USING NARRATIVE ADVISING THEORY IN INTERPRETING THE ROLES OF ADVISORS AND GUIDES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

GINA JOANNE KELLEY. Using Narrative Advising Theory in Interpreting the Roles of Advisors and Guides in African American Young Adult Literature
(Under the direction of DR. MARK WEST)

Telling stories has been a popular method of how humans connect interactively and serve a purpose to educate, entertain, influence, warn, and illustrate. In African-American young adult (YA) literature, there are guides that dish out valuable advice or stories of their own that carries a vital amount of weight and significantly impact the protagonists' life. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the role of guides in African-American YA literature and their impact on the protagonist as it correlates to the realistic roles of academic advisors and their influence on the students by utilizing narrative advising theory practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling can be a multifunctional tool that delivers knowledge, teaches morals and ethical values, explains cultural norms, reveals authentic diversity, illustrates concepts and ideas, and of course, provides entertainment. In an academic advising context, stories can be used as a non-threatening technique to present information to students in a multitude of ways. Telling stories can also build a pathway to understanding and to breaking down communication barriers between specialists (academic advisors) and novices (students) to form a bridge to foster a healthy relationship and learning experience. Advisors mostly tell stories to educate and/or teach students. Peter Hagan, the author of *The Power of Story: Narrative Theory in Academic Advising* (also noted as narrative advising theory) argues that some stories warn or caution students of the repercussions of their plan and imagine "consequences and educational outcomes of proposed course of action" (49). Some stories are told to develop critical-thinking skills and urge students to become self-directed learners and decision-makers. Some stories may not serve as a profound life or academic lesson at all and are only told to enrich connections. Overall, storytelling in the advising realm can be considered an art form with the intent to accomplish something fundamental to the student and aimed at making a difference in the students' world.

In most young adult (YA) literature, protagonists have role models. For this thesis, the role model characters will be considered as guides. Guides, who are mainly influential adults, may not steal the spotlight, but their small part in the story holds significant weight. The main character may carry the burden of the consequences of their actions, but it is the guide who helps the protagonist understand and cope with the adversities of everyday life and encourage self-love. Most guides have gone through similar experiences or have acquired specific knowledge to

be able to reassure the protagonists with wise guidance and support them in hopes they make the right decisions on their own.

Guides in YA literature assist with conveying the context of a story and are necessary to help the protagonists create order from chaos and advance on their individual journeys. Guides mainly provide support and try to steer the adolescents away from self-destruction or bad decisions by using a designed and purposeful narrative. Regardless of how small the guides' role may be, it is critical enough to warrant attention to the consequential impact they have on the protagonist and the story itself. Parallel to YA novels, in academia, the students are the protagonists and the advisors are the guides. A guide's role is adjacent to an academic advisor's role who is the person who recognizes a need or change in a student and a person to which students turn to for help with academic and non-academic related advice at the university.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) defines the concept of academic advising as a preset whereby "students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community" (Drake et al., 3). Academic advisors work with a plethora of diverse student populations spanning across religion, race, veteran status, and sexual orientation. This profession is prepared to deal with many different unique characteristics and academic quandaries on an intimate level every single day. Advisors are constantly gaining knowledge and creating strategies to support student learning from our own experiences as well as from others in the field of advising in academia. Advisors should always be aware of their biases and/or stereotypical assumptions and take steps to reduce or remove them from their practices. Academic advisors are in a position that students look to for help and guidance, and are ahead of the curve when it comes to the need of the

students' well-being. Advisors strive to make a powerful impact on students' decision-making abilities. To be an academic advisor, one must have patience, be flexible and creative, have a service-oriented attitude, and be able to learn quickly and disseminate detailed information.

Advisors have an imperative supporting role in students' lives and like most literary guides, they must be there for support only interfering to a certain extent. Many students rely heavily on an advisor's support, but some students rarely seek their assistance. There are times when an advisor notices that a student is in need when the student does not even recognize a need in themselves. Hagen takes a profound stance on the role advisors to have in education:

> Advisors are not there merely cheering students on from the sidelines, offering advice and encouragement every now and again. They are coaches, mentors, teammates. They are co-learners who lead, guide, and attract students to the life of the mind. They hold a stewardship role, a teacher's role. This role is not (or should not be) some low-impact role in the student's life. (59)

An advisor's moral compass is guided by compassion and care but is limited by institutional policy and procedures. An advisor can only go so far with assisting students without threatening their position due to overstepping boundaries or becoming too involved. This is the one stipulation that sets apart advisors from most of the guides in the novels because of the occupational constraints placed upon us. However, storytelling is the best concept we can use to get our message across in an effective manner for students.

As an academic advisor, I serve as a shepherding role to young adults on their educational matriculation and oftentimes their personal life goals. Every advising session is different; every student is unique. Unlike the well-laid plans of a story, there are many ways an advising session can be steered to accomplish the desired outcome. Advisors must use their

expertise and experiences to be flexible and open-minded about each situation, regardless if it is the first time hearing it, or the hundredth time to help co-construct each student's educational progress. Academic advising is non-preferentially administered by many disciplines, paradigms, models, and theories. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all advising technique and we are constantly learning new approaches and being receptive to new ideas and modes that will produce successful and positive results. Predominantly, advisors assist students with creating meaningful learning experiences, all the while encouraging achievement of education, occupational success, and attaining personal life purposes and goals while adhering to the university's educational mission (Yong-Jones et al. 8). In short, what has always worked well for me is storytelling. Telling stories is a way to provide students with a rational vision of their future that fuses in meaningful ways to their present lives. One storytelling theoretical technique I implement in advising sessions is called the narrative advising theory.

Narrative Theory in Academic Advising

There is not a specific practice or advising model that fits all students. However, there are multitudes of advising practices that each advisor has adapted to their own educational environment that works well for them and their student body. Regardless of what advising model is used, storytelling is always involved across the board. The concept of stories has become so popular that it has been created as an advising model, The Narrative Theory in Academic Advising. Storytelling is a way of narrating, creating, preserving, and modifying identities (Hagan, *Power* 5). Hagen, who is the creator of this advising theory, explains that "human life *is* a story and that identity is created through narrative" and that "people make sense of their lives by creating stories" (*Power* 6-7). As homo sapiens, how we were named regarding the ability to cognitively think and rationalize, Hagen says that a better term would be "called homo narrans,

'the storytelling animal'" (*Power* 7). The saying "put yourself in someone else's shoes" is a perfect example of how humans relate to circumstances they were not even privy to being involved with. Overall, stories fit into a larger purposeful narrative culture in the advising realm.

The beginning of a story can start with "once upon a time," but in the advising world a story usually begins with "Let me tell you about a previous student..." or "I know a student who..." Either introduction creates a rapport between advisor and student. The stories told in advising sessions contain "narrative probability (are coherently structured)" and have "narrative fidelity (resonates with other stories)" to create meaning and implied inference (Hagen, "Narrative Theory"). Every advisor listens, computes, and in return tells stories about themselves or other students that have been in similar situations to offer clarity for advising qualms. This theory can help advisors advise well beyond mere information giving while coherently facilitating and coaching the learning process.

An advising session is where discourse happens and verbal exchanges are transpired and a relationship is formed. If a student asks if a certain class would fulfill one of their major requirements, the advisor could simply answer with a no or a yes. End of discussion. This example would constitute as advising. Just as Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* implies to the Cheshire cat that she wanted to get "somewhere" and he responds with, "Oh, you're sure to do that...if you only walk long enough" (Carroll 67) and sends her out alone to make the excursion. Getting students to go "somewhere" simply is not sufficient or effective. Advisors, by design, are to walk alongside the students through their academic journey in hopes they gain a richer sense of knowledge than what they had when they started college. Asking follow-up questions to inquire the root of why a student chooses a certain course of action will more than likely create a story from the student. I appreciate how narrative theory has promoted advisors to

surpass the act of mere information giving (end-stop answers) and delve into a more inquisitive practice. By doing so, advisors are formulating a bond with students to let them know they can openly share their dreams, aspirations, goals, and fears so that we can advise them accordingly.

Once students share their stories with me, "I become a safe person with whom they can talk about the next challenge, because they know I will understand where it fits in the unfolding arc of their lives" (Newman 1). During an advising session, sometimes a story is told to bring home a point or deliver a different perspective which requires advisors "to call upon vast resources of experiences and imagination" (Hagen, *Power* 50). By doing so, advisors improve their power of interpretation by observing student's stories, infer their state of mind through their illocutionary language to whip up a narrative, or discuss a character with similar attributes to deliver a new perspective on the situation. Classic stories and popular tales help shape narratives for students. Advisors can, and do, use this to their advantage. Hagen explains in his article "Imagination and Interpretations: Academic Advising and the Humanities" that "students are like texts" and "advisors are like readers" and "both parties in the interaction are like co-authors of a new story" (14). Hagen goes on to say, "That new story is the story of the student's life and education, and although it hasn't been told before in the history of the world, aspects of it are as ancient as Athens" ("Imagination" 14). And from those narratives, new stories materialize from our recent culture and globalization that teach advisors how to conduct themselves in the face of adversity and uncertainty.

Hagen calls advisors and guides "Light Figures" and notes that these figures are posted throughout literature to "help the protagonist bring about a successful end to their quest, battle with the monster, their voyage and return, or their movement from rags to riches" (*Power* 71). Some examples of famous guides in literature are Merlin from *Camelot,* Albus Dumbledore from

the *Harry Potter* series, Gandalf in *The Lord of The Rings*, The Good Witch of the North from *The Wizard of Oz,* and Athena from *The Odyssey*. These stories would not have been complete if they were not for the embodiment of these traditional guiding roles. Similar to the guides in literature, advisors are a "benign androgynous power operating on behalf of the student and sometimes without the student's knowledge or comprehension" (Hagen, *Power* 72). Academic advisors "support students working through challenges and encourage them to pause and engage with the provocative moments they encounter" (Drake et al. 134-5). Typically, advisors and guides both strive to reduce external distractions or pressures (such as family, societal expectations, peers, and cultural impressions) so that students can find their voices and make decisions on what works best for them on their academic journeys.

The logistics of a story have several different layers of requirements for narratives. Hagen generalizes that stories consist of the author (real and implied) and audience (real and implied) (*Power* 15). The style is how the story is delivered that contains a point of view, characterization, imagery and symbols, and diction or language usage. Each story also has a theme that is understood through the art of interpretation — hermeneutics. Hagen addresses that "hermeneutics is a field within philosophy that is concerned with interpretation, the determination of the meaning of a text or an utterance, including those spoken in advising interactions" (*Power* 35-6). Lastly, the plot is heavily influenced by the context, style, and theme. When a student explains an issue about their academics or personal life, Hagen postulates that students' stories usually coincide with Christopher Booker's Seven Plot Types which are the following: "Overcoming the Monster," "Rags to Riches," "The Quest," "Voyage and Return," "Comedy," "Tragedy," and "Rebirth") (Hagan, *Power* 63-5). It is heuristic to assess how familiar narratives help us realize different plot elements during the telling of a story from a student's

point of view. Each plot explains a common-type student situation to better understand the dilemma.

