced back to specific data.

The fifth AERA (2009) standard is coherence. Coherence means that the research study and research report should clearly focus on how effective the study was in addressing and accomplishing its goals. Research purpose, questions, and theoretical and methodological frameworks were used to ground the study and to provide perspective through the course of the research.

AERA (2009) published that the sixth standard is quality of communication and suggested that “the purpose of the quality of communication standard is to promote clarity through attention to an author’s presentation and writing style, including choice of title, abstract, and headings” (p. 485). To address this standard, detail is provided that represents the voice of participants while also striving for conciseness of writing throughout the study and ensure that the title, abstract, headings, etc. align with the content and goals of the research.

The final standard addressed is ethics and AERA (2009) provides substantial guidance in this area. AERA emphasized *human consent/access to information*. In this area, AERA stated,

all manuscripts should honor human consent agreements and any other agreements pertaining to gaining access to the research site or to texts, text analogues, and artifacts, including but not limited to transcriptions of talk, visual representations, graphical displays, and archival data that could inadvertently compromise guarantees of anonymity and/or the confidentiality of information. (p. 486)

To uphold this standard, Institutional Review Board approval including statements of confidentiality and informed consent were obtained and upheld throughout the course of the study.

Within ethical standards, AERA also emphasized the importance of being attentive to *perspectives and voice*. The organization stated, “Ethical issues related to authorship, ownership, and voice should be acknowledged, where appropriate” (p. 486). In the present study, acknowledgement of all contributing parties are given while maintaining participant confidentiality.

AERA noted that issues of *bias* should also be addressed. This type of research should “describe any potential conflicts of interest that could influence the analysis, such as sponsorship or funding by a party with a vested interest, and the researcher’s perspective should be acknowledged in the research, as appropriate” (AERA, 2009, p. 486). Analytic memos were recorded and used throughout the study and then reviewed to understand how my identity informed my thoughts, insights, and perspectives during data analysis. Additionally, a subjectivity statement acknowledging my biases is included in this paper.

*Evidence and reasoning* are additional ethical considerations. This includes maintaining data in “such a way that other researchers who understand the purpose and procedures of the research could understand how evidence was used to make claims or follow the line of reasoning



that led to the researcher's conclusions" (AERA, 2009, p. 486). For the present study, clear organization and data management techniques using the Dedoose platform were employed and described in the paper above so that themes and categories can clearly be traced back to specific data.

Finally, *funding and sponsorship* should be explicitly stated. Participants were awarded \$100 each for completing the present study. These incentives were provided through a grant awarded to me by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. Quality and ethical standards must be acknowledged and followed to ensure a rigorous study. Additionally, a researcher must acknowledge and articulate the limitations of the study (AERA, 2009).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I summarized the methodology and design of the study. A description of the qualitative approach and methodology was discussed. Additionally, details were provided regarding the research design and data analysis. Finally, alignment of the study with standards and ethical principles of qualitative research were noted and a discussion of the study limitations were identified.

## Chapter 4 - Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand, through narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brings awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors and how this awareness of their individual purpose in life may illuminate their work in academic advising. Additionally, in this study, I explored how advisors navigate limitations and/or challenges of living out that purpose in life within the context of their institution. Data was collected and analyzed as described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the study by presenting themes that emerged from the data collected during participant interviews. The themes are organized according to the research questions they answered.

### Findings

The following sections describe the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data as related to each of the research questions that guided this study. Questions that guided this study related to how the exploration of life experience brought awareness to primary-role academic advisors' purpose in life. Furthermore, this study explored how this new awareness of purpose in life illuminated their work in academic advising. Finally, respondents were asked to consider how they might navigate conflicts that might arise while trying to live out their purpose in life within the context of their institution. Participant quotes are used to support the themes that emerged.

#### **RQ1: How Does the Exploration of Life Experiences Bring Awareness to Purpose in Life for Primary-role Academic Advisors?**

For the first research question in this study, I investigated how primary-role academic advisors became aware of their purpose in life through the exploration of their life stories. Three

themes emerged from the data related to this question. The first theme revealed that while exploring their life stories, primary-role advisors experienced feelings and emotions that helped them reconnect with meaningful experiences. This reconnection led to the ability to interrogate the meaning behind those strong emotions. The second theme that emerged showed that telling and exploring life experiences afforded participants a deeper understanding of themselves. The third theme connected to this research question was that having an unbiased partner in the process of articulating their purpose was important.

### ***Emotions Were Critical in Co-Constructing Meaning Assigned to Life Experiences***

When discussing life stories, participants often recalled and even felt significant emotions that helped them connect to meaningful experiences in their life. For instance, when discussing an experience in one of her classes in college, Sophia explained that the instructor created an environment that had a meaningful impact on her. She shared,

I remember my teacher saying ‘this is your safe zone, this is your safe zone’ [and she] created an atmosphere where no matter what you’re saying we’re not gonna judge you. And she did that from the start of the class.

By connecting and reconnecting with these emotions attached to life experiences, participants were able to further reflect on the meaning behind those emotions. After deeper reflection, Sophia explained that this was one of the first times in her life where she felt as though she “mattered.” When reflecting on the accumulation of the stories she shared, Sophia realized that there was a strong theme that had informed her identity and how she interacts with others. She stated, “My past experiences have definitely shaped how I feel about people. And I wanna protect people. I hate when people get hurt.”

Daisy recalled the emotions she felt during difficult times in her childhood where her basic needs and those of her siblings were not met. During these times, she was forced to be very self-reliant which resulted in a lack of awareness of how to ask for help. After reflecting on these experiences and interrogating her emotions during those times, Daisy shared, “I think there was something in me that was like, it probably shouldn’t be like this, you know, and I was like, I feel like I would love to help someone in a way where maybe I didn’t receive the help that I wanted.” She then shared:

I think I knew I wanted to be that person in somebody’s life, or even if it’s the smallest thing, even if I’m just saying the advice of, ‘Well, why don’t you ask this person for help,’ or ‘I’ll help you write a message to this person,’ or ‘Let’s look online and see if we can find something about that.’ Whatever the resources might be. Even then, I was like, if I’m just that one person that starts that kind of avalanche of asking for help, getting those resources you need then I was really interested in being that person.

Through connecting with the emotions she felt from her childhood, Daisy was able to understand why she has a deep desire to help others who may not know how to ask for help.

In one of her stories, Lynn identified feelings of disappointment during an experience with a group that was exploring policies pertaining to the inclusion of a group of individuals into the community that she led. She explained, “There’s a feeling about this that I connected with being really disappointed in people being conventional. I really had to do some work to get over my disappointment with the community where I really felt like fear had taken over.” Through the exploration of her stories and recalling those emotions, she revealed that she deeply valued the opportunity to see past limiting beliefs. In this story, her feelings of disappointment in the

community helped her understand that fear had presented a limiting belief within this community which was against her deeply held personal values.

As a child, Linda revisited memories that were happy, but many of them were connected to negative experiences and emotions. She shared, “There are times in my stories, in my memories, where I didn’t feel safe, or I didn’t feel valued and when I didn’t feel empowered.” Through deeper reflection, she identified a passion for creating a space where people felt those things that she often did not experience in her childhood. She explained, “You took my feelings of being trapped and turned it into ‘so you don’t want to be trapped.’ What’s the opposite of being trapped? Being free; being empowered.”

Through the exploration of life stories, participants connected with deep emotions that they felt not only while going through those experiences but also while looking back on them. Those feelings were then interrogated to understand and to co-construct the meaning that participants assigned to those experiences. Through that exploration, participants gained a deeper understanding of themselves and of their individual purpose.

### ***Exploring Life Experiences Led to a Deeper Understanding of Themselves***

Advisors in this study felt that exploring their life stories led to a deeper understanding of themselves which helped bring awareness to their purpose in life. Sophia experienced a powerful perspective shift through the exploration of her life stories which revealed her purpose. As someone who experienced significant trauma throughout her life, she had only reviewed her past through a negative lens. However, exploring her stories through this experience helped her realize how strong and resilient she has become. She said, “I’ve just never had to talk positive to myself, or I don’t know how to talk positive to myself.” After co-constructing that her purpose was to help people feel like they matter, Sophia shared, “I’ve never said that I’m proud of

myself, and so, just in talking to you and talking about then versus now, I'm proud of myself. And I've never said that out loud; like never." As Sophia reflected on the trauma and negative experiences of her past, doing so through the lens of articulating her purpose in life provided a more positive outlook. She realized that although many of her life experiences were difficult due to the trauma she endured, she was proud of how she had overcome it all. She realized that these experiences inform the strong, resilient woman she is today who is deeply passionate about making others feel safe, valued, and appreciated.

Scarlett recalled challenges with her mother impressing upon her a "perfect or bust" mindset which led to her feeling as though she was not accepted or valued unless she was perfect. Through the exploration of her stories, she stated, "I needed the validation of people loving me where I'm at." She connected these memories to conflicting feelings spurred from witnessing her mother working with children with disabilities in a classroom setting. Although she was taught at home to maintain a "perfect or bust" mindset, she saw how her mother interacted positively with children who had disabilities. She recalled, "I could see how it [school] was explained to them, and I thought, 'Why can't that be what everybody learns?'" These experiences coupled with the discovery of her own learning disabilities later in life informed a deeper understanding of her identity. She was able to link these stories to her purpose which included genuinely accepting people for who they are.