The "Overcoming the Monster (Battle; thrilling escape from death; kingdom restored)" (Hagen, *Power* 63) plot type uses the literary example of the *Hunger Games* with the hypothetical situation of a student who has dropped the same class twice and is currently failing the third time around. The reason that the student is failing is not because of incapability. External circumstances may have hindered their ability, but they are determined to succeed. Overall, the Monster can be internal and external circumstances that hinder students' potentiality.

The "Rags to Riches (A central crisis [that] moves protagonist to maturity)" (Hagan, *Power* 63) plot is when a student comes from a destitute socioeconomic background and they want to major in Computer Science or Pre-Med to earn an expansive income after college. Their self-worth is tied to their academic success. This situation is compared to *Cinderella*, who wanted to escape her destitute life for something greater.

"The Quest (Protagonist sets out on journey with companions; overcomes obstacles; attains goal; finds meaning)" (Hagen, *Power* 64) plot is compared to *Lord of the Rings*. It is connected to students who are searching for fulfillment by choosing an academic path that holds a deeper meaning in their lives. Whether their parents were doctors, lawyers, professors, etc., the students have been exposed to those fields, therefore, adopting a passion for a set goal.

Next, the "Voyage and Return (The protagonist lands in a realm where the normal laws do not apply and ultimately returns as a changed person)" (Hagen, *Power* 64) plot type gives an example of a Native American student that has completed their bachelor's degree and they return home to the reservation and their family with newfound knowledge and expertise. This particular

situation is compared to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and how she is different and more capable of making informed decisions after her journey underground.

The "Comedy (plagued by misunderstandings and dark forces, the protagonist is finally redeemed)" (Hagen, *Power* 64) plot is adjacent to the novel *Emma*, by Jane Austin. This plot describes ambitious students who wish to major in two degrees and possibly an intense minor. Despite having struggled through their academic terms with conflicting classes, large class loads, other advisors or faculty who may dismiss their academic plans, they will later graduate with all degrees and the minor. Also, they have been accepted into their graduate program of choice.

The "Tragedy (The flawed protagonist is destroyed by their own blindness)" (Hagen, *Power* 65) plot connects with the literature of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They describe this student's story as someone who gets distracted from their academic pursuits and is more involved in social activities than their education or responsibilities. Their grades suffer and graduating becomes a farfetched possibility. Unfortunately, not all stories end with a positive outcome.

Finally, the "Rebirth (The protagonist is not only redeemed, but transformed)" (Hagen, *Power* 65) plot is compared to *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. The example that Hagen gives is a returning veteran student who suffers from PTSD and has never attended college before. Their college experience has transformed them to see the world from different points of view and they graduate as a new and improved version of themselves.

All of these plot types are encountered by advisors and students alike at certain points during their matriculation. The circumstances may be different, but the same storylines appear, and the ending of the tale ultimately depends on the students' choices. Regardless of how many times a familiar storyline is told, advisors must adopt each situation with humility, imagination,

and care. As Hagen explains, “the ideological lenses of the humanities can serve us well in advising” and that “[stories are] an inescapable consequence of being human” (“Imagination and Interpretation” 17, 20). Advisors are sometimes trusted by students with sensitive and extremely personal information. It’s what we do with that information that can result in a powerful teaching moment. Like guides, advisors try to construct a narrative that sympathetically directs students on a path of success safely and effectively. For example, Hagan delves into the importance of a master narrative:

> There is a master narrative that supplements most of the stories advisors encounter: Master narratives can be thought of as background ideologies that might or might not be codified. In the present day, we can think of The American Dream as such a master narrative. It is not written down anywhere, but most Americans have a general sense of what it is. Master narratives do not have to be true or right-often they are not-but they strongly influence what we accept as true or right and how we behave. (*Power* 87)

Advisors draw their master narratives from their personal life experiences to integrate purpose in their messages to students. Many advisors, like myself, have an advising philosophy (See appendix). An advising philosophy expresses a specific personal and professional self-proclaimed code of honor. Hagen goes on to explain that “the philosophy of higher education held by the advisor is a stance, an ideology, a worldview-and not a mere approach-that will always exert its influence in the background of the discussions between the student and the advisor” (90). Using my advising philosophy along with YA literature as a resource to cultivate advising practices should further nourish the experience.

There is an important aspect of the narrative advising theory that is used in advising interactions and that is the Theory of Mind. Theory of Mind is a concept used in narrative theory

by imagining what students are thinking, or better yet, putting yourself in their situation (Hagen, *Power* 125). It is how advisors think about students' minds and how we make sense of their stories and the stories we choose to tell them. Theory of Mind is not only used in real-life advising situations, but also within literary fiction. According to neuroscientists, reading literary fiction strengthens Theory of Mind by the simple fact of making "complex, multi-layered attributions about the characters" (Hagen, *Power* 128). Hagen strongly implies that "literary fiction helps us not only to escape from reality, but rather to understand it better" (*Power* 129). Therefore, imagining what the student is truly going through can give us a softer perspective of their situation and how to advise accordingly.

For advisors, there are four learning outcomes for using the narrative advising theory. First, advisors must become aware of the power of the story that is being told. Second, advisors must be aware of prejudgments and biases (which are unavoidable) during advising meetings. It is not that advisors must be void of prejudgments and biases, "it is what we do with them that matters" (Hagen, *Power* 117). Third, advisors must recognize that they can heavily influence students and what is said determines the success or failure of a students' quest for meaning. Last, advisors must always put forth a healthy skepticism towards the interactions with the students with a value on careful interpretation.

There is power of interpretation in communication. For example, "advisors need to listen not only to *what* the student is saying, but also *how* it is being said" (Hagen, *Power* 136). An advisor should be able to understand the nature of interpretation, the roles of how language is used and its history, and should be comfortable with ambiguity. The verbal and non-verbal cues given by a student provide critical context to the story that needs to be told. Linguistic meaning versus speaker intention can be misconstrued, but with experience in the field, it is easier to

dismantle. Therefore, eliminating the locutionary act from the entire speech act will put more emphasis on the true meaning of what is said. Normally, advisors (and guides) have the skill to read between the lines, automatically compute and study what is said and the meaning or intent behind what is said to develop a purpose and translate that purpose in a course of action for the students' benefit. Dissecting implied meanings through utterances can get messy. Humans are already complex individuals. Although these theories are interesting and they explain certain contexts of how language and stories are instruments of communication, there will never be a cookie-cutter formula designed for all humans to understand why we say what we say, how we say it, or what we mean by saying it even in our stories.

Most of the time, I resort to humorous stories in advising sessions. Using humor is a way of downplaying the intensity of the discourse or meaning while also creating strong ideologies with its inference. Also, persuasive language such as the use of metaphors, repetition, and rhetorical questioning are prime methods used by advisors to sway the outcome in the best interest of the student. Communication via verbal discourse goes beyond storytelling which is hard to depict in literature unless it is spelled out for the reader to pick up on. To support a student is to continuously analyze non-verbal cues, reading between the lines, and it is all about timing. Timing may be imperative when guiding a student towards a positive outcome, but it is the students who have full authority over their decisions. Drake et al. reiterate this by stating that "students [must] take responsibility for executing their [academic and life] plans" (87). Overall, advisors may serve as a reader, listener, and teacher in regards to storytelling and supporting the student's well-being, their quest for meaning, and how they will write their own stories.

The structure of the African American YA novels used in this study takes on various forms such as different points of view and different eras. These novels are genuinely focused on

protagonists who are teenagers dealing with larger-than-life situations that no adolescent should have to endure. Each of the protagonists has a guide, usually an adult, that is there witnessing the difficulties these adolescents are facing and the fast transitions they are experiencing having to be responsible for more than just themselves and the community they live in. Predominantly, their situations can be realistic to what many college students may face, and I have encountered similar instances with students to highlight and illustrate in detail with each novel. Overall, this thesis is intended to demonstrate the similarities between academic advisors who are (or have been) influenced by narrative advising theory to the guides portrayed in the African American YA novels and how they both administer a supportive environment and give perceptive guidance for their students and adolescents.

The following African American YA novels used in this thesis are: *The Planet of Junior Brown* by Virginia Hamilton, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* by Alice Childress, and *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* by David Barclay Moore. I will use these three novels to depict how the guides narratively construct the story to help the young protagonists understand and cope with the difficulties in life and the spaces that allow them to do so. The novels are intended to serve as a mediator of diverse views, morals, and values which makes it an interesting subject matter for advising elements. By using African American YA literature as a pedagogical tool for broadening and expanding relevant examples, the messages in the stories reveal a multifaceted nature to foster understanding for a wide range of diverse student populations.

FINDING TWO GUIDES AND A SAFE SPACE IN *THE PLANET OF JUNIOR BROWN*

The Planet of Junior Brown, written by Virginia Hamilton, is a story set in New York City about two teenage African American boys and their internal and external struggles of survival. Junior is a naive, obese musical prodigy prone to having delusions and Buddy is a homeless street-savvy teenager who both ditch their 8th-grade classes by spending time in a hidden basement at the school with the teacher-turned-janitor, Mr. Pool. Junior is controlled by his domineering mother (who suppresses his musical talents), teased by others because of his weight, and having a hard time fitting in school and society. Buddy purposefully makes himself scarce, and his stealth-like thinking keeps him from being noticed at all. Junior unknowingly needs Buddy's wits as they both wish to slink out of society's eye for their own reasons.

Unfortunately, good things must come to an end. When their hideaway basement is almost discovered by another, Junior's mental health becomes more erratic causing Buddy to utilize as many resources as possible to ensure Junior's safety and well-being with the help of Mr. Pool. This is a story of heroics and survival and the interdependence of humanity. There are two guides identified in this novel, both Mr. Pool and Buddy Clark. Both guides are huge influences in Junior's life as well as each other's. These two guides share a likeness to academic advisors by their radical consideration and acts of kindness for the well-being of others.

The traditional adult guide and self-appointed guardian of the boys in the story is Mr. Pool. Mr. Pool's involvement with the teenage boys first began with Buddy Clark. He discovers Buddy "looking like any half-wild alley cat" (Hamilton 12) living at the school and coming out at night when the place was empty. Buddy, oblivious to Mr. Pool's acknowledgment, solves advanced math problems on the chalkboard just to pass the time. Mr. Pool "had discovered that Buddy could get through two or three problems difficult even for a college student" (Hamilton

12). Knowing Buddy isn't the typical runaway truant, Mr. Pool decides to take over a forgotten basement room and turn it into a hidden spot "from where he might help and teach the boy" (Hamilton 12) and provide a safer place to hide. Mr. Pool's academic expertise is mathematics and astronomy; therefore, he could educate Buddy at his own pace. At first, Buddy was skeptical of adults as any homeless kid should be. Eventually, when he decides to give Mr. Pool a chance, he brings Junior Brown with him to the hidden room. Mr. Pool had noticed Junior a year earlier playing the piano in the music room admiring his talent and described him as "so fat, so awful to look at...the school, like Mr. Pool had left him alone" (Hamilton 12). Mr. Pool sensed the apprehension of trust between himself and the boys, and although he meant no harm, he made sure he was careful of his behavior around them. He is conscious as to not pressure the boys but to let them know that he is willing to help should they need him. Mr. Pool "kept his distance and was as cautious as any teacher ought to be" (Hamilton 13). This is typical during a first advising appointment with students. Trust is earned and not given on both ends. Mostly the conversational narratives are normally geared toward polite conversations until students feel comfortable sharing deeper narratives. The same concept applies to Mr. Pool and the boys.

After spending ample time together in the basement getting to know and trust one another while building a 10-planet solar system, Mr. Pool notices Buddy's "devotion to Junior Brown" and "sensed a whole new being lying in wait within the boy" (Hamilton 13). Here is where Mr. Pool saw something in Buddy that is worth nurturing for the good of humankind. Mr. Pool overhears a conversation where Junior insists Buddy come with him to his piano lessons. Smiling to himself, "it had taken Junior Brown all this time to admit to himself that he needed Buddy Clark, that he could go no further with something he had to do without big Buddy helping him. Maybe that's a beginning, Mr. Pool thought" (Hamilton 112-3). This is an example of how

advisors recognize a need in students when most of the time the students do not recognize a need themselves by using "imagination and interpretation" (Hagen, "Imagination" 14) in the story's context.

The basement is a safe environment where both Junior and Buddy need to free themselves from the constraints of their family (or lack thereof) and the stresses society has forced upon them. Junior needs to escape the stress of his nagging mother and from society because he is ashamed of his weight. The room provides him comfort away from prying eyes. Buddy needs a safe and warm place to sleep between his job at the newsstand, and his obligation to help and feed other homeless children in the city. For Mr. Pool, the basement is his lounge to teach the boys and a hideaway from the school administrator's demands of janitorial responsibilities during the daytime hours. However, the space for Mr. Pool is more than a refuge from the world or to conceal or teach the boys. Although he taught them how the solar system works, and how the newest addition of the Junior Brown planet would fit into it, he cultivated something much more valuable—an undeniable and unbreakable friendship among the three of them. The solar system is a metaphor for the matter that holds their friendships together. When their private space is in danger of being discovered, Mr. Pool worries about what will happen to the solar system and if he could not find another space to build it, that Junior and Buddy might take "to the streets" (Hamilton 158) instead. What Mr. Pool means by this is that the boys may turn to unfavorable methods to cope with life's adversities such as drugs, thievery, or enlist in dangerous gang activity on the tough streets of New York City. Storytelling from Mr. Pool comes in the form of the solar system contraption rather than many verbal stories. The wheels and pulleys represent the constant revolving life force. The creation of a tenth planet provides the

inclusion of a new world signifying interdependent friendships manufactured between the three characters.

Mr. Pool's compassion for Junior's and Buddy's welfare is tied into self-appointed responsibility for the boys. At one point, Buddy admits that "if he could have a father, he would have only this man" (Hamilton 161). Mr. Pool is not much of a talker, but rather a significant figurehead who enables the boys to work things out for themselves without being meddlesome. He provides the space and the safety of a trusting adult that the boys needed to survive the long days hiding. Like advisors eliminating any judgments or biases towards students, Mr. Pool does not condemn, coerce, convince, or pressure the boys in any way. His narratives are mostly of small short sentences to the boys where some advice carried more weight than others. For example, when Buddy witnesses the altercation at Ms. Peeb's place with the fake relative, he is pretty shaken up. Mr. Pool asks about what happened, and then when Buddy had a hard time explaining, he responds, "You take it easy...you don't have to talk anymore" (Hamilton 185). Not necessarily dismissing Buddy's account, but addressing that he is empathetic to Buddy's struggles and that he doesn't have to explain any further. Mr. Pool uses Buddy's scattered narrative to gather enough information to make sense of the situation by noting "Through Buddy's confused and disconnected sentences, Mr. Pool pieced together the boy's story...It brought Mr. Pool to his senses. Everything Buddy had told him came together in that one picture of a thing unseen going down in darkness to a place unknown" (Hamilton 190-91, 192). This is an example of how advisors read between the lines and use inference to surmise students' stories. He could be utilizing the Theory of Mind concept to understand and relate to Buddy's experience. Hagen explains that using the Theory of Mind to "infer their state of mind, their

thoughts, based on what we can observe" (*Power* 131) is an essential talent that advisors can tap into to provide a course of action from the narrative.

There is a pivotal point in the story where Mr. Pool offers serious yet unsolicited advice when he suggests that Junior receive professional help and Buddy disagrees:

> "And do they hurt anyone? Buddy said. "No, man! They don't hurt *nobody*."
>
> "They hurt themselves," Mr. Pool told him. "Don't you understand? Junior sees this person, this man, and that's serious. No," Mr. Pool said. "We have to get him some help but maybe first we can buy him some time."
>
> "Time?" Buddy said. He looked anxiously at Mr. Pool.
>
> "He might still need a hospital," Mr. Pool said, "but maybe not right away. Because putting him in there right away would be like telling him nobody cares about him. He has to have time to know there's people who care. We care. We want to see he gets well." (Hamilton 188)

Likewise, advisors should know when students may need professional assistance such as psychological counseling services that they cannot provide. It is expected that academic advisors should never dismiss or diagnose any student's mental illness even if they may recognize certain symptoms. Hagen explains that "it would be morally wrong of us advisors to disregard our students' concerns on the basis that we know more than they do" (*Power* 40). Advisors are to embrace the students' stories and engage in healthy dialogue on the best course of action that best benefits the student. Mr. Pool is firmly aware of this, too, because there is only so much he is qualified to do in his role as a guide, which he expressed to Buddy in his narrative. Overall, a guide like Mr. Pool is there to provide the means and assistance from the outside world due to his adultship and experiences, unlike Buddy who does not possess those resources yet.

Buddy's guiding role differentiates between his involvement with Junior and the homeless children. He is the biggest influence on Junior Brown and he can reveal his true self and identity around both him and Mr. Pool. To the nexus of underground homeless kids he provides for, he is known by an alias, Tomorrow Billy, to hide his true identity. Both of Buddy's worlds (or so-called planets) are kept separate from the other for obvious reasons—fear of discovery. He harbors the massive secret of his planet for as long as possible and it is soon revealed at the end of the novel where eventually both of Buddy's worlds/planets collide. To keep up the charade, Buddy's narratives fluctuate significantly when he speaks with either Mr. Pool, Junior, or the underground boys

When Buddy converses with Mr. Pool, his narratives are more or less of a vulnerable and inquisitive nature out of respect and also as an equal partner. When Buddy speaks to Junior, he narrates the role of protector. He constantly inquires about Junior's welfare and attempts to encourage him when he acknowledges that Junior is beating himself up about his weight or subdued by his mother's nagging words. At times, this frustrates Junior, but Buddy never gives up on him. An example of Buddy's way of encouraging Junior is when he says, "You worry about everything but what you need to worry about...I'm telling you, you ought to see yourself on Broadway" (Hamilton 39). Buddy wishes to maximize Junior's potential in hopes that Junior will eventually understand his worth and value. Similarly, advisors mock sample narratives like Buddy's to encourage students to pursue their dreams and aspirations and to believe in themselves, and promote self-efficacy.

Buddy's Tomorrow Billy vernacular towards the homeless boys takes on a strong, definitive tone and his stories are frothed with ethical lessons and moral reasoning. He takes it upon himself to teach the younger homeless boys humility and honesty, and stresses the

importance of education to keep them from a life of regrettable actions. Even though he is a teenager, he assumes the role of a grownup. The refugees are mindful of Tomorrow Billy's stories. To them, he is the mature adult, the veteran of the streets, the wise one. The homeless boys depend heavily on Buddy/Tomorrow Billy for survival. Not only to secure shelter or bring food but for his logical and perceptive advice through his stories. Buddy himself has been raised by a so-called Tomorrow Billy and it took him "three years to learn all that the bigger boy on his planet could teach him" (Hamilton 73). As always "the younger one would grow up better able to take care of himself than the older one had been" (Hamilton 76). Buddy's instructional narrative for survival is seen as pure and genuine guide advice:

> Nightman would naturally go to the sections of town where there were black people. That was all right so long as he stayed out of bars, so long as he kept himself moving. Don't stand on street corners, Buddy told him. The best place to rest was in playgrounds but only at lunchtime and after three o'clock...he couldn't go to school until he was safe being on his own. Because until he could get by, he would be nervous. He'd want to go home with the first teacher who was nice to him...He might tell some kid he had to sleep in a broken-down building. No, Nightman had to get behind living for himself; and when he could do that, he would have no trouble in school or anywhere else" (Hamilton 79-80)

Buddy's narrative is spoken from true experience. He has taken on more burdens and responsibilities than a 15-year-old boy should have to endure. He not only teaches the homeless kids how to seize opportunities for survival, but he also hopes to instill certain righteous behavioral traits in them. Just because they have no parental guidance dictating their every move, Tomorrow Billy makes it clear that they cannot run amok or break the law. To be able to live on his planet, they must strive to be upstanding and law-abiding citizens and always strive to do the

right thing. In the world of advising, advisors can spew story after story of different scenarios regarding previous students' bad or good choices in hopes the student will comprehend the right path for themselves. In the end, it is ultimately the students' responsibility to uphold an ethical and moral code to society, the school, and as global citizens.

All of the homeless boys on the secret planet have aliases. Buddy goes by Tomorrow Billy, Russell has changed his name to Franklin, and the youngest runaway declared himself, Nightman Black. Buddy tells the boys "It's better you give up the name you were born with...because just having a last name the same as the mama or aunt or daddy you once knew reminds you of them. And remembering is going to make you feel pretty bad sometimes" (Hamilton 75). At home, students may have had a guardian or parents who they seek advice from in the comfort of a familiar environment. In college, most students are away from home for the first time and they are overwhelmed by the new atmosphere and new experiences, and new expectations surrounding them. Basically, they are strangers in a strange land. Most of the time students are vulnerable and open to receiving assistance and require guidance to help them navigate the collegiate life, while some are not. While discovering their academic interests, learning to manage their time and homework, they are shaping their own unique collegiate identity by subconsciously creating a story of their education.