Lynn revealed that she had participated in activities centered on discovering purpose at various stages of her life. However, they were all within the context of religion and theology. Through sharing her stories during this exercise, she revealed a deep passion and purpose for seeing beyond limiting beliefs. She felt that this experience, which was outside of the context of focusing on religion, provided a different perspective. She stated, "To put it in this framework of

limits and possibility links some things that are very much a part of who I am, but it gives me different language that I had not put to it before.” This new realization allowed her to connect her previous understandings of her purpose in life, grounded in theology, with her personal values that aligned with her professional work. Articulating her purpose in life in a new language provided further insight and perspective to the previous reflection she had done.

Heather recalled both positive and challenging experiences throughout her life. Through the exploration of those experiences, she discovered that she had self-confidence in some areas of her life; before this exercise, she had felt she had low confidence in all areas. She was able to see that despite some challenges that she recalled from even her early childhood, she displayed resilience throughout her life. She stated, “I used a lot of the same strengths getting through both the ups and downs, and they, many of them, may have started pretty early on in life.” These stories and realizations provided Heather with a deeper sense of understanding of her identity and awareness of her purpose in life. She discovered a connection to her deep passion for providing people with detailed information that would allow them to build their own strength and resilience.

Table 4.1 shows a comparison between a few participants’ purpose statements prior to this study compared to after the experience of articulating their purpose in life through this exercise. Out of respect for individual participants, only those six who agreed to having their purpose in life statements in this paper are included. Advisors in this study identified as self-reflective, so it was expected that some advisors had thought about their purpose in life prior to this study. Because of this, some of the purpose in life statements did not change significantly over the course of the study. However, some participants had shifts in their understanding of

themselves which can be seen by the more comprehensive nature of their “why” statements following this exercise.



**Table 4.1. Purpose Statements Before and After This Experience**

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Participant’s Why Statement Before This Study</b>	<b>Participant’s Why Statement After This Study</b>
Scarlett	“To make a difference in students’ lives and to be the person they trust and come to when they need”	“To be an authentic, open place for students to learn, grow and find their dreams with no judgement, have a supportive and equitable environment, both physically and mentally, to allow students to experience growth, change and help them set and reach their goals and become uniquely themselves.”
Linda	“I’m an advisor. I want to be the advisor I needed when I was in school”	“To create a space and experience where you feel safe, valued and empowered so that you know you are worthy, talented and valued.”
Daisy	“I enjoy helping people/students, and being part of their educational journey”	“To inspire people through support and genuine care to acknowledge their own self-worth so that they feel empowered to be their own advocate”
Angela	“To be a problem-solver for students”	“To provide students with accurate, relevant information to support them through their decision-making process without judgment or prescription”
Heather	“To provide students with a roadmap for reaching their academic goals”	“To show people genuine care by helping them to put the pieces together through research and problem-solving so they can build their resilience and move toward their goals.”
Nicole	“To help students reach their goals”	“To empower students to appreciate the journey so that they can live to their full potential”

The exploration of life stories allowed participants the ability to notice themes throughout their life. These themes created a greater understanding of themselves and their passions. By doing so, they were able to connect those passions to their purpose in life and to develop a “why” or a purpose statement. Although they could recall stories and experiences from their past, participants felt that having a partner in the process was critical.

### ***Having an Unbiased Partner in the Process of Articulating Their Purpose Was Important***

Participants revealed that having an unbiased partner to listen to their life stories and to help them identify recurring themes throughout their experiences was important. As someone who majored in Psychology, Nicole was very accustomed to being introspective. However, she found a benefit in having someone who did not know her listen to her stories with the goal of articulating her purpose. She explained, “Being able to kind of talk with someone who wasn’t there was an interesting experience, because most of the time when I talk to people about those, they were there for at least one of my major life events.” She felt that having that unbiased partner allowed the discovery of themes that she had not realized before this experience. She stated, “Looking at everything and you pulling out the common themes and kind of seeing some of that makes me want to think about other aspects of my life and other moments and how it might relate to this [purpose statement].”

Angela reinforced the benefit of having a partner in the process and shared her surprise at the ability to narrow many of her life stories down to a few salient themes. She shared,

It was really helpful having a moderator because I was just talking about myself, and you were able to kind of pick out patterns and themes. And then the patterns and themes are what made me kind of realize like, oh, these are the things that fill my cup. So yea, I think just noticing trends in all of the things that are significant in my memory. It’s

helpful. And it felt like we were able to drill every random story down to the same three things which is kind of crazy.

Having a partner helped her co-construct her purpose through the discovery of themes in her stories that she had not considered. There were some that she had thought of before but others that were new realizations.

Daisy also felt that having a partner helped her connect conversations she has with students to her purpose statement. Specifically, she recognized that part of her purpose was to help people advocate for themselves. When I mentioned the word advocate, she exclaimed, “Yes! Advocate! Oh my gosh, I can’t believe I didn’t think of that! I use that word with my students all the time!” She explained, “I really appreciate you helping to point that out because I’ve never thought about that before.” She reflected further on her individual stories and noted, “I’ve never really considered how everything meshes together. In fact, I actually probably thought that they were all very separate and really thinking about it now and how there are these overarching themes.”

Having the ability to work with a partner who could objectively notice themes in their stories was a prominent comment by many of the participants. Working together with each participant, we were able to co-construct those themes together and then, subsequently, articulate how those themes connected with their purpose in life. Once advisors had an awareness of their purpose in life, we began exploring how this new awareness might illuminate their work in advising. These conversations were guided by the second research question in this study.

## **RQ2: How Does the Experience of Bringing Awareness of Their Individual Purpose in Life Enlighten Their Work in Academic Advising?**

In exploring how a new awareness of their individual purpose in life enlightened their work in academic advising, three themes emerged from the data. The first theme showed that articulating and understanding their purpose led to more intentional focus on the relational aspect of academic advising. Secondly, advisors felt that having an awareness of their purpose created feelings of empowerment and a sense of career fulfillment. Finally, participants felt that understanding their purpose built a foundation of resilience in their professional work.

### ***Purpose in Life Informed Intentional Focus on the Advising Relationship***

Understanding their purpose in life built on a foundation of self-understanding provided the basis for an intentional focus on the relational side of academic advising interactions. Advisors felt that understanding themselves and their purpose helped them connect with students on a deeper level than would be possible through interactions that are just transactional. When understanding that her purpose included genuinely accepting students for who they are, Scarlett reflected on how it had impacted her conversations with students. She stated, “It’s actually kind of informed my advising practice. I’ve spent more time putting worksheets and stuff away and just really digging in with them of like, ‘what’s life like for you right now?’ Like, ‘what’s going on?’ That has just been so much more beneficial.”

Linda learned that creating safe spaces for people to feel empowered was part of her purpose. She remarked that she would intentionally be integrating her purpose into student interactions and that she would be using it to inform guiding questions that she would routinely ask her students. She explained,

It will give me a solid platform for every encounter with a student. I hope it even becomes something that I can use as guiding questions. ‘So tell me, do you feel safe? Why or why not?’ Because then, that’s uncovering something for that student that safety is important to them too.

Linda realized that her life stories revealed spaces in her life where she did not feel safe and empowered. Therefore, she had a deep passion for creating these spaces for students.

Bob described how having an awareness of his purpose changed his perspective on the importance of the relational aspect of each advising interaction. He noted,

It gives me a really good thought process as to the impact that I’m having on others and the reminder that for me, this might be my 50th meeting of the week or my 17th time telling students about this particular policy. But for every student, it’s their first interaction with us. It’s an organic individual interaction. And to not realize that that’s what it is, as an organic interaction, negates the idea of impacting others and to me, I think that’s the most important part when you talk about advising.

Through exploration of stories, Bob realized that his “why” or purpose was to build genuine relationships with people and inspire them to feel that they were valued and exceptional. He then became aware of the tangible ways in which he could implement this into his conversations with students with the goal of building those advising relationships.

Heather realized that she really enjoyed connecting spending time with students and connecting information for them. She realized that this was directly tied to how she built relationships with students in her daily advising conversations. She reflected,

I love to help them, you know, to see them at the beginning feel really overwhelmed. And sometimes [it takes] multiple appointments. But seeing them start to understand how

these pieces are all fitting together, and how we can fit necessary classes [in] for their end goals, their transfer school, and their major into their curriculum.... I feel very satisfied in putting those puzzles together and explaining it to them, and seeing the light bulb go off. She felt that assisting students in this way helped them to see that they could begin to put the pieces together themselves which build self-reliance.

Understanding their purpose in life gave advisors the ability to see the alignment between their purpose and their work in academic advising. This knowledge led to a shift from a transactional approach, especially during very busy times, to an intentional focus on the relational aspect of the advising relationship. Not only did having an awareness of their purpose inform a more intentional focus on the relational aspect of working with students, but it impacted them individually in their work as well by creating a sense of resilience during stressful or challenging times in their work.

### ***Purpose in Life Promotes Empowerment and Resilience in Professional Work***

A salient theme identified by advisors in this study was that understanding their “why” or purpose gave them a grounding tool when they were feeling burned out or frustrated with their work. Elizabeth remarked that it was something she could turn to as a reminder of her passion for her work and why it is important to bring her full energy every day. She stated, “It’s something you can refer to and remember what it means to you. So especially if you have a really busy day or busy week, [I think] let me go back to remembering why I do the work that I do.” She noted that it helps to rekindle her energy and enthusiasm when she can be reminded of her “why.”

Daisy also remarked that having and understanding of her purpose would help her reframe her thinking during times of frustration. She explained,

It definitely changed my perspective on things a little bit. I've found myself in the past being like, 'Oh my gosh! Why can't this student just get it together?' You can get frustrated sometimes and just having that there to kind of reframe my thinking again, like reminding myself why I'm in this field was really, really helpful.