Buddy trusts his intuition more than his logical mind when it comes to teaching the boys a valuable lesson in humility. As Hagen points out, "this is how we must view narrative in advising, as a companion and counterpart to logic, to help us make sense of those times when logic might not tell the whole story, to help us find meaning, to save us from jumping to conclusions" (*Power* 62). For example, in the basement of an abandoned building, Buddy suggests Nightman follow Franklin for a few days to learn the ropes of the neighborhood, what

to do, and what not to do. Franklin's flat and "angry" retort was a telltale sign that he was hiding something from Buddy because "He'd had a feeling about Franklin and had begun questioning the boy. Now all his knowledge of the street and its people came together in certainty" (Hamilton 80). After a brief altercation, Buddy discovers many stolen items on Franklin's person, specifically a wallet with seventy-five dollars in cash. What Buddy does next, surprises the boys. Following a stern reprimand on Franklin and how thievery will not be tolerated, Buddy announces that he will mail the wallet back to its rightful owner when he finds an envelope and stamps. The reason Buddy does this is that "the safety of the planets depended on the trust the boys had in their Tomorrow Billys" (Hamilton 84). Franklin did not trust Tomorrow Billy "because he was untrustworthy himself" (Hamilton 84), but it is important that Buddy lead by example and uphold moral and social integrity because of the responsibility he has to the runaway kids as their guide.

Buddy uses a special technique to teach the kids a lesson by including the youngest, Nightman, in the decision-making process. Hagen illustrates that "states of mind are not always overtly stated in literary fiction...we must infer [Buddy's] more guarded thoughts and motivations" for including young Nightman (*Power* 131). Nonetheless, from the stolen wallet, Buddy allotted Franklin and Nightman five dollars to get through the week and he kept twenty dollars to feed and help other runaway kids. Buddy asks Nightman if he should return the twenty dollars to the wallet. Nightman says no and gives the five dollars back to Buddy so he can use the whole twenty-five dollars for the other homeless kids. Nightman says, "I want to believe" that Buddy will do the right thing with the cash and Buddy contemplates "how come one boy was so different from another when they both hurt the same" (Hamilton 86). The safe environment that Buddy is striving to uphold and maintain is adjacent to the advising

environment that is designed to promote inclusivity for all types of students and their stories. The way that Buddy teaches the lesson is similar to how advisors must "call attention to discrepancies and inconsistencies between words and behaviors, or behaviors, values, and goals demonstrated by the advisee. Advisors should confront in a concise, strong, and nonjudgmental tone of voice" (Drake et al. 74). In coaching students through issues, advisors hope that students will be able to demonstrate a much richer understanding by developing realistic ways they solve problems and make decisions to include a global dynamic other than for personal gain. However, there are times when students' decisions are devalued by the persuasion of others, particularly parents.

For instance, Junior's mother, Junella Brown, is an example of what advisors call helicopter parents because of their vigorous interference in their children's lives. Many times in advising sessions, students gravitate towards a certain major "because of parental pressure" (Newman 1). Oftentimes, the parents are paying the tuition, therefore students feel trapped and miserable in a field of study they do not like only to please their parents. To illustrate, Junella had removed all of the "wires meant to vibrate to make sound" (Hamilton 115) from Junior's piano. Buddy "felt empty of himself and outraged at the damage done to Junior" and by taking the sound away, he pondered "how could she do that to her own son" (Hamilton 115). Furthermore, not only does Junior like to play the piano he also loves to draw and paint. His mother allows him to have art supplies until she finds one of his unusual paintings. Appalled and unable to appreciate his artistic nature, she blames his friend and confidant Buddy. She convinces herself if Buddy is out of the picture, her Junior could get "back to reality" (Hamilton 164). Even Mr. Pool is not pleased with how Junior's mother treats her son because she is very "self-centered" (Hamilton 113). Regardless, "it upset [Mr. Pool] to know she would condemn

Junior's friendship with Buddy simply because Buddy looked tough" (Hamilton 113) or not of their social standing. Shocked that the painting reveals that Junior has been in different parts of the city because he painted "robbers, drunkards-people hurting one another" (Hamilton 164), she dumps the painting "down the incinerator with the rest of her garbage. 'That's that,' she said from the rocker. 'I'll never give him canvas again as long as I live'" (Hamilton 165). In her thoughts, Junella narrated a pseudo-conversation with Junior for her reasoning of destroying his artwork, "You can never have materials for painting, Junior, until you can demonstrate to me you will occupy your mind with thoughts proper and normal for your age group" (Hamilton 166). Instead of discussing the painting with Junior to get an explanation, she jumps to conclusions and forgoes a possible bonding experience with her son to emphasize predictability and control.

Junior is fully aware that his mother would not appreciate or understand his art just as some students confide in advisors how they cannot talk to their parents about their true talents and academic passions in fear of being rejected or worse, scolded or defunded. It is not the advisor's place to convince parents their students should be on one academic path rather than the one that was chosen for them. On the other hand, it is an advisor's responsibility to understand how "different large-scale cultural narratives hold sway...where it may be perfectly normal and desirable to choose a major in accordance with one's parents' wishes" (Hagen, *Power,* 12). On the other hand, there are tricks to the trade. Hagen indicates that "if the narrative indicates something less than enthusiasm for the major being pursued, and if the available data indicate that it is being pursued in a lackluster way, then the advisor attuned to narrative knows that is the time to take a risk and broach the subject of changing majors" (*Power* 47). At the end of the day, the advisor can at least persuade the student to consider a minor or double major in their desired subject to fulfill the student's quest for knowledge while simultaneously appeasing their parents.

Students are seeking a major that compliments their skills and abilities, goals and aspirations, just like how Junior Brown is searching for his own planet to call home where he can be accepted for who he is and where his talent can be nourished. Hearing stories about others who may have set off on their paths, such as Buddy or Junior has, could affirm students' own power and possibly unearth ways to energize, motivate, and capitalize on their academic and life passions as the best means for addressing and overcoming opposition. When discussing this novel in an advising session, the students may better understand Buddy's and Junior's journeys by associating them with some common narrative plot types.

The plot types from narrative advising theory that best accompany this novel involve both Overcoming the Monster and The Quest. Junior's storyline aligns with Overcoming the Monster. This plot is the oldest of them all where the hero is to confront and battle the monster through insurmountable odds to slay it and end the suffering (Hagen, *Power* 66). Junior's monsters are abstract (his low self-esteem, obesity, and his mental illness), and his mother who "reache[s] into Junior's mind and trie[s] to take it over" (Hamilton 30) as well as use "that asthma of hers to keep Junior as close to home as she can" (Hamilton 25). He is constantly putting himself down and his true talents are being snuffed out by his mother's claim to know what is best for him. He needs acceptance and an outlet to nourish his musical talents. Without the help of Buddy and Mr. Pool, Junior would still be trapped as his mother's pseudo caretaker, fighting an antagonistic force while suffering in silence. Junior's story can be a lesson on how to reach out for help, especially if one feels lost or overwhelmed. On the advising side of things, the monster for students could be finals week, a massive paper, or parental pressures.

The Quest plot type aligns most with Buddy's journey. In this plot, the hero receives a call for their help, leaves home aligning with sidekicks or guides that help him achieve his goals.

Buddy overcomes many obstacles such as surviving to live on his own, protecting Junior, helping Mr. Pool relocate the solar system, and providing shelter and food for runaway teenage kids. Advisors can use Buddy's strong altruistic nature as a lesson to explain how to manage independence, countless critical decisions, and to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. As Buddy tries to survive the streets, students are trying to survive college.

To summarize, Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* addresses homelessness, mental illness, obesity, familial obligations, and social pressures. The main takeaway of this story is about the importance of love and compassion as well as helping others and being there for people even in the toughest of times. These are examples of how guides in the literature can translate into narratives while advising to help students that may be experiencing comparable situations to these trials and tribulations. The slew of relatable examples available in this text can be a tool used by advisors for related scenarios. As a veteran advisor, I share the same qualities such as Mr. Pool's caring demeanor and Buddy's altruistic nature that I can always refer to in future advising sessions that will deepen my repertoire of circumstances and solutions to apply to my own narratives.

RESISTING GUIDES IN *A HERO AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A SANDWICH*

A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich by Alice Childress is set in Harlem New York in the 1970s. This story follows several characters' accounts of the world around them and their perspectives of thirteen-year-old Benjie's struggles with narcotics. Unfortunately, Benjie is addicted to drugs, predominantly heroin. The main guide in this book is a man named Butler Craig. Butler is romantically involved with Benjie's mom, Sweets. Butler tries to maintain the complicated relationship with Benjie throughout the novel by forgiving him countless times even after Benjie's willful disobedience disrupts his relationship with Sweets. In the end, Butler is left waiting in the cold streets of Harlem at the addictions center for Benjie. Readers never truly know if he shows up or not. The massive cliffhanger at the end of the novel is left open-ended to suggest different possible scenarios. For this paper, I am going to assume that Benjie does not show up to the meeting. This book relates to the topic being discussed throughout the thesis because, in this instance, *Hero* reinforces the reality that advisors are not always successful in their endeavors.

Butler's stories are aspirational and integrate purpose. He delivers various narratives to Benjie in the hope that something good will sink into the adolescent's mind. At times he is thoughtful and considerate, giving profound advice, and other times he takes risks and says exactly what is in his heart, whether Benjie wants to believe it or not. He instructs Benjie to cultivate various ways of thinking and to be self-aware of how his actions are not only hurting himself but those around him. Butler provides Benjie with realistic methods to solve problems through his fair-minded ways of championing for his well-being.

Not only is Butler an influence on Benjie, other characters see the good in Butler, too. For example, Jimmy-Lee Powell, Benjie's friend, admits that Benjie has it made by having "a

stepfather who's bringin in a color TV and hi-fi record player and all kinda good things people need. True, Mr. Butler Craig gives him talkins to bout don't do this and don't do that, damn, the man titled to say somethin" (Childress 25). The neighbor, Miss Emma Dudley, even prays to "get a man like this Butler" (Childress 78) in her life. But that isn't enough for Benjie because he is "steady complainin bout having a step [father] and a broken home" (Childress 25). Benjie is jealous of Butler because he sways his mother's attention away from him. Even Butler recognizes Benjie's jealous tendencies by noting the "boy so damn jealous and mean, he made up his mind not to like me the first time we met" (Childress 105).

Butler may be the true guide of the story with the heaviest influence on Benjie, but two teachers, Nigeria Greene and Bernard Cohen are the ones who first notice Benjie's despondent attitude and lackadaisical mannerisms in class. Neither teacher wants the responsibility of getting deeply involved with Benjie's situation like Butler has. Greene recognizes that Benjie looks "stoned" (Childress 48) and notices needle marks in his arm and that he should be turned in. Cohen refuses to interfere because he does not want to stir up trouble with the parents or the school, and notes that if he does, the kid will feel "betrayed" (Childress 48). Better betrayal than death, Greene points out, and both teachers bring him to the principal's office to notify his mother.

I can relate to Greene and Cohen, myself being in an academic position tangled in policies and procedures when it comes to reporting students for misconduct or other serious incidents. There have been a few instances when I filled out a Care and Concern document to report an incident involving a student's erratic or dangerous behavior, misconduct, or other suspicious activity. The report goes to the Dean of Students' office and then that office reaches out to the student to inquire about the incident and offer support services in case of need. After I

have reported a student, especially when they have admitted something to me in confidence, a twinge of betrayal nestles in my stomach. However, I remain confident that I took the correct action for the right reasons. Just like Greene and Cohen did for Benjie regardless of his defiant attitude.

After the reporting of Benjie's drug use reached his school's administration and his mother, he was placed in Harlem Hospital for a short rehabilitation stint. This gives Benjie time to think about his choices and wallow in his pride. He claims that he can stop at any time and he will not rat out his dealers, nor does he blame anyone for his addiction—not even himself. He recalls the first time he tried heroin and how he expected to feel something, but he felt "nothin, no pain" (Childress 70). His excuses resort to self-pity. This is where the tragedy of the plot comes to play. He simply cannot see, or chooses not to see, that other people truly care for him and want to see him succeed. At one point, Benjie complains:

> Guess I'm in this sad world all by myself. Nobody care, why should they if your own daddy run off? They don't mean no harm, they can't help it. Trouble is this, too many folks expeck other folks to be carin bout them when it ain't no-way possible. So I'm layin here learnin how to expeck nothin. (Childress 73)

He has convinced himself that "God [is] somewhere else" (Childress 75). Benjie also somehow feels responsible for his real father leaving the family and is upset that Butler is trying to play a fathering role. Eventually, Benjie's constant relapses and irresponsibility cause Butler and his mother to break up. Therefore, Benjie escapes into the space of his own mind to feel nothing. By feeling nothing, he is safe and free of responsibility and avoids the consequences. Regrettably for Benjie, the addictive mind can be a dangerous place to retreat to. This literary scenario highlights

antagonistic plots that mirror some students' reality that is sometimes revealed in harrowing advising sessions.

For example, not all advising sessions are gratifying or productive. For instance, serious confessional stories from students about any sort of abuse or addiction (social media addiction, drug abuse, domestic violence, etc.) are an immediate cause to reach out for campus assistance, such as counseling services or university police to inquire what can be done to help the student. This is protocol especially if the student is a threat to themselves or others or in imminent danger. When a story goes beyond the academic realm and deep into the student's personal life, precisely if there are threats or harmful situations afoot, the matter must be transferred to other professionals who are equipped to assist with these types of issues. This is a standard procedure that advisors must follow. Although these circumstances are rare, they still happen. However, quite frequently, downtrodden and troubled students come into my office telling stories about how they have failed in life, and how they do not care about school anymore. During these types of sessions, advisors "tell stories to let them know that we have ourselves gone through failures, losses of confidence" with a "trusting attitude" (Hagen, *Power* 49) to empathize with students. This type of technique, using stories to encourage and evoke positivity, is also called coaching (Drake et al., 159). Advisors coach students daily in hopes that the student interprets the instructions and suggestions to improve their way of thinking as well as to take good actions to change their situation. Drake et al. reiterate:

> Devising a good plan is important, but it means little if students do not accomplish the tasks outlined in it. Advisors play a key role by reviewing the priorities in the plan, inviting students to return to them when they run into roadblocks, and reiterating their confidence in the students' ability to complete the objectives. (87)

During follow-up meetings, advisors may find certain students have not changed for the better. Students “have to confront [their] own intellectual limitations” (Newman 1) and sometimes they are terrified to do that. It is then when an advisor must acknowledge that the student either has no will to accept change or that they, sadly, do not care about their academic journey or their well-being. Regardless, advisors should never give up on the student and normally will reach out to follow up. Even if the student does not respond, at least they are aware that their advisor is open and available should they need them.

Likewise, Butler does not give up on Benjie. He demands that Benjie take responsibility for his old drug habit and instructs him to “square your shoulders, admit you been a junkie, but now gonna stay clean and report to daytime center for your followups” (Childress 119). This is an example of how advisors encourage students to take responsibility for their actions. Benjie then admits that he can do what Butler needs him to do, but only if someone believes in him. Butler retorts with this insightful nugget of advice:

> “you gotta do it even if nobody believe in you, gotta be your own man, the supervisor of your veins, the night watchman and day shift foreman in charge-a your own affairs...straighten up, Benjie...do it even livin on the edge of ugly, cause we got nowhere else to go right now. (Childress 120)

These words of encouragement should have given Benjie enough determination to want to kick the habit to the curb. Just like advisors give pep talks, Butler tries his hardest to be supportive and deliver emboldening words. His master narrative implies that in order to succeed, one must have faith in themselves. Butler mentions that “social workers, doctors, teachers, all doing what they can and Sweets almost out of her mind” (Childress 105) trying to help Benjie. Benjie’s mentality is that Butler is “just a maintenance man—and we livin in a time when a hero ain't

nothing but a sandwich—so don't strain yourself tryin to prove nothin" (Childress 74). Unfortunately, this type of resistance and attitude is common in at-risk students. At-risk students are in severe danger of failing their courses and are skimming a very low-grade point average that could result in academic probation and eventually suspension. There are times when students give up and stop trying, regardless of whether the advisor or guide has done all they could do within their academic power to save the student.

After Benjie's hospital release, he is back home trying to cope with being clean. He has a weak moment and steals Butler's nice suit to sell for heroin. Butler admits to having enough anger to kill Benjie for what he did and how he is constantly upsetting his family who desperately tries to help him. Butler is cautious and presumptuous about Benjie's true motives. However, Butler, being the genuine guide that he is, decides to give his relationship with Sweets another chance so that he can spend his free time helping Benjie beat his drug temptations. He gives Benjie his work phone number to let him know that he is available and ready to help at a moment's notice. Then, just as things are seemingly going smoothly, Benjie steals an electric toaster out of Miss Emma Dudley's apartment and Butler chases him up to the rooftop. There, a pivotal moment between Benjie and Butler's relationship is tested. Benjie trips off the roof and Butler barely catches him by the arm. Benjie begs Butler to drop him and let him die, but Butler refuses. At that moment, looking into each other's eyes during a crisis of life and death, Butler acknowledges that he disengaged from Benjie because he wasn't his own flesh and blood. Butler understands that not only does Benjie resent him for not being his father, but he also resented Benjie because he wasn't his son. A sudden change of heart causes Butler to fight harder for Benjie, giving him yet another chance to live. At least Butler can physically save him from the

untimely death of falling off a building. However, saving him from a death caused by drugs is ultimately up to Benjie himself.

After the commotion dies down, Butler recapitulates to Benjie yet again that with his help, Benjie can beat his drug addiction. Eventually, Benjie softens his stance towards Butler and begins to trust him. He finally sees Butler as a true guide. When Sweets took Benjie to a teenager's funeral who died from a drug overdose to teach him a lesson, Benjie is despondent. Butler tells Sweets that, "you can't' scare nobody into bein well. If you could, jails and hospitals all be empty...so don't be tryin no shortcuts to straightenin Benjie" (Childress 117-18). Butler is right. In advising, there are no shortcuts or specialized theoretical methods designed for guaranteed positive student outcomes. Hagen agrees by stating "Advising methods that are based in positivism may be scientific in their approach, but they tend to ignore the things that our students are dealing with: complexity, uncertainty, indeterminateness, instability, and the uniqueness of the individual" (*Power* 123). Overall, through narrative storytelling, we can get a better understanding of how others make meaning in their own lives and how we can justify our own comprehension (Hagen, *Power* 126).

According to NACADA, there are three crucial areas that advisors adhere to in order to provide "the knowledge and skills to be effective guides for their students" ("Core Competencies"): the conceptual, the informational, and the relational. Following are the definitions of each framework from the NACADA site:

- The Conceptual component provides the context for the delivery of academic advising. It covers the ideas and theories that advisors must understand to effectively advise their students.

- The Informational component provinces the substance of academic advising. It covers the knowledge advisors must gain to be able to guide the students at their institution.
- The Relational component provides the skills that enable academic advisors to convey the concepts and information from the other two components to their advisees.

  To achieve excellence in their work, regardless of the specifics of their individual campus' advising mission, all advisors must understand all three components, and be able to synthesize and apply them as needed in advising interactions. ("Core Competencies")

These three components are embedded into an advisor's work. By incorporating the narrative advising theory approach alongside these components, advisors can accelerate understanding as it may apply to students' lives.

A case in point: Butler's narrative explains why he is suitable and qualified to be Benjie's father, or in this case a guide because he is:

> ...a chosen man so to speak. Well, some might say that me and my circumstances ain't quite good enough for the job. But I know better. I can do what social worker, head shrink and blood kin can't-give a boy back to himself, so he can turn man. You better believe it. (Childress 123)

The advising qualifications that Butler does not refer to directly but implies are patience, understanding, and other necessary skills to do what needs to be done. Without a strong and invested guide like Butler, Benjie doesn't stand a chance of beating his addiction on his own. His characteristics are exactly what Benjie needs to be reminded that he can prevail and that he is loved and supported beyond measure.

The narrative advising plot that fits most with this story is the Tragedy plot. The protagonist's story outcome is the result of his own undoing no matter how much help he is

given or by whom. Using Benjie's story as an example in academic advising would prove to be essential for situations with students who are at-risk, non-responsive, or withdrawn. Hagan puts it simply:

> Students hide their obsession from others who might care for them. Tragic heroes are blind...to their shortcomings and allow themselves to be sucked into depravity and death...We come to see the ways in which people ignore aspects of themselves (sometimes called the tragic flaw) that prove to be their undoing. (69)

Sadly, outcomes such as these are disheartening for me knowing that I have very little sway over these types of students other than reiterating cautionary tales, positive influences, and supportive narrative stories. In the end, stories like *A Hero Ain't Nothin but a Sandwich* reinforce the true reality that no matter how involved a guide or advisor is, it is ultimately students' responsibility to have the willingness to change for the sake of their own academic and personal survival.