Daisy felt that having a concise purpose in life statement helped her to remember the struggles that she had as a college student. These reminders helped her reorient herself to a more positive mindset during difficult or tiring moments in her day.

Angela and Bob explained that having their purpose in a clear statement helped them to reframe situations with colleagues or their institution. Angela added that she is currently experiencing some challenges with a new coworker in her office. She remarked that this statement could help her "set up my boundaries and safeguards to continue to uphold my 'why' even if this new person might be making it a little more difficult." Bob expressed some frustrations with some things happening at his institution that seemed to conflict with his purpose and values. However, having a purpose statement reminded him of his goal to have an impact on individual students. He said, "This has helped me to remember that even in those negative [institutional] situations, we have that opportunity to inspire and help [students] even if things are beyond our control." While this resilience created a sense of empowerment for advisors, they did acknowledge the potential for conflicts to arise between their purpose in life and their institution's goals.

### **RQ3: Given the New Awareness of Their Purpose in Life, How do Primary-role Academic Advisors Navigate Limitations and/or Challenges of Living Out That Purpose in Life Within the Context of Their Institution?**

Advisors felt that articulating their purpose in life had many positive implications as detailed in the sections above. However, they also understood that trying to live out that purpose in their advising work may conflict with departmental or institutional goals. First, advisors in this study acknowledged instances where their purpose has or may (in the future) conflict with the goals of their department or institution. Second, through reflection on the alignment between their purpose and their work in advising, advisors suggested resources that would help them feel supported in living out their purpose. Finally, advisors felt that having an awareness of their purpose would help guide them in their professional goals and potential career moves.

#### ***Anticipating Conflicts Aids in Navigating Challenges Between Purpose in Life and Institutional Goals***

While advisors identified benefits of understanding their “why,” they also identified times when living out their individual why in their work may conflict with the goals of the institution or department where they are employed. As someone who deeply values forging relationships with students and providing information targeted to the individual student, Angela shared some challenges with her department’s moving to a group advising model during very busy times of the semester. As the newly appointed director in the office who works as a primary-role advisor, she addressed this with her team:

I said, “Are we still doing group advising? Do we want to go back to individual appointments?” And everyone was like “No, I hate individual appointments. Let’s do



group advising.” And so it’s like, I don’t want to undermine everyone, especially after I asked for their opinion. But it’s also like, that is not how I forge genuine relationships. In this instance, Angela felt a very strong conflict between her approach to advising and how the colleagues on her team wanted to approach their work.

Daisy reflected on how her purpose to be a present resource for students and to help them overcome barriers may conflict with departmental or institutional policies. As an example, “One thing I’ve had to learn is [that] there’s still policies. There’s still rules that people have to follow.” She discussed how there may be times that she doesn’t feel that these policies serve the students’ best interests. She shared, “From my perspective, we can still always be empathetic in those situations.” Daisy’s example indicated a situation where she could foresee difficulties in enforcing policies that she felt did not enhance the student experience.

Nicole expressed challenges within her institution where administrators, even if they were in advising at one point in their career, seem to ignore the impact of their decisions on front-line academic advisors. As someone whose purpose revolved around building relationships with students so that she can assist them in overcoming obstacles, Nicole felt that having an administration that continually pushes work to academic advisors is difficult. She explained that increasing their workload through administrative policies and decisions decreases the amount of time that they have to build intentional relationships with students through advising. She explained, “Sometimes higher leadership... they forget what it was like to be on the front lines. And you know, how their decisions impact us on a mental scale.”

Bob shared that his institution has set goals around enrollment and the retention of students. While he understood these were common goals across higher education, his individual purpose revolved around providing honest information to students. He shared,

There's a load of intention around enrollment and retention. And I understand that. But I've had to have multiple conversations with students who, in my opinion, shouldn't be here. It's not the right time. They're not ready for it. Like, just because the university is gonna push you to do it, I'm gonna tell you to make the right decision for you.

Bob highlighted a current challenge where he feels that the institution pushes to keep the student enrolled when it may not be in that student's best interest at that time. Although advisors acknowledged challenges with living out their purpose within the context of their institution, their "why" statement helped them see potential resources that may be helpful in trying to navigate these conflicts.

### ***Collegiality and Intentional Time for Reflection Promote Purpose in Life and Work***

#### ***Alignment***

Advisors felt that having the support of colleagues around them at work could assist in navigating the conflict between their purpose and their institution's goals or policies. Linda and Sophia explained that being able to block out intentional time to reflect on their purpose would be beneficial. Sophia shared, "I think just getting the chance.... I never take the time to sit down and to reflect and to think about this process." Linda shared this idea and explained, "Maybe just 20 minutes a day. Block that out and make that a time to just sit in my 'why' and remember to feel it, and to keep practicing it until it's second nature." Intentional time to focus on and remember their purpose and how it aligned with their work in advising was identified as a resource by these advisors.

While Sophia and Linda shared that personal, reflective time would be beneficial, others felt that leaning on colleagues and on their supervisor to discuss and to reflect on their "why" would be helpful. Lynn shared her recent connection to a colleague in her office, and through

their conversations about their purpose and values, felt that being able to have intentional conversations with people who shared the same beliefs was positive. She explained,

We have very different experiences. He's like, half my age, and you know, totally different background.... but, we have these amazing conversations about students and advising and sort of where we come from in terms of students. But, I think where we're really sort of kindred spirits is in this seeing past limiting beliefs.

She shared further, "I wish there were more time just in general to talk with colleagues about why we do what we do."

Lynn was not the only advisor who felt that conversations about purpose in the workplace would be beneficial. Bob shared his frustrations with the lack of recognition that advisors receive but felt that conversations about purpose with colleagues would create connections between colleagues. Bob commented,

The hardest part about being an advisor, in my opinion, is the lack of recognition. And, I think that if we, as an office, and we, as a community of advisors and advising-related professionals, can come together and remind ourselves that we are doing the right thing.... We are doing really well. We need to keep moving and keep going forward. [It] increases our staff morale, especially at a time when morale in many places is already low. I think that can do wonders.

Having the support of colleagues and others within the office was a helpful resource for both Lynn and Bob as they considered how to navigate difficult challenges between their work and their purpose. While sharing their thoughts about potential supports and resources in living out their purpose within their institutional context, advisors indicated that having their purpose statement would help to inform both their professional goals and potential career moves.

### *Awareness of Purpose Guides Professional Goals and Future Career Moves*

Academic advisors indicated that having an awareness of their purpose in life could be used as an interpretive tool when considering professional goals or career moves. For example, prior to this exercise, Scarlett explained, “I hadn’t really thought forward much on professional goals.” Prior to understanding her purpose, she had not considered the possibility of leading an advising office. However, in understanding her “why,” it made her realize that, just as she does with students, she wanted to lead advisors to understand how to work with diverse students including students with disabilities.

Angela and Bob indicated that understanding their purpose would help them focus their time and energy on areas that aligned with their purpose. For instance, because Angela identified that having information gives her comfort, she realized that at times she would focus on gaining information in areas that were not necessary. She stated, “I think it will just help keep me focused because I tend to get too much in the weeds. So, I think it’ll help me kind of determine ‘Is this worth the fight?’” Bob also shared that his purpose statement can provide boundaries for his time and energy. He noted, “I think it will also help me fight for things that I feel are best, not just for the students, but for us as staff members.”

Nicole and Heather mentioned ways in which their purpose might assist them in making decisions about future opportunities. Nicole reflected, “In looking at other jobs that I might have previously shied away from, and not even liked, looked at, or thought about applying for because it’s out of my wheelhouse.... but if the purpose of it is related to this [her purpose], then it’s not really out of my wheelhouse. So, I think it’ll help me open up my future opportunities.” Heather also felt her purpose statement would help her in future career moves, specifically in interviews.

She explained, “I might be able to [think about] how I’m gonna be able to weave this kind of statement into the ‘tell me about yourself’ question.”

Reflecting on the alignment between their individual purpose and their work in advising, participants began to understand either current or potential conflicts with trying to live out their purpose within the context of their institution. In identifying these areas, they were able to provide thoughts on possible resources that would feel supportive in the alignment between their purpose and their work. Finally, advisors felt that understanding their “why” would assist them in making decisions about both professional goals and career moves in the future.

## **Chapter Summary**

Findings from this study were summarized in this chapter as they related to each of the guiding research questions. In investigating how the exploration of life experiences brought awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors, three themes were identified. Emotions identified through the exploration process were important in connecting life experiences with the meaning the participant assigned to them. Additionally, telling their stories afforded participants a deeper understanding of themselves and indicated that having an unbiased partner in the process was beneficial.

The experience of bringing awareness to their individual purpose in life enlightened their work in academic advising in three ways. The first was that articulating and understanding their purpose led to more intentional focus on the relational component of the advising relationship. Second, advisors felt that having a purpose statement created feelings of empowerment along with a sense of career fulfillment. Understanding their purpose created a foundation that they could refer to during challenging and busy times resulting in professional resilience.