FINDING A GUIDE, A FRIEND, AND A FUTURE IN *THE STARS BENEATH OUR FEET*

Wallace "Lolly" Rachpaul, the central character in David Barclay Moore's *The Stars Beneath Our Feet,* has much in common with the central characters in *The Planet of Junior Brown* and *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich.* All three novels are also set in Harlem, New York. The protagonists from each story are African American adolescent boys who have suffered different types of losses and share similar experiences. For example, Lolly, Junior, and Benjie do not have strong father figures in their homes and are more connected to their mothers. By having a guide as a role model for these boys, they all experience what it is like to have a support system and a positive influence in their lives.

Unlike Junior Brown or Benjie, Lolly has to deal with the death of a sibling. Jermaine, Lolly's brother, was shot and killed outside of a club in the Bronx, and Lolly is left behind to fend for himself. Lolly's parents are divorced. His father has a string of girlfriends and rarely visits. His mother is in a relationship with a woman, Yvonne, who supplies him with endless bags of Lego blocks. Other than a broken homelife and grieving the death of his brother, Lolly has to worry about street gangs. In Harlem, certain streets are safe to walk, and others that are off-limits due to high levels of gang activity. Gangs are prominent in the story and are a constant shadow that looms over Lolly's life as a result of his brother's actions and the pressure from the neighborhood to follow suit into the street life.

Like Junior Brown and Benjie, Lolly has a guide to help him deal with the problems that complicate his life, but in Lolly's case, his guide is a professional counselor, Mr. Ali. Mr. Ali is a Licensed Social Worker with an MS in psychotherapy and the after-school center director (Moore 46). Mr. Ali is a generous, caring, and straightforward guide for Lolly and the other students at the center. Not only is this a story about Lolly overcoming trauma and putting his

ambitions into action, but it is also a story about the prominent student/advisor relationship that I am familiar with the most. With a guide like Mr. Ali, Lolly does not go through these trials and tribulations alone. Mr. Ali is aware of Lolly's troubles (parents divorce, brother's gang involvement pre-death, and being enticed by street gangs) and tries to work closely with him in a limited capacity after school to help Lolly overcome these adversities on his own accord.

Since Jermaine's death, Lolly strives to tackle the stereotype set upon him by association with the society of Harlem. Jermaine and Steve were best friends until they went separate ways. Lolly explains that "Jermaine went in one direction—staying out more, running the streets—and Steve went another way, spending more time in after-school and art programs" like the one Lolly and his best friend, Vega, participate in (Moore 12). Steve is also an influential guide for Lolly. Steve admires Lolly's gift of building with Lego blocks and tells him that he will "make an excellent architect" (Moore 13). Steve encourages Lolly that there are choices he can make other than the ones society imposes on him:

> Not many of us have rich imaginations, but you do. It's hard for most people to come up with any original ideas...If you only expose yourself to whatever everybody else does, you'll never create anything new. I think that's what got your brother: He couldn't see any other way out of here besides *dealing*. (Moore 14)

Steve gives Vega a book on "violin technique for kids" (Moore 14) and gives Lolly a book titled "*A Pattern of Architecture"* (Moore 14) in hopes to motivate the boys to hone and excel at their individual talents. Lolly admits that the book was something he would never ask for himself, but "it seemed like something I had been wanting. I just hadn't known that I wanted it" (Moore 15). Equivalent to advising, advisors are trained to listen intently to students' stories "that allows us to attend to narratives as they are being told" (Hagen, *Power* 36) and to spot other apparent

visual clues (such as a stick on their computer) that may spark ideas of their interests. Just how Steve recognizes the special talents in the boys, advisors are skilled as a solid resource for students to deliver information and suggest courses or campus workshops for the betterment of the students even if they do not believe it would be helpful. From one single word mentioned in students' stories, advisors can encourage them by providing favorable and enthusiastic approaches to sharpen their special skills in hopes to enrich self-confidence and acquire success.

Other than Steve, Lolly has the unwavering guiding influence of Mr. Ali. In all fairness, his role is the closest to an advisor than Butler or Mr. Pool is. Throughout the novel, it may seem that he is intrusive and demanding by hosting mandatory meetings with Lolly. However, he does not require these meetings because Lolly is a troubled student, it is because he has been "sulky in class" and "despondent" and wants to help (Moore 41). Academically speaking, most students have advising holds on their accounts, not always because they are in danger of failing, but to require mandatory meetings to make sure they are staying aligned with their educational goals. Drake et al. explain that "proactive advisors must take the time to teach the students how to be advised" (141) whether they are willing or not. As begrudgingly as it may seem to the students to attend, they usually end up feeling better after the advising sessions are over and stories are exchanged. A little reassurance and guidance on behalf of their aspirational needs serve a positive and significant purpose to connect meaning to their educational experiences.

Lolly claims that Mr. Ali is "always trying to get into everybody's business" (Moore 41) when that is the farthest from the actual truth. Mr. Ali knows that it has been months since Jermaine's passing and his parents' separation, and Lolly needs a swift dose of truth to stray from negative thoughts or spiral out of control, or make irreversible decisions. He is aware that this is a crucial time in Lolly's life that needs special attention. During one of their routine meetings,

Mr. Ali presses Lolly to explain why he is upset, specifically, about Jermaine. Lolly is reluctant to volunteer information and, at times, just stops listening. According to Hagen, the reason Lolly doesn't immediately trust Mr. Ali is that "the power imbalance is quite possibly the single most important reason why students feel that they cannot tell their whole stories, to be accepted for who they are" (*Power* 29). Mr. Ali urges Lolly to confront his grief through tough love, stating that Jermaine is not coming back and that he needs "to accept it. It may sound callous, cold-blooded, but you will never see Jermaine again. At least, not in this life" (Moore 42).

Coddling is not Mr. Ali's forte and he takes a risk by being so blunt and forthright with a reluctant Lolly, but there is a reason for this. Hagen clarifies that "experienced advisors know that the plot or story may take many advising sessions to unfold, with plot twists, red herrings, and lengthy discourse on seemingly innocuous events" (*Power* 33). Therefore, some students, like Lolly, need a firmer push than others. Mr. Ali told Lolly that he must deal with his anger, "or anger will deal with you" (Moore 46). This made Lolly uncomfortable, but Mr. Ali's repetitive narratives intend to subconsciously pave the way to motivate Lolly to accept reality, process it, and move on.

Students need honesty and truthfulness, regarding their academic and life journeys. As Newman attests, most students need "to feel that someone really wants to know them" (2) and give advice that will help them succeed whether they like what they hear or not. Harsh conversations are a part of an advisor's responsibilities. Advisors often relay information that students may ignore and they would rather crash and burn to have the "transformative experience that will propel them to the next developmental stage" (Newman 2) in their academic or personal life rather than take or acknowledge the given advice. Similarly, Mr. Ali gives Lolly direct and clear instructions for his own sake by telling him to, "Deal with these emotions, Mr.

Rachpaul...If we don't distinguish our heartache—don't at least attempt to work through it, you understand—it tends to pop up later. In different ways, *aberrant* ways" (Moore 47). Mr. Ali may sound like a broken record, causing Lolly to dig up painful memories, but his main intent is to save Lolly from carrying that pain any further than it truly needs to go. Lolly may seem like he refuses to listen, but Mr. Ali's words successfully resonate with him throughout the novel. Reaching out to show genuine concern when Lolly refuses to cooperate, Mr. Ali insists, "Mr. Rachpaul, you are a brainy young man, but there's some things you're keeping to yourself. Which is very dumb. I want to help" (Moore 59). Drake et al. reinforce the importance of advisors extending their assistance regardless of students' uncooperative nature by stating, "Despite concerns that students might resist mandatory advising to discuss grades, student feedback indicated feelings of relief that advisors called them and gave them the opportunity to discuss their academic challenges" (142). Coaxing information out of a student can be detrimental to the advisor/student relationship. However, it can also serve as a healthy dose of truth and honesty that students need more than to be coddled or ignored.

Mr. Ali's suggestion for Lolly to get to know his father better was a hard pill for Lolly to swallow. Lolly instantly went into defense mode, stating that it is the father's job to reach out, therefore relenting accountability. Contrariwise, Mr. Ali gave him a different perspective and ordered Lolly to "be open" (Moore 60). Lolly gets heated with Mr. Ali at the mention of his absent father, but Mr. Ali provides a different perspective in his narrative: "It's gotta be rough on him, losing a son. Parents aren't meant to bury their children. Kids, we basically grow up knowing that one day our parents are gonna leave us. But parents aren't conditioned to see their kids to go before them" (Moore 59). This is something that Lolly has not considered and he softens at the thought to reach out to his father. Mr. Ali's narrative suggests that he is acting in a

reflective way of the Theory of Mind concept by trying to put Lolly in his father's shoes to understand what it may be like for him. Parallel to advising, advisors provide multiple perspectives of a situation and literary contexts in hopes that students can process the different scenarios or stories to better understand their state of affairs.

One day, at the center, Mr. Ali catches Lolly watching a video of gangs boasting that "their crew was the best and that they were going to stomp out the rest" (Moore 76). Mr. Ali snatches Lolly from his desk threatening Lolly, "next time I catch you celebrating 'hood fame' and grimy gang threats in *my* after-school, I'm going to...lock you up in this storage room" (Moore 77-8). Advisors rarely know a student's entire story or motives for their actions because of the numerous external and internal factors at play. However, Hagen explains that "Advisors can foster better storytelling to occur if they consider possible cultural constraints under which students are operating, but of which they might not be aware. We need to allow the whole story to emerge, untinged by our own cultural constraints" (*Power* 29). While Mr. Ali could have allowed Lolly to explain the situation without making a scene, that is not how Mr. Ali prefers to do things. Some students in the after-care center require more action and less talk to understand a necessary point. The gangs may be dangerous territory, but Mr. Ali, to an extent, is just as rough and tough. Overall, he is the lesser of two evils when it comes to bringing down the wrath on the students by delivering moral and ethical implications that do not endanger their well-being but enriches it.

As cruel as it may seem, Mr. Ali makes good on his threat and locks Lolly in the storage room. The space Mr. Ali forced him into, unknowingly sparked something in Lolly that helped him think, create, and meditate. He enjoyed the closed-in space where he could feel free to be himself without any restrictions. Lolly explains, "Over the past week, that noise had become my

most favorite sound in the world. The *ka-klick* of the unlocking door to the big storage room in the community center...this *was* my world" (Moore 95). It is in this space, provided by Mr. Ali, where Lolly begins to build the extension of his Lego "fantasy fortress" named "Harmonee" (Moore 97, 113). Lolly is very smart and creative, especially when it comes to experimenting with his ultimate passion—Lego building because he chooses to build from his imagination. After a while, the door opens, and Mr. Ali allows Lolly to come out; Lolly was in a positive, deep state of mind.