When considering how advisors would navigate limitations and/or challenges of living out their purpose in life within the context of their institution, three themes were identified. First, participants acknowledged instances where their purpose has or may (in the future) conflict with their departmental or institutional goals. Second, advisors identified resources that would support them in the alignment between their purpose and work in academic advising. Finally, participants felt that having an awareness of their purpose would help guide them in their professional goals and potential career moves. The following chapter will include a discussion and implications of the findings of this study as well as limitations and ideas for future research.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

The importance of academic advisors within institutions of higher education cannot be overstated. As White (2015) shared,

Academic advising has the unique capability to reach all students enrolled at any particular institution. Either by mandate or by virtue of students finding their own value in meeting with an adviser, academic advising has been identified as the one endeavor in higher education that is structured in such a way as to have an impact on all students. (p. 271)

Moreover, Troxel et al. (2022) expanded on the unique positioning of academic advising within the context of the institution and writing, “Academic advising is uniquely placed within the academy as a bridge between the curriculum and the co-curriculum and draws from multiple theories and disciplines to ground scholarship and practice in the field to support student success” (p. 24).

Despite the importance of advisors, these key players in the student experience are leaving higher education in alarming numbers. Recent scholars have noted a “mass exodus” (Ellis, 2021a, para. 19) of employees out of higher education, while others have focused on specific reasons for academic advisors leaving the profession such as burnout, high-volume workloads, emotional exhaustion, and low levels of institutional support (Gregerson et al., 2022; Soria et al., 2023). The exit of these essential advisors is costly.

Costs of employee attrition include a significant amount of money needed to replace the employee as well as time dedicated by other employees in the recruitment and hiring process, lower team productivity due to fewer staff, and the loss of institutional knowledge (Navarra, 2022). Furthermore, scholars are warning that the so-called “great resignation” of the workforce

may not be over. Shapero (2024) reported that close to 85% of employees in the United States are prepared to change jobs. If institutions of higher education are going to retain valuable academic advisors, they must begin looking for new and creative ways to keep them engaged. The results of this study indicate that supporting primary-role academic advisors in both bringing awareness to their purpose in life and helping them find ways to align their work with their purpose may promote advisor retention and increase intentional focus from advisors on the advising relationship with students.

This chapter focuses on the interpretation of the findings from this study which showed that exploring life experiences assisted primary-role academic advisors to bring awareness to their purpose in life. Secondly, it was determined that having an awareness of purpose in life enlightened their work in academic advising. Finally, these primary-role academic advisors shared thoughts about navigating their newfound purpose into their daily work and within the context of their institution. These findings are situated within the framework of both the theoretical models and the current literature that exists.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The following section summarizes the findings of this qualitative, narrative study and both synthesizes those findings and expands knowledge within the context of the current literature and the theoretical frameworks that grounded this inquiry. In this study, I found that these primary-role advisors gained a deeper understanding of themselves through the exploration of life stories which led to an awareness of their “why” or purpose in life. Participants’ work in academic advising was also enlightened with a more intentional focus on the relational aspect of academic advising and with the promotion of feelings of professional resilience. Finally, through reflection on integrating their newly articulated purpose in life into their work, these primary-role



advisors acknowledged conflicts that may exist between their purpose and the goals of their institution but also suggested resources that could support them in navigating this conflict and possible career moves.

### **Life Experiences and Understanding of Self**

Participants in this study found that by exploring life stories, they were able to more deeply understand their identity and their internal values. Findings showed that emotions were critical in this process. Additionally, these emotions led to an awareness of their individual purpose. To add to that, participants felt that having an unbiased partner in the process was key.

#### ***Examining Life Stories and Identifying Emotions Critical to Understanding Self and Purpose***

Through this study, primary-role advisors explored life experiences with the goal of bringing awareness to their “why” or purpose in life. Findings showed that exploring life stories allowed participants to reflect on both current and past emotions connected to those experiences. Additionally, revisiting life experiences and connecting to feelings surrounding them led to a deeper understanding of their individual purpose. Emotions were critical in the ability of the participants to co-construct the meaning they had assigned to those life experiences. The connection between emotions (both past and current) surrounding a participant’s life stories allowed deep reflection on why those experiences held deep meaning for them. The themes of these meaningful stories were then used to co-construct their purpose in life statement.

This finding is supported by the work of Frankl (1959/2006). Through his experiences in multiple Nazi concentration camps, Frankl witnessed and experienced the importance and impact of emotions. Frankl observed that despite the most unimaginable circumstances, victims who maintained a sense of hope while prisoned in the concentration camps survived well beyond those who fell into despair. By preserving feelings of hope, both Frankl and other concentration

camp victims were able to reorient their perspective to the future and feel that they had a purpose beyond their current circumstances. This finding is also supported by the work of Dewey (1938), which is described next.

Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience* noted that people learn through interactions with other individuals and the world around them. These interactions, called experiences, have educative value that can be positive or negative in nature. Dewey's principle of continuity might suggest that through the exploration of life stories, advisors realized the educative value of their past experiences. They discovered that situations they had experienced in their past, even early in life, had an educative value and informed their present self. Each life experience explored by the advisor happened and was perceived in the context of the experiences that happened before it which led to a deeper understanding of self.

These findings are further supported by more recent literature. When discussing the exercise of "Finding Your Why" used in this study, Sinek (2009) emphasized the importance of participants connecting to the feelings and emotions of each life experience shared. By doing so, participants could reflect on stories that were deeply meaningful to them. Craft and Hochella (2010) identified the importance of emotions when considering purpose in life purpose in life In their study of 24 student affairs administrators, the authors found that although many had not thought about or articulated their purpose in life, they identified feelings of "joy, comfort, and/or confidence with themselves and/or their jobs" when asked if they felt they were "where they ought to be" (p. 5). Finally, Leider (2015) suggested that the first thing one must do to uncover their purpose was to "mine your life story" (p. 3) for themes that reveal passion and values. While the findings of this study revealed that an exploration of life stories led to a deeper

understanding of self which helped to illuminate an individual's purpose in life, participants noted that having an unbiased partner in the process was critical.

### ***Exploration of Life Stories with an Unbiased Partner was Essential***

All the participants in this study acknowledged that they had felt they had a purpose. While some had reflected on their purpose in other situations, all participants in this study noted that this exercise gave them a different perspective. Furthermore, a significant finding of this study showed that having an unbiased partner in the process of bringing awareness to their purpose in life was helpful. As the researcher, I took on the role of this partner in this process.

In his theory of *Will to Meaning* Frankl (1959/2006) noted two assumptions to his framework that align with the finding that having a partner in the process is important. First is the assumption of self-distancing. The ability of the participant to engage in self-distancing suggests that the individual could remove themselves from their circumstances and view their experiences objectively. The second assumption of Frankl's (1959/2006) is that of conscience whereby the participant is consciously able to review their life experiences or circumstances and discover the meaning that they have assigned to them. All participants noted that having a partner who had not already heard their stories or who was not present during those experiences was helpful. They noted that having an unbiased partner's perspective assisted them in consciously looking at their life stories objectively (self-distancing) and seeing both meaning that they had assigned to those experiences and the themes that were revealed (conscience).

The telling of stories is a key piece of the methodology of this study. From a lens of social constructivism, truth, reality, and meaning are unique to every individual. Therefore, the researcher and participant work together to co-construct these elements through the qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, when using narrative inquiry as a methodology, the

story told by the participant is the “basic unit of analysis” (Kramp, 2004, p. 105). The alignment of social constructivism, narrative inquiry, and the theoretical frameworks provided a foundation for understanding why having a partner in the process of bringing awareness to their purpose was important. Articulating a purpose statement not only provided new self-insight for these primary-role advisors, but it also provided perspective on their work in academic advising.

### **Purpose Enlightens Academic Advising**

Following the exercise of articulating their “why” or purpose statement, primary-role academic advisors felt a shift in their conversations with students which began to focus more on the relational aspect of the advising relationship. Additionally, participants reported ways in which having this new understanding would promote resilience in their professional work.

### ***Intentional Focus on Relationships Related to Awareness of Purpose***

Participants in this study revealed that having a new awareness of their purpose in life led them to intentionally focus on the relational aspect the academic advising interactions. Conversations with students became concentrated around their experience as a student both inside and outside of the academic environment. Advisors noted that they were no longer spending as much time on the informational aspect of their work with students (e.g., worksheets) but were intentionally asking questions such as “How are you, really?” While a few participants saw only a small shift in their approach with students, others experienced a significant change in their perspective with conversations.

This finding aligns with Frankl’s (1959/2006) *Will to Meaning* framework. Frankl suggested that not only is the will to meaning uniquely human, but a person’s identified purpose is directed at something or someone greater than themselves. Primary-role academic advisors in this study found that having an awareness of their purpose allowed them to see how their

individual identity and values aligned with their passions to help students. By having this new perspective, participants were able to understand the intrinsic motivation they felt to help others, particularly the students they assisted. This new lens shifted their conversations to intentionally relationship focused.

Emphasized in the *NACADA Core Competencies*, Smith and Cunningham (2022) noted that a key component of academic advising is the advising relationship. While providing information to students (informational component) and understanding scholarship, history, theory, and philosophy (conceptual component) are important, none of these things are possible without the foundation of a relationship between advisor and student. Craft and Hochella (2010) noted the importance of helping students, “The expressed purpose in life for a number of other participants was described as a desire to help and/or to serve others in one’s immediate sphere of influence” (p. 4). Based on both the findings of this study as well as theory and literature related to purpose in life, academic advisors and student affairs professionals often have a deep desire to build relationships and help students. Having an awareness of purpose in life can assist in understanding the alignment between individual purpose and this desire.