The space also prompted Lolly to confide in and trust Mr. Ali and his advice. Lolly admits that building with his Lego blocks helps him remember Jermaine and his absent father in a constructive light. He instructs Lolly to "move ahead. Your life is young. Move ahead, brother...separate the bad emotions from the good memories" (Moore 108-9). Lolly takes this advice by building with Lego blocks as a scapegoat to illustrate his feelings and visually tell his own stories. Lolly becomes the master of his new Lego world and gets "lost in it" (Moore 97) all the while feeling closer to his deceased brother. Such as life, when things are going smoothly, an obstacle presents itself and derails Lolly's euphoric emotions. An autistic female student, Big Rose, at the community center invades Lolly's safe space and begins tinkering with his Lego blocks. Lolly's space felt "hijacked" (Moore 113) and he felt violated. Big Rose imposes herself into Lolly's storage room, and Mr. Ali did not kick her out at Lolly's behest. Instead, Mr. Ali uses this interference as a learning tactic and instructs Lolly how to communicate better with her:

> Life's all about differences and choices...Rose needs space too...when you deal with her, be patient...and keep trying to connect because it takes her a little longer to pick up on what you're meaning to say...socially and body language and all that...emotions can be tricky for somebody like her. (Moore 137)

What Mr. Ali hopes to accomplish is that Lolly will learn to not succumb to total isolation, to be cooperative, and learn to cope with setbacks and disappointment that may arise in the future. The space provided for Lolly and Big Rose not only teaches them how to compromise and negotiate, it enhances their curiosities of real architecture designs for their Lego cities.

Just as Lolly begins to be comfortable sharing the space and his Lego blocks with Rose, they both receive unfortunate news. Mr. Ali compliments both of them for their creativity and progress with the Lego building and each other, but "a new fitness program is moving in...You're gonna have to tear down your cities to make room for it" (Moore 174). Mr. Ali is one to get straight to the point. Lolly is heavily attached to this room and his Lego empire that he has equated Harmonee with himself. Lolly thought, "what is the point in doing anything if it was all gonna be destroyed anyhow?" (Moore 175). Lolly wrestles with his purpose and progress because he cannot find meaning in it anymore. Mr. Ali says that "he was worried that us having to tear down Harmonee might affect me in a bad way. Might cause me to 'backslide'" (Moore 176) and gave him a sketchbook as a crutch to draw buildings instead of using Lego blocks. Like Mr. Ali, advisors may suggest alternative methods to students to sustain progress. For example, students can feel lost when they come to the university with all good intentions but suffer setbacks or realize that college is different than they anticipated. Advisors can suggest they get involved with student organizations at the university or connect with the local community in hopes to gain an enhanced sense of motivation, relevance, and direction. This kind of involvement could serve as a new purpose or spark a developed interest that may tie into their educational experience, not necessarily a distraction from their obligations as a student.

Furthermore, Lolly takes another major step and shares the architecture book he received from Steve with Big Rose. Most of the buildings in the book are skyscrapers in New York that

peak both of their interests. Lolly invites Big Rose with him to explore the city and hunt for the buildings so that they can construct one last Lego project in resemblance to a few of the featured buildings. This excursion opens up a new desire in Lolly. He felt out of place in the more eccentric parts of the city, but that did not stop him from wanting more for his life. Lolly finally realizes what Steve recognized in him all along, "I want to make art...For the rest of my life. Until I'm old like her and still making art" (Moore 227). In addition to his academics and after-school responsibilities, he has found meaning and purpose by stepping out of his comfort zone.

Mr. Ali permits Lolly and Big Rose to showcase their extraordinary Lego city compilation in the courtyard of the student activity center before they have to tear it down for good. By doing so, their work gets a lot of attention and admiration for the intricate details they designed from scratch. Big Rose's display was modeled after the buildings they visited in the city, but Lolly's display was of his particular creation. Steve appears to admire Lolly's prototype. Lolly admits "the book he gave me at Christmas had really started all this. How Steve thought about me was important" (Moore 209). Steve went beyond praises and admiration, he took pictures of Lolly beside of his Lego city and records Lolly discussing his masterpiece and publishes it online. The online post brings Lolly massive recognition and as a result, he is offered an invitation to design a storefront display full of Lego blocks at Tuttle's Toy Store where Yvonne works. In the interview, Lolly discusses his brother, Jermaine, and "realized that I didn't feel as sad as I had been before" (Moore 210). Before Steve left, he gave Lolly some advice, "you're a hard worker. I see that...stay out of trouble" (Moore 211). Lolly was the most excited to show his work to his father whose "mouth dropped open" (Moore 212) at the sight of the structure. His father compliments Lolly, "this is something fantastic, boy. The strength of artistry needed to construct all of this here. And the *vision*…" (Moore 212). His father's honest flattery

gave Lolly a surge of pride and a definitive realization that creating art "makes me happy...makes me *me*" (Moore 212). Lolly has finally found his true purpose with the help of Steve, and most importantly, Mr. Ali.

Lolly's showcase is similar to the commencement ceremonies at universities. Students are recognized when walking across the stage and shaking hands with higher administration, and are cheered on by family and friends to celebrate their hard work and dedication that they endured earning their degree. Being present and sharing the enjoyment and optimism with students' family and friends at commencement is one of the highlights of being an advisor. I get a chance to brag about and applaud the students' academic milestones and their transition into a major stage of life. To see the smile on their faces and the exhilaration of completion is worth every meeting, every email, every repetitive instruction, every tear, and every laugh we've shared over the years of their matriculation. Knowing that I played a very small part as a supporting guide in their lives, I hope that my tiny nuggets of narrative wisdom in my stories or literary examples will serve them well long after I am forgotten.

While Lolly is progressing positively, Vega is having a much harder time coping with the pressures of the street gangs. Throughout the novel, both boys are constantly harassed and experienced a violent mugging by two gang members, Harp and Gully. Lolly notices that Vega has pulled away and acts very distant after that dangerous altercation they shared. An upset and scared Vega confides in Lolly that he has "a black Glock" (Moore 234) to protect himself the next time he is threatened. Lolly realizes that Vega is only trying to protect himself. This brings Lolly's good mood crashing down. They converse about shooting Harp and Gully for revenge and the seriousness of the conversation reverts to what Mr. Ali has tried to get Lolly to do all along. Lolly admits it "the same argument that Mr. Ali had been trying to get me to speak about

during our talks. I had never told it to anybody. Not even my best friend" (Moore 237). Lolly admits to Vega that at first, Jermaine tried to protect him by excluding him from the horrors and dangerous aspects of his gang. Then, towards the end, Jermaine tried to recruit Lolly and when Lolly refused, Jermaine felt "foolish" (Moore 237) and Lolly felt guilty. The acknowledgment of this memory helps Lolly realizes what Mr. Ali has tried to convince Lolly that he is not at fault for his brother's demise.

Lolly is genuinely concerned for his friend's mental health and physical safety if he goes through with harming Harp or Gully. So much so that "just thinking about this made me different, feel how I *used* to feel" (Moore 239), which was unstimulated and moody. Lolly began to notice how things were taken away from him, like his Lego world and his brother Jermaine, and now possibly Vega. Lolly admits, "Vega and his gun had really infected me" (Moore 245). Taking a play from Mr. Ali's book, Lolly gives Vega a straightforward ultimatum: "Frito and the gun, or me and his violin" (Moore 269). Vega threw the gun into the Harlem River "like he was throwing all of his fear and anger along with it" (Moore 268). Lolly is influenced heavily by both Mr. Ali and Steve that he is purposefully becoming a guide for Vega. Lolly reminds Vega "about Steve and Jermaine, growing up together, but parting ways. If he chose wrong, he'd definitely end up screwed. But, if he made decent choices, there was a chance he might make it out all right. Like Steve did. We both could" (Moore 269). They both agreed to ask Steve if he has a "blueprint...on how to survive St. Nick projects" (Moore 270) and how to deal with the harassment of Harp and Gully and gang pressures in general. By displaying such a mature demeanor, it is apparent that Mr. Ali has made a pivotal impact on Lolly's life.

By the end of the novel, Lolly decides to go by his given name, Wallace. By doing so, he is putting the past behind him and moving forward transitioning into an adult role. Wallace no

longer feels the guilt or takes ownership of his brother's death and decides to make better decisions thanks to Steve and Mr. Ali's constant and unwavering support. Hagen explains that "knowing how stories turn out, all kinds of stories and not only advising ones, gives advisors a basis for sound advice" (*Power* 43). Wallace gives the readers his own wise counsel, "you gotta learn to do something new...the folks you hang out with can raise you up or bring you down low. Over time, they can make you think a certain way—change who you really are...I had learned the most important thing: the decisions you make can become your life. Your choices are you" (Moore 287, 288). This is excellent advice that I will for certain reiterate to my students.

The Stars Beneath Our Feet is a combination of two plot types: Overcoming the Monster and the Rebirth. The monsters that Lolly overcomes are his grief and the identity struggles brought on by society, namely street gangs. Lolly uses the Lego blocks to process his grief and by doing so it has a critical impact on his healing process. With Steve and Mr. Ali's narrative stories and perspicuous advice, Lolly can dismantle the pressure set upon him by the stereotypical life those in Harlem are thought to live and find his own way.

The Rebirth plot aligns with Lolly going through internal changes and fighting against external forces to gain control over his own life. He goes through trials and tribulations to understand that he is worthy of making his own choices about his life and does not have to succumb to the stereotypes of society. Lolly realizes that with Mr. Ali's swift and honest narratives as well as the small gesture of confidence that Steve has in his well-being, he is ready to take on the world and drops his nickname to be reborn and known as his given name, Wallace. In turn, Wallace goes through several intense transformations (e.g., grief, making new friends, fighting the enemy) throughout the novel to be fully redeemed in the end by establishing purpose, meaning, and his own constructed identity.

The Stars Beneath Our Feet signifies what Hagen reiterates as a "Protagonist finding their way against the backdrop of larger-scale struggles" (*Power* 57). In the end, Wallace is taught about tolerance, acceptance, and the value of trusting friendships and true guidance. Mr. Ali provides Lolly with a safe space, promoting creativity, and fostering friendships by using his own knowledge and institutional resources. This is how the guide, Mr. Ali, specifically relates to my role as an advisor. We both share an affinity to assist our students, be a strong listener and be an advocate for their success. Advisors are not always aware of a students' internal or external struggles outside of academia, therefore advisors are consciously aware that there may be more to the story than what a student wishes to share. When students are unstimulated and unmotivated, all it takes is a little encouragement and support to possibly spark an interest with the vast resources and stories advisors like me and guides like Mr. Ali hold in their repertoire of skills.