### ***Purpose Enhances Professional Empowerment and Resilience for Primary-role Advisors***

This study revealed that understanding individual purpose, through the exploration of life stories, built a foundation of resilience for primary-role advisors in their professional work. By reflecting on their past experiences, advisors gained a sense of empowerment when they reflected on the alignment between their purpose in life and their work in academic advising. Additionally, they were able to understand how life experiences and their individual purpose in life informed their identity and connected to how they approach their work with students.

Participants acknowledged a deep passion for their work but also recognized the toll that it can have on their individual well-being. Advisors noted feeling frustrated at times with individual student situations, their overall workload as an advisor, and their departments or institutions who seemed to have conflicting goals with their individual values and with what they felt was best for students. By bringing awareness to their purpose and developing a “why” statement through the exploration of life stories, advisors were able to use their purpose as a reflection tool which promoted professional resilience. This statement grounded them in their day-to-day work and reminded them of the important role they play with individual students. Their purpose statement reoriented them beyond their frustration and provided a refocus on both their internal drive and the outward impact they have on students. It resulted in their feeling reenergized even during difficult or stressful times. These findings are illuminated by the work of Dewey (1938).

Dewey’s (1938) theory suggests that, because academic advisors experienced this exercise, it will provide educative value for future experiences and life situations. Participants were able to use their newfound awareness of their purpose in life as a grounding tool. The experience of understanding and articulating their purpose in life provided educative value and insight into why they are passionate about their work. During times of high stress, advisors are able to use this new information to maintain resilience in their work.

The literature in this area is clear: employees in higher education and especially academic advisors, feel overworked, undervalued, underpaid, and have little opportunity for advancement which has led to high turnover (Ellis, 2021a; Figueroa, 2015; Owens, 2022). In contrast, employees who have an awareness of their “why” or purpose in life generally enjoy going to work, are more productive, and are happier with both work and their personal lives (Sinek,

2009). Scholars have found numerous positive correlations with an awareness of purpose in life including the ability to manage day-to-day stress (Hill et al., 2018), “feel less defeated by daily issues” (Pfund & Hill, 2018, p. 8), and are less likely to experience burnout (Crea & Francis, 2022). Having an awareness of purpose in life and a purpose statement that they can easily reflect on at any time builds professional resilience among primary-role academic advisors who are feeling overwhelmed in their roles. Because of this, advisors need clear ways to integrate their purpose in life into their daily work.

### **Integrating the Advisor’s Purpose in Life into the Workplace**

With new knowledge and/or a new perspective on their purpose in life, participants were asked about integrating this new insight into their work with students. While most participants felt that their individual supervisors would support them, many advisors acknowledged both current and potential future conflicts in trying to live out their purpose within the context of their institution. Namely, they identified that their values and identity may not align with overarching goals of their department and/or institution. For instance, if their purpose was to empower students to make informed decisions and to do what was best for them, they may feel that a student should not stay at the institution or with their current program. These participants acknowledged that this inherently conflicted with the institution’s goals to retain and to graduate all students. Because of this conflict, advisors identified potential resources that may help with the alignment between their purpose in life and their professional work.

These advisors felt that their environment was critical to feeling supported. They indicated that intentional time to focus and to reflect on their purpose in life and its alignment to their work in academic advising was critical. These participants remarked that, because of their workloads, they had very little time to sit and think about why they do their work every day.

Additionally, the ability to lean on both supervisors and colleagues who inherently understood their work and who shared the same passions for their role was important. They noted that having advisors understand both their individual purpose in life and the purpose in life of those around them could create a common language and cohesiveness among advising teams.

An important finding revealed that participants in this study planned to use their new purpose in life statement as a guide for both professional goals and potential future career moves. In some cases, they explained that having a new understanding of their purpose in life helped them imagine their professional identity in ways they had not considered before. They began to see how they might be able to align their purpose in life with future leadership roles and/or indicated that they may consider other professional positions that they previously would not have considered due to feeling unqualified. Once again, Dewey's theoretical framework informs these findings.

Dewey's (1938) *Theory of Experience* emphasized the importance of the environment when considering the educative value of an experience. Dewey explained, "An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 41). This principle of interaction, as Dewey called it, explains the importance of an advisor's environment on how advisors experience their purpose in life at work. If they see their environment as being supportive of the alignment between their work and their purpose, this will likely provide a positive, educative experience to other experiences that build on it in the future. If advisors feel that their environment conflicts with their purpose, it will likely have the opposite effect.

In addition to Dewey's theory (1938), the literature supports the idea that employees should be encouraged to engage in work that aligns with their purpose. Craft and Hochella



(2010) noted that some participants in their study were able to connect their purpose in life with professional opportunities that had been presented. They explained that when purpose and work align within certain opportunities, these “provide places where people can grow and can use their gifts and talents” (p. 5). Presbitero and Teng-Calleja (2020) went a step further and encouraged supervisors to offer guided exercises that assist employees in discovering their calling or purpose. The authors suggested that employers consider how the employees’ purpose or calling aligns with the organizational goals and to work with the employee to find ways within their job that they can “live out his/her calling” (Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, p. 333). The findings of this study have implications, not only for individuals, but also for how institutions may work to retain valuable employees.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study lead to implications that should be considered by individuals and administrators alike within higher education. Awareness, understanding, and clear articulation of purpose in life rarely happens without intentional focus and strategic reflection. The goal of this qualitative study focused specifically on the experience of these academic advisors and results should not be generalized beyond these participants. However, the findings offer the opportunity for advisors, faculty, and administrators to consider how advisor purpose in life and their work in academic advising may align and be beneficial to individual advisors, institutions, and students.

### **Implications for Individual Advisors and Institutions**

Academic advisors and employees in higher education are leaving the profession at alarming rates due to feeling overworked, undervalued, unsupported, misunderstood, and underpaid (Ellis, 2021; Figueroa, 2015; Gregerson et al., 2022; Owens, 2022). The findings of

this study indicate that administrators may have hope of retaining these critical employees if they are willing to support them in their alignment between their work and their individual purpose in life. Charles-Leija et al. (2023) studied the impact of purpose in life on an organization's ability to retain employees. In their study "data showed that elements such as life purpose, job relationships, and meaningful work are aspects that are more relevant for individuals than wages" (p. 13) when considering employee turnover.

As shown with the participants in this study, the exploration of life stories with the goal of articulating and understanding an individual's purpose in life can create powerful perspective and insight. By sharing their stories with an unbiased partner, advisors were able to uncover both past and present emotions and while identifying and co-constructing meaning assigned to those experiences. This exercise led to uncovering themes that were woven throughout their life stories revealing their true, individual purpose. Advisors felt that they had a deeper, more powerful understanding of themselves and their values which in turn, they found, laid the foundation for the passion in their academic advising work.

Not only did these academic advisors report that they found this new awareness intrinsically beneficial, but they also were able to connect it to a greater sense of resilience in the workplace which could counter feelings of compassion fatigue and burnout. A study completed by Dai et al. (2021) showed a positive correlation between purpose in life and employee engagement. They noted that allowing employees "more freedom to follow their hearts" led to employees "feeling more purpose in their individual work and engender[ed] higher level[s] of purposefulness and employee engagement" (p. 68). The findings of this study suggest that having an awareness of purpose in life had positive implications for how academic advisors experience their work and encouraged the need for institutional support.

## **Implications for Administrators and Supervisors**

Having an understanding and awareness of individual purpose in life may be beneficial to both individual advisors and advising administrators and/or supervisors. As advising leaders focus on hiring advisors who will deeply engage with their work, asking questions throughout the interview process that shed light on how the individual's purpose in life aligns with their work in academic advising could help evaluate the intrinsic value of the work to that potential employee. Furthermore, if not included in the interview process, administrators should encourage advisors to consider activities such as articulating their purpose statement during the onboarding process. Doing so may provide a foundation for and insight into that individual advisor's work with students by enhancing understanding of why the work may be meaningful to them and the institution.

When considering the implications for currently employees, these academic advisors suggested that having administrators and institutions who support them taking time to intentionally reflect with the goal of revealing and understanding their purpose in life would be helpful. Once awareness is gained, advisors need intentional time for further reflection, especially during high-stress times, to refocus on their "why" to feel reenergized. Unfortunately, the sheer volume and nature of advisor workload is often counterproductive to an individual's ability to intentionally focus and reflect on their purpose in life. It is recommended that advising supervisors and administrators support advisors in this intentional endeavor. Allowing and encouraging advisors to take short breaks throughout the day to walk outside or sit in silence and regroup themselves in their purpose provides the space for advisors to reenergize. In addition to encouraging advisors to take intentional, focused time to reflect, administrators can engage in

conversations with advisors to support their pursuit of an active alignment between their purpose in life and their work.

Advisors may be hesitant to openly share their purpose in life with supervisors or colleagues. Administrators and supervisors can open these conversations by asking advisors if they have considered how their work aligns with their purpose in life, their personal values, and their goals. Furthermore, conversations between supervisors and advisors can focus on exploring how advisors see themselves living out their purpose in life through their work. Brainstorming can occur to explore ways in which an advisor can engage in projects or work that is meaningful to them and aligns with their individual purpose in life. By doing so, advisors can feel personally fulfilled by the work that they do while feeling supported to do so by their supervisor and colleagues.

The results of this study suggest that advisors' awareness of their purpose in life created a powerful perspective shift when considering conversations with students. Advisors were more inclined to focus on the whole student rather than the transactional information-giving that can happen, especially during high-stress times. Numerous authors have noted the importance of the advisor-student relationship as the foundation for academic advising. Notably, Cunningham and Smith (2022) integrated the relational component of the advising relationship as the foundation for all other competencies in the *NACADA Core Competencies*. While this relational aspect of advising is not a new concept, there are new players in the field of advising that will continue to increase its importance.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the work of academic advising is an ever-growing topic. Fortunately for advisors, AI cannot, at this time, recreate human interaction and relationships. Dr. Kevin Thomas, Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Success at

the University of Central Arkansas, explained the vital shift that needs to occur in higher education with the surging growth of AI. He noted,

Academic advising is reaching a crossroads and will have to evolve. With growth in AI and advanced technologies, a shift to greater focus on relational aspects of the advising relationship won't just be necessary but they will be paramount to academic advising and student success efforts" (personal communication, November 12, 2024). I

It is in the best interest of both students and the institutions who wish to retain them that advisors be allowed the space and time needed to understand and reflect on their purpose in life and its alignment to their work in advising. While the findings of this study leave much to consider, there are a few limitations that should be addressed.

### **Implications for Work Environment and Culture**

Many of the participants in this study noted that having an unbiased partner in the process of exploring their life stories was a critical piece of the exercise. By sharing their stories with someone who did not know them on a personal level, advisors felt that I was able to see themes and help them co-construct meaning in their life stories that they had not yet considered. Additionally, through this co-constructed meaning and self-awareness, they were then able to articulate their purpose in life statement which was a true reflection of their deeply ingrained values and passions.

In the daily setting of a fast-paced advising office, it would be unreasonable to expect that deep exploration of life stories between colleagues would be feasible or possible. However, allowing advisors the time and ability to explore their life stories with a trusted colleague or campus partner who could help them co-construct their purpose in life statement would benefit both individual advisors and the advising team. Exercises could include partnering with campus

constituents such as counseling services, offices focused on student and staff well-being, or other partners who have an interest in individually engaging in these activities with advisors.

From an advising team perspective, once advisors engage in the discovery and articulation of their purpose in life, supervisors could hold retreats or conversations where advisors could share their purpose in life statements with their colleagues. By doing so, it reveals advisors' passions and values which could provide a common language and understanding of everyone on the team. Such common language and understanding could promote cohesiveness and a sense of camaraderie and understanding between supervisors and colleagues. However, there may be some individuals who do not wish to participate in these activities which should be respected as well.

Participants in this study reported that they were highly reflective and enjoyed exercises such as the one completed in this study. However, not all individuals enjoy such activities. Therefore, it is important for supervisors and advising colleagues to honor and respect the boundaries of their teammates. Administrators must have open conversations with individual team members about their comfortability with exploring their life stories, revealing their purpose in life, and then sharing that with their teammates. In this study, many participants shared traumatic experiences from their past. While these advisors interrogated those stories and felt that they illuminated their individual values and purpose, some individuals may be very uncomfortable uncovering painful experiences of their past. Supervisors and administrators will need to carefully navigate these differences among individual team members and determine what is best for their office regarding a requirement that advisors participate both individually and as a group. The fact that participants in this study self-reported as highly self-reflective highlights one limitation of this study. This and other limitations are discussed in the following section.

## **Limitations**

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to identify and to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Creswell (2012) as cited in Koch et al. (2013) stated “Limitations in qualitative studies may include problems in data collection, unanswered questions by participants, unexplored topics during the period of data collection, or a need for a better sampling of participants or sites for inclusion in the study” (p. 140). In the present study, as with all qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument. Therefore, as the researcher, I acknowledge that I bring a set of assumptions and perspectives that inform my lens on the data collected from participants through interviews. Because of this, there are limitations to what I observe in the data analysis. As a White, Christian, middle-class, educated woman, each of these identities inform the way that I view the world, and subsequently, my interactions with the advisors. Given that nine of the participants were women, my identity aligns with them in that aspect which informs my understanding of their experience. Additionally, some of the participants self-identified as Christian. As they spoke about their life experiences and purpose through a lens of their religion, I was able to understand their perspectives since they aligned with mine.

Additionally, I acknowledge that, as a former primary-role academic advisor, I was able to understand their stories and experiences since I have experienced the role myself. While this ability is helpful in some ways, I understand that it could cloud my perspectives when reviewing the data. Furthermore, the participants selected in this study are from a specific target population: primary-role academic advisors with more than one year of experience in academic advising who acknowledge that they are self-reflective and enjoy exploring their life experiences. Exploring the perspectives of other individuals from different populations may alter the findings.

Additionally, individuals who do not enjoy self-reflection or exploring life stories may experience this exercise differently.

Finally, the theoretical perspective and methodology utilized in this study present limitations. As Bhattacharya (2017) stated, “There is no one correct way of designing or conducting a qualitative study” (p. 92). Therefore, the theoretical perspective and methodology used in the study can only provide one lens to view the data collected. For instance, Frankl (n.d.) noted an assumption of self-distancing when articulating the idea of will to meaning. The assumption of self-distancing implies that individuals can detach from themselves and look at their circumstances objectively. While participants reporting that having me as an unbiased partner to listen to their stories assisted with this process, it is unreasonable to think that participants fully detached from their circumstances. This was further validated by the fact that many of the participants experienced deep emotions through the process. The ability to fully detach from meaningful experiences that invoke these strong feelings and emotions is difficult. Therefore, while participants were able to somewhat view themselves objectively with the help of an unbiased partner, it is unrealistic to believe that this was purely an objective review of their life stories. In addition to limitations of the theoretical frameworks used to ground this study, the use of narrative inquiry as a methodology also has limitations.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the stories delivered by participants through interviews. As Hagen (2018) noted, “Our life stories are our identity...The telling of stories is a life-affirming process...People make sense of their lives by creating stories” (p. 7). While narratives and storytelling are common in these ways across many cultures, we can only truly know what the teller of the story tells us. In speaking about advising through a narrative lens, Hagen (2018) explained that because there is a power differential between advisor and student, a student may



not be forthcoming with all information when they are telling a story to their advisor. In the same way, a participant in a research study may not be inclined to share all details of a story with a researcher. For this reason, I was only able to notice themes and help the participants co-construct meaning in their stories and uncover their purpose in life statement based on the information they chose to share. This may have limited the insight and progress we were able to make toward uncovering their purpose in life.

Finally, collecting data through interviews presented a set of limitations. For instance, deMarrais (2014) highlighted the power differential that must be navigated between the participant and researcher: “The researcher has the power in studies where participants view him or her as the one who designs and conducts the study, interprets the findings, and publishes the results” (p. 65). Communication barriers, such as the interviewer being “present” or not attending to nonverbal cues from the participant, may create challenges in the data collection process (deMarrais, 2014). Considering both the findings and limitations, the section that follows covers suggestions for future research.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As stated previously, as of the time of this study, no other literature was found that explored the alignment between purpose in life and academic advising. Thus, the opportunity for future research in this area is tremendous. First, in this study, I focused on participants from a very specific demographic pool: primary-role academic advisors with more than one year of experience in the field who considered themselves reflective and enjoyed exploring their life stories. Further research needs to be done on a wider, more diverse pool of participants. Most of the participants in this study identified with either one or more majority categories. A more

inclusive pool of participants who identify in historically underrepresented groups would significantly expand the richness of this line of inquiry.

In addition to expanding the diversity of participants, both faculty and higher education administrators should be explored in future research. The current study only focused on how primary-role academic advisors viewed the alignment between their purpose in life and their work. Expanding the research into other areas of higher education, such as faculty (in the areas of teaching, research, and academic advising) and administrators, could provide insight into how these professionals view their purpose in life and their role with students and staff that they supervise.

Like primary-role advisors, exploration is needed to understand if faculty members and administrators feel there is a benefit to having an awareness of their purpose in life. How might this awareness of purpose in life illuminate their work in teaching, research, and administrative work at institutions? If faculty and administrators understand their own purpose in life, will it create a common language and understanding between various levels of the institution? These are areas that should continue to be explored.

One delimitation of this study is that the participants all identified as deeply self-reflective (5 on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being the highest). Future research could explore participants who may identify as lower than a score of 5 on such a survey. Their experience with a process such as the “Finding Your Why” exercise may be rather different than the participants in this study who enjoy these activities. Will those individuals engage in the process and ultimately bring awareness to their purpose in life? Only future research in this area can determine this.

Because of the experience of these advisors, institutions and administrators are encouraged to support advisors in bringing awareness to and understanding their purpose in life. Furthermore, because of research in other areas, there may be a correlation between advisors understanding their purpose in life and the ability of institutions to retain them due to higher levels of engagement and resilience. The direct correlation between advisor purpose in life and employee retention is beyond the scope of the present study. However, there is a need to more deeply understand this connection broadly, and specifically with academic advisors.

Future research is needed to show how an advisor having an awareness of their purpose in life impacts the student experience. If an advisor understands their purpose in life, does the student experience change (for the positive or not)? Is there a difference in what students see/feel about their interactions with advisors before vs after an advisor has discovered their “why?” Future scholars are encouraged to explore these questions and continue to fill the gap in the literature surrounding advisor purpose in life and their work.

The implications of this important line of research extend beyond the boundaries of academic advising and higher education. Frankl (1959/2006) suggested that all individuals possess and *Will to Meaning*; a purpose in life that is unique and that individuals should be encouraged to bring awareness to this purpose. Future scholars should explore purpose in life not only individual career groups, but discover how the alignment of individual purpose in life may impact employee retention, engagement, well-being, and organizational culture. There is still much to be explored in this important area.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this study, findings revealed that primary-role academic advisors were able to bring an awareness of their purpose in life through the exploration of their life stories. Interrogating those

stories with an unbiased partner allowed participants the ability to identify feelings and co-construct meaning. Having an awareness of their purpose in life encouraged a deeper understanding of themselves and their identity while also helping them understand the foundations of their passion for their work with students

Furthermore, when primary-role advisors understood their purpose in life and how it aligned with their work in academic advising, it informed their work with students. Having an awareness of purpose in life created a more intentional focus on the relationship aspect of the advising interaction. Advisors reported spending more time asking students about their life and experience both inside and outside the academic environment, rather than providing transactional information. Additionally, advisors reported the ability to return to their purpose in life statement during high-stress times as a reminder of “why” they were passionate about their role.

Finally, participants acknowledged that living out their purpose in life within the context of their institution may present challenges. They recognized that there would likely be conflicts between their internal values and the goals of their department and/or organization. However, advisors identified that support from colleagues, supervisors, and institutional administration would help them feel that their purpose in life was understood and valued. Although many reported currently having this support, they did indicate that they would consider a move away from their institution if the conflict between their purpose in life and institutional goals was too strong. They also noted that their new purpose in life statement would be used as a guide for professional goals and future career moves.

The findings of this study have implications for advisors and institutions. When advisors feel that their purpose in life aligns with their work in academic advising, they report a deeper understanding and a stronger sense of resilience in an environment where retaining employees is

becoming increasingly more difficult. Administrators would do benefit in acknowledging and supporting this powerful alignment between an advisors' purpose in life and their work with students.

As a primary-role academic advisor who had the privilege of working with students in higher education for over 11 years, I knew that I had passion for the work I was doing. While I never had intentional time to focus and reflect on my purpose or “why,” I knew the work I was doing was deeply meaningful to both me and those I engaged with through my work: students, colleagues, administrators, leaders, and beyond. When I entered the NACADA annual conference session in 2018 on “Finding Your Why,” I had no idea the impact it would have, not only on my work, but in my life. Since then, I have not only articulated but continued to refine my “why” statement to something that deeply describes who I am at my core: *To inspire others to believe in their own potential and purpose so that they can be an intentionally positive influence on the people and spaces with which they engage.*

While not every participant experienced such a powerful shift in perspective, a few reported being “forever changed” by this experience of bringing awareness to their purpose in life. Sophia reported that because of this experience, she was able to say she was proud of herself for the first time in her life. After the study, Linda reached out to me and shared that she has created a poster displaying her “why” statement. She generously offered the following:

You took me through a journey that truly changed me and my work outlook. I still get frustrated.... But now I understand why I become frustrated and angry. It's because my values that drive my “why” are under attack. When I'm with students and maybe typing something or looking up something while we're in an appointment, I can always see that the students are looking all around my office at what's on my walls, hanging from the

ceiling, sticking on the side of my filing cabinet, and on my bulletin board. It makes me happy to know that they read my “Why Statement” and know that they matter so much to me. Forever changed, forever grateful – Linda. (personal communication, November 21, 2024)

In an environment where advisors feel undervalued, underappreciated, and misunderstood, statements like those made by Sophia, Linda, and other participants in this study demonstrate the critical importance of intentional time and focus on advisor well-being through an understanding of their purpose.

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## Appendix A - Participant Recruitment Email



Hello Advisors!

My name is Ashley Thomas and I currently serve as Assistant Director of Resources and Managing Editor of all publications for NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. Prior to this role, I was a primary-role academic advisor for eleven years.

I am writing to you today as I am currently seeking participants for a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation through Kansas State University.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to understand, through a narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brings awareness to Purpose in Life for primary-role academic advisors and how this awareness of their individual purpose in life may illuminate their work in academic advising? Additionally, how do participants navigate limitations and/or challenges of living out their purpose in life within the context of their institution?

**Study Procedure and Participant Time Requirement:** Participants who volunteer to be a part of this study will participate in one introductory/informational meeting and two, one-on-one sessions held via Zoom over a 4-6 week period.

The first session will include introductions of myself, the research study, and the “Finding Your Why” exercise that we will be participating in together with the goal of articulating a “why” or purpose in life statement. During the first one-on-one session, according to the “Finding Your Why” exercise, we will explore a timeline of life stories of your choosing in an effort to uncover themes in the meanings that you have assigned to those life experiences. At the end of the session, we will explore your immediate thoughts and insights about the exercise and your new purpose in life statement. The goal of the second one-on-one session will be to further reflect on the experience of bringing awareness to your purpose in life and examine how this purpose may assist with your work in academic advising. Additionally, we will explore how you envision living out your new purpose in life in the context of your work in academic advising and discuss any challenges or limitation you may perceive in doing so.

Follow-up emails and conversations will be conducted on an as-needed basis to clarify any lingering questions. All sessions will be held via Zoom and recorded for transcription and analysis.

**Informed Consent:** Participants will be provided with a formal Informed Consent

which outlines the purpose of the research, procedures, or methods to be used, anticipated risks and benefits of participation in the study, and confidentiality statements.

While the perspectives of faculty advisors are critical to this area of research, the current study seeks to explore the experiences of primary-role advisors with the hopes of exploring faculty advisor perspectives in the future.

Participants who are selected to participate in the study ***and*** complete the full research process will be sent a \$100 Amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the following survey no later than ***May 19th,***

***2024:*** [https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5inaZhmbmnJWKiy](https://kstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5inaZhmbmnJWKiy)

While gaining deep perspectives from participants on this topic are critical to this study, the number of participants who will be selected for the study will be limited. Therefore, responding to this call for participants does not ensure selection to participate in the full study.

If you have questions, please reach out to me directly: Ashley Thomas ([ashleythomas@ksu.edu](mailto:ashleythomas@ksu.edu))

Your perspectives and insight are incredibly valuable to this study, and I am grateful to have you consider participation in this important work. I look forward to hearing from those interested by the deadline listed above!

IRB Approval: This study was granted approval by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board on March 25, 2024; IRB Protocol #IRB-12137

NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising  
2323 Anderson Avenue, Suite 225  
Manhattan, KS 66502

Phone: (785) 532-5717  
Fax: (785) 532-7732  
Email: [nacada@ksu.edu](mailto:nacada@ksu.edu)

### **Qualtrics Survey Questions:**

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Institution

Institution Type (Drop-Down Selection): 4-Year Public, 4-Year Private, Community or Technical College, Other: Please Specify

On a scale from 1 (low-level reflection) to 5 (high-level reflection), to what extent would you consider yourself to be someone who is reflective and who enjoys thinking about their life stories and the personal importance of your professional work?

*\*\*Please note that this recruitment email indicates that each participant who completed the study would receive a \$100 gift card. Per college and departmental processes following the awarding of the NACADA grant to support my research, the incentive was changed from a \$100 Amazon gift card to \$100. Incentives were distributed to participants through university processes and platforms.*



## Appendix B - Project Summary for Participants

**IRB Approval:** The Kansas State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed and granted full approval for this study (Proposal Number [Insert Proposal Number])

**Project Title:** *Discovering the “why”: A qualitative study exploring alignment between an individual’s purpose in life and their work in academic advising*

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to understand, through a narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brings awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors and how this awareness of their individual purpose in life may illuminate their work in academic advising? Additionally, how do participants navigate limitations and/or challenges of living out their purpose in life within the context of their institution?

**Time Commitment:** This study will require each participant to attend one introductory/informational meeting and two, one-on-one interview sessions which are detailed in the information below. The introductory/informational meeting will be scheduled for 30 minutes. The first one-on-one interview session will require at least one hour but potentially more given that we will be exploring your meaningful life stories to develop your “why” statement. The time for this exploration exercise varies depending on the individual. The second one-on-one interview session will be scheduled for one hour. All interviews will be video and audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

### **Session Outline:**

#### *Introductory/Informational Meeting:*

During this time, you will be provided with foundational, introductory information to orient you to Sinek’s “Finding Your Why” model. This will include chapters 1-3 from Sinek et al (2017) book and you will be asked to read this material prior to the first one-on-one interview. You will also be asked, as explained in these chapters, to gather a timeline of stories from your life that are meaningful to you and that will be shared and explored during the second session. This session will be scheduled for 30 minutes.

#### *One-on-one Interview Session One:*

During this session, as outlined in the introductory chapters 1-3, we will be exploring your story timeline. The goal of this session is to collaboratively discover themes that are woven through these stories toward the goal of developing your “why” or purpose statement. This session will be scheduled for one hour, but individual session times may vary depending on your stories and engagement with the process.

#### *One-on-one Interview Session Two:*

During this time, we will be exploring the experience of bringing awareness to your “why” (or purpose in life) and how this awareness may assist your work in academic advising. We will also explore your ideas on how you will live out your purpose in life in your professional work and

any challenges or limitations you may perceive in doing so within the context of your institution. This session will be scheduled for one hour.

Following the second session, questions and clarification will be conducted via email and zoom conversations as needed.

Upon successful completion of the second one-on-one interview session, you will be emailed a \$100 Amazon Gift Card.

**Final Statement:**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and to be part of this study. As the project moves forward, I may periodically be contacting you regarding questions or clarifications related to some of the information you shared with me throughout this project. Overall, I am hoping to represent your words as accurately as possible. Because the goal of this study is to collect your reflections and insights, quotes may or may not be used in the final report of the findings; however, your identity will remain anonymous in the final written report. Please feel free to share openly in response to interview questions and prompts. Please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, and you are welcome to contact myself or the individuals listed on your consent form at any time if you have questions or concerns. Thank you for your participation! Your contributions are very valuable to this study.

*\*\*Please note that this document indicates that each participant who completed the study would receive a \$100 gift card. Per college and departmental processes following the awarding of the NACADA grant to support my research, the incentive was changed from a \$100 Amazon gift card to \$100. Incentives were distributed to participants through university processes and platforms*

## Appendix C - Informed Consent

**Project Title:** *Discovering the “why”*: A qualitative study exploring alignment between an individual’s purpose in life and their work in academic advising

**Project Approval Date:**

**Project Expiration Date:**

**Length of Study:** 6 months

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Christy Craft

**Co-Investigator:** Ashley A. Thomas

**Contact Details for Problems/Questions:** Dr. Christy Craft ([ccraft@ksu.edu](mailto:ccraft@ksu.edu))

**IRB Chair Contact Information:** Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**Project Sponsor:** N/A

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to understand, through a narrative inquiry, how the exploration of life experiences brings awareness to purpose in life for primary-role academic advisors. Additionally, how does this awareness of their individual purpose in life assist with their work in academic advising?

**Procedures or Methods to be Used:** A total of four one-on-one sessions between a participant and the researcher will be held over a 4-6 week period. Sessions will include an introductory informational session, two semi-structured, open-ended interviews, and one debriefing session. Sessions will be conducted with participants to understand the participant’s experience in bringing awareness to their purpose in life, and how their purpose may assist their work in academic advising. The two semi-structured, open-ended interviews will be recorded and transcribed via the video conferencing platform for data analysis following the sessions.

**Biological Samples Collected:** No

**Alternative procedures or treatments, if any, that might be advantageous to subject:** N/A

**Risks or discomforts anticipated:** During the “Finding Your Why” exercise, participants are invited to share stories of their life that have deep meaning for them which could include both positive and negative experiences. While participants will be asked to share personal information regarding their stories, insights, and reflections about this exercise and its impact on their advising work, all responses will remain confidential and will be aggregated into thematic reports that do not identify individuals. There is no additional risk beyond those experienced in everyday life/education situations.

**Benefits Anticipated:** The opportunity to critically reflect on life/professional stories and experiences is meant to help participants identify and bring awareness to their individual and unique purpose in life (or “why”). The literature suggests that bringing awareness to this purpose in life has positive implications at both the individual and organizational levels. Additionally, all participants selected for the study and who complete the full research process will be sent a \$100 Amazon gift card.

**Extent of Confidentiality:** As a reminder, I will be requesting to video and audio record the four sessions that we will participate in together through this research process. Additionally, I will be asking that you journal about your experiences and will be collecting those journal entries as data for further analysis. No personally identifying information will be linked to published reports of the study. You may choose for elements of the discussion not to be recorded. The information that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators. Your personal information including all collected artifacts, Zoom recordings, and researcher notes will be kept on a password protected computer and in a locked office. These items will be destroyed after three years. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty

**Terms of participation:**

**I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.**

**I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.**

**Participant Name:**

**Participant Signature:**

**Date:**

**Witness to Signature (Project Staff):**

**Date:**

*\*\*Please note that this document indicates that each participant who completed the study would receive a \$100 gift card. Per college and departmental processes following the awarding of the NACADA grant to support my research, the incentive was changed from a \$100 Amazon gift card to \$100. Incentives were distributed to participants through university processes and platforms*

## **Appendix D - Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and to be part of this study. As the project moves forward, I may periodically be contacting you regarding questions or clarifications related to some of the information you shared with me throughout this project. Overall, I am hoping to represent your words as accurately as possible. Because the goal of this study is to collect your reflections and insights, quotes may or may not be used in the final report of the findings; however, your identity will remain anonymous in the final written report. Please feel free to share openly in response to both interview and journal questions and prompts. Please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, and you are welcome to contact myself or the individuals listed on your consent form at any time if you have questions or concerns. Thank you for your participation! Your contributions are very valuable to this study.

# Appendix E - Introductory/Informational Meeting Protocol

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions and Interview Process:

### Part 1: Introductions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You have been provided with and signed the Informed Consent document which includes important contact information for me, the Principal Investigator overseeing this project, and the IRB office. The Informed Consent includes the purpose and benefits of this study, the research methods that will be used, anticipated risks or discomforts from participation in the study, the measures and extent of confidentiality of your personal information, and the terms of your participation. Thank you for reviewing this document and signing it which indicates our voluntary participation in this study.

I have provided you with the Project Summary which outlines the purpose and process of this research. Do you have any questions regarding either the Informed Consent or the Project Summary?

As a reminder, I will be requesting to audio and video record as well as transcribe the two, one-on-one sessions that we will participate in together through this research process. No personally identifying information will be linked to published reports of the study. You may choose for elements of the discussion not to be recorded. The information that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators. Your personal information including all collected artifacts, recordings, transcriptions, and researcher notes will be kept on a password protected computer and in my locked office. These items will be destroyed by me after three years.

Again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty.

### Part 2: Project Summary

1. Review Project Summary and answer any questions participant may have
2. Introductory Information for Participants – participants will be provided with chapters 1-3 from Sinek et al. (2017) book during the first session and will be asked to read this material prior to the second session. The goal of providing this introductory information is to provide a foundational understanding of the “Finding Your Why” exercise. Participants will also be asked, as explained in chapters 1 - 3, to gather a timeline of stories from their life that are meaningful to them. Participants will be asked to have this timeline completed prior to the second session.
  1. Chapter 1 – 3: “Finding Your Why”
3. Invite participants to develop timeline of stories before the next session.
4. Answer any lingering questions about the study or anything covered during the session.

## Appendix F - Session 2: One-on-One Session Protocol

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions and Interview Process:

#### Part 1: Introductions

1. Reminder of informed consent signed in first interview.
2. Remind participants steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and their participation is voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any time without penalty.

#### Part 2: “Finding Your Why” Exercise

I will lead participant through the “Finding Your Why” exercise during the second session. The participant and I will work together, through the exploration of their stories (explained in Chapters 1 thru 3) gathered prior to the second session with the goal of narrowing down to their individual “why” (purpose in life).

#### Part 3: Begin Reflection Process

Interview questions to be asked during this session. Information in parenthesis indicates the research question targeted with each interview question:

1. *How would you describe your purpose in life at this point? (RQ1)*
2. *Having gone through this exercise, can you share examples of how the reflection and discussion of a couple of your specific life experiences led to clarity about your purpose in life? (RQ1)*
3. *Can you give an example or two of any insights or realizations that emerged for you during the exercise that you had not considered before and how those emerged during this process? (RQ1)*
4. *What emotions or feelings did you experience during the exercise that helped you connect with your purpose? (RQ1)*
5. *How do you feel at this point having thought about your life experiences and reflected on your purpose in life? (RQ1)*

## Appendix G - Session 3: One-on-One Session Protocol

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions and Interview Process:

#### Part 1: Introductions

1. Reminder of informed consent signed in first interview.
2. Remind participants steps taken to ensure confidentiality, and their participation is voluntary, allowing them to withdraw at any time without penalty.

#### Part 2: Exploring the impact of the “Finding Your Why” purpose in life exercise

Participants will be asked the following questions to explore the impact of the process of bringing awareness to their purpose in life (“why”) and how this affects their work in academic advising:

Interview questions to be asked during this session. Information in parenthesis indicates the research question targeted with each interview question:

1. *How would you describe your purpose in life at this point, after having some additional time to reflect on it and on the exercise we did together? (RQ1)*
2. *In what ways has gaining an awareness of your purpose in life influenced how you think about your work in academic advising? (RQ2)*
3. *Will you please share any instances in the past where there was a subconscious alignment between your purpose in life and your work in academic advising? (RQ2)*
4. *How will you integrate your understanding of your purpose in life into your professional goals and aspirations moving forward? (RQ2)*
5. *What impact do you believe this integration will have on your overall fulfillment and effectiveness in your career? (RQ2)*
6. *To what extent have you noticed any shifts in your mindset or attitude towards your work in academic advising since becoming more aware of your purpose in life? (RQ2)*
7. *What specific challenges or conflicts might you face as you integrate your personal purpose into your professional life? (RQ3)*
8. *How do you plan to address or mitigate these challenges? (RQ3)*
9. *How do you envision balancing your personal sense of purpose with the expectations and constraints imposed by your institution? (RQ3)*
10. *What support or resources would be helpful for you to effectively pursue your purpose within your institution’s context? (RQ3)*
11. *How do you plan to seek or create these resources? (RQ3)*
12. *How do you intend to communicate and negotiate your aspirations related to your purpose with your colleagues and leaders within your institution while respecting the institution’s objectives and policies? (RQ3)*



## Appendix H - Sinek Permission Letter

**From:** Greer Cohen (Simon Sinek Inc) <[support@simonsinekinc.zendesk.com](mailto:support@simonsinekinc.zendesk.com)>

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 28, 2021 3:48 PM

**To:** Ashley Thomas <[ashleythomas@ksu.edu](mailto:ashleythomas@ksu.edu)>

**Subject:** Re: Hello, I am currently a doctoral student working on a PhD in Student Affairs in Higher Education. I was introduced to Mr. Sinek's work in 2018 and ...

**This email originated from outside of K-State.**

## - Please type your reply above this line -##



**Greer Cohen (Simon Sinek Inc)**

Jul 28, 2021, 4:47 PM EDT

Hi Ashley,

Thank you for following up.

You are welcome to utilize the Find Your Why exercise for your dissertation in this case, as long as it is properly cited.

Thank you again for being a part of the movement to inspire. It moves forward because of people like you!

Best,

Greer