CONCLUSION: TAKING GUIDANCE FROM THREE GUIDES

This thesis compares the roles that adult guides play in three African American young adult novels set in Harlem to my role as an academic advisor at UNC Charlotte. I examine how narrative advising theory relates both to the approach these guides take when interacting with the teenage characters whom they are trying to help and to the approach that I take when advising undergraduate students. The three African American YA novels, *The Planet of Junior Brown, A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*, and *The Stars Beneath Our Feet,* are interconnected in terms of having attentive guides who help the young protagonists by attempting to provide them with safe spaces where they out their problems to come to their own realizations and by providing the protagonists with positive visions for their futures. The three guides in the novels, Mr. Pool, Butler, and Mr. Ali, seek to develop caring relationships with the adolescent protagonists and are heavily invested in their well-being. These guides each share the common traits of possessing honorable, ethical, and moral. In their guidance, each of the guides encourages critical thinking, independence, and problem-solving. The roles of the guides coincide closely with that of an academic advisor. Even though the guides in these novels assist young adolescents in Harlem, their stories apply to advising 18-year-old college students in Charlotte. Both guides and advisors understand that students learn differently; therefore, it is imperative to consider various perspectives and multiple learning theories, such as storytelling, when giving advice. The guides set the standards of how an advisor should act when initiating discussions with students.

The guide in *The Planet of Junior Brown*, Mr. Pool, works in the school system as a janitor; therefore, he is familiar with the educational environment that Junior Brown and Buddy must endure. He is aware that Junior is mentally unstable and does his best to accommodate Junior with what he truly needs with the limited resources he has available. For example, Mr.

Pool demonstrates his nurturing abilities by providing a safe place for Junior in a tranquil and secure environment located in a secret basement room at the school. In the basement, Mr. Pool builds a unique solar system that has an additional planet he named Junior Brown. This tenth planet is intended to represent Junior's inclusivity. Since Junior has an interest in astronomy, by doing this, Mr. Pool implies indirectly that Junior Brown does matter and has value and worth. The effort behind this gesture is to connect with Junior on a level he can interpret. Similarly, students need a safe space to speak about issues and to feel like they are valuable and heard. Therefore, my office is deliberately designed to encourage open conversations and privacy so that the stories can comfortably unfold.

In theory, Mr. Pool has a centrist perspective when it comes to giving narrative guidance to Junior and Buddy. His narratives indicate that he believes in more of a common-sense-based solution which is showing rather than taking an authoritative stance by telling. Hagen explains that "Logic and imagination, reason and emotion, rationality and narrative need to be conjoined in advising practice...so that we can tell the whole story of academic advising and understand its power" ("Interpretive Turn" 41). Mr. Pool's most prominent characteristics are being calm, patient, and trustworthy. What I learned from Mr. Pool is to incorporate his creativity in advising sessions, especially when discussing difficult topics, in hopes that it can make students feel at ease, adopt accountability, and allow them to confide or share their stories without any pressure.

In comparison to the other guides from the novels, Butler, from *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich* has a more personal connection with the boy he is guiding (Benjie) because he is in a relationship with Benjie's mother. Butler's upstanding reputation as a good man keeps him in high esteem to everyone surrounding him, except for Benjie. Benjie is the most resistant of the three adolescents. Butler has had a challenging time getting through to Benjie, because of

Benjie's willful disobedience and lack of responsibility. No matter how the odds are stacked against them, Butler never gives up on Benjie and continually shows up for him. After Benjie's near-death experience on the rooftop, Butler says, "It's you and me from now on, hear?" (Childress 110). Butler's powerful statement affirms that he will always be around to help Benjie because he knows that Benjie is blinded by his addiction and cannot truly see what is right or what is good for himself. Therefore, Butler repeatedly provides hope throughout the novel and strives to always motivate Benjie to overcome his addiction. This repetition of narrative, which Hagen describes as "rehearsal," is pivotal to students, like Benjie, who may need extra coaching (*Power* 50).

Lessons that can be applied as a result of *Hero's* guide, Butler, is to maintain unwavering support, to provide a positive outlook as much as possible, and to be accessible and open-minded to students' stories and concerns. Even though advisors may not nourish an intimate connection like Butler and Benjie's towards their students, they can use *Hero* in hopes that a reciprocity connection can be formed. No matter how serious a conversation may take place between advisors and their students, advisors are bound by policies and procedures set in place by the university to maintain professionalism and to prevent too much personal involvement. There are times when advisors are repetitious with encouraging narratives toward students that they do not wish to believe it themselves and end up choosing a rough path. Even though the advisor's or the guide's efforts were not successful, this does not make them give up.

Finally, the last guide, Mr. Ali from *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*, is the one with whom I have the most in common. He is an educated expert in guidance who persistently nudges Lolly to think expansively about the future and to seek his own American dream regardless of Lolly's socioeconomic status. Mr. Ali has a no-nonsense attitude and tries to instill interpersonal

competence in Lolly. His narrative stories elaborate on how an emotionally responsible young adult should behave to triumph over adversity when they are out on their own. For example, Mr. Ali notices a positive change in Lolly's conduct and tells him "That's a good thing. It means you've improved. All the work you've done up until now I don't want us to lose" (Moore 176). It is evident that Mr. Ali's stories "persuade[d] the student to adopt one course of action over another" (Hagen, *Power* 29). Furthermore, Lolly felt abandon by his father. Mr. Ali uses the Theory of Mind concept to put Lolly in his father's shoes to understand how hard it is to lose a son. This changes Lolly's perspective and he gains a new understanding as a result.

Overall, Mr. Ali has personified lessons I can implement such as no matter how difficult an advising session may be, I should always make a conscious effort to truly listen and to communicate clearly and effectively. Also, by providing various perspectives to students, I can develop the whole picture including possible outcomes, mitigating factors, to build a comprehensive narrative so that they can formulate a practical understanding. Furthermore, by having confidence in my narratives, I can build a trusting bond and formulate a cohesive relationship with students. Mr. Ali reminds me that always being honest and forthright is best for students to help them face any issue head-on, and is necessary for academic and personal advancement long after they leave college.

These novels have similar plots regarding the adolescents who share a common background and race, endure comparable calamities, and have caring guides who are their voices of reason. The novels provide secure spaces that the adolescents, mainly Junior and Lolly, can utilize that are void of judgment or harm so they can process ways of coping with the world and with the communities in which they reside. These spaces prompt the adolescents' natural proclivities to plan and aspire for a better future. When both spaces were threatened, each guide

worried about what the lack of those spaces would do to their adolescents. For Lolly, Mr. Ali worried it would cause a setback in his recovery and for Buddy and Junior, Mr. Pool worried they would "take to the streets" (Hamilton 158). Therefore, I constantly strive to create a consistent, dependable, and comfortable space for students in my office just like the guides in the novels do to maintain an equitable, inclusive, and familiar advising environment for storytelling.

Telling stories is one of the main modalities that advisors use to offer support to students. Oftentimes, I have narrated anecdotes from my own life and academic trials to illustrate a point for students. The narrative advising theory is structured around what we already do as advisors and specifically in conjunction with literature. I chose to focus on the selected African American YA literature with powerful storylines to enhance students' perspectives concerning the world and to apply diversity and inclusion in my advising sessions. These stories can be bestowed to students as a fellowship in which they can understand or perceive to galvanize their commitment to existing and future goals and achievements. For the most part, the process of telling and listening to stories is a practical element to orient ourselves in society and familiarize ourselves with multiple cultures.

I use narrative advising theory, in particular, to draw in students and put them at ease while diminishing the traditional top-down advising models and in hopes to allow students to express concerns or praise accolades by exchanging holistic storytelling. Hagen writes that "if advising is like literature, then advising research and theory can be enriched by approaching the theory of advising and approaching the research in advising in ways similar to how they do it in literature (and by extension, to all the humanities" ("Imagination" 15). A skilled advisor can use these stories to dig deeper into conversations delivering meta and master narratives to cultivate a point. Throughout the years, I have had doppelgangers of Benjie, Junior Brown, Buddy, and

Lolly (among other YA literary characters) sitting across from my desk sharing stories and gave the best advice possible for their situations. Altogether, YA literature, such as *Junior Brown, Hero,* and *Stars,* combined with narrative advising theory implemented in advising sessions to reach all students regardless of the social, economic, and academic barriers that might exist for them.

Naturally, guides and advisors are typically altruistic. Even after protagonists or students lash out, fight back, ignore advice, or refuse to cooperate, guides and advisors will suffer through it, and, as a result, they become well enriched in their experiences to continue to narrate stories and examples for the betterment of their future students. Using these enriching novels in advising sessions, I should be able to analyze the plots as they may or may not apply to students' individual situations as well as initiate respect for and an inclination to entertain diverse viewpoints. Both guides and advisors are equipped to steer adolescents and students in the right direction and aid them with formulating their own opinions, developing critical thinking skills, and assisting in communicating their ability to reason and make rational decisions. In doing so, guides and advisors hope that their persistent consistency of advice will be tenacious enough so that the adolescents or students will be able to navigate their own lives without always relying on others.

Coincidently, Hagen explains how advising using the skills gained with an MA in English literature is the best of both worlds, "Perhaps you are wondering what to do with an MA in literature and are considering a career in advising and finding that the two things just might fit together very well and bring unity into your life where before there was multeity and fracture" (*Power* 59). In my opinion, advising hermeneutically is an occupation that requires critical reflection to convert narrative advising theory into practice. The complexity and richness of

advising are rewarding, but incorporating the love of YA literature makes it even more appealing and enriching. Advising is a constantly revolving door with thousands of students coming and going, along with the changing of the times and the evolving of cultures. Through it all, the one piece of the job that is the most effective and that will always remain consistent is storytelling. Therefore, storytelling, using these African American YA pieces of literature in advising, can help young adults cope with a constantly changing society in hopes that they can imagine new opportunities or possibilities for a better future.

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Appendix

Gina Kelley's Academic Advising Philosophy

My academic advising philosophy is to foster the development of critical thinking skills, problem-solving competencies, and to empower students to take responsibility for their education in hopes to encourage and enrich them to become self-directed learners and decision-makers. I truly aspire to assist students with successfully navigating through their academic journey by being a solid resource for them. I consider myself to be supportive and goal-oriented in my approach to holistic advising techniques. My greatest strengths as an advisor are my attitude, personality, and open-mindedness. The excitement and desire to help students succeed is professionally and personally fulfilling. Dependability, flexibility, and an energetic demeanor are some of my strengths as a colleague. I feel that my talent in both roles overlaps to offer a valuable partnership. I am also flexible, self-sufficient, and a quick learner.

Reality is more complex than any theory, technique or model can fully describe. However, in addition to the developmental advising model, the appreciative advising model has proved to be a foundational technique for me. I prefer to instruct students on how to investigate for answers on their own accord. The appreciative advising model focuses on open-ended, positive inquiries to develop a reciprocal relationship between advisor and student to encourage them to achieve their academic and professional goals (Howell, 2010). I prefer this base advising model as a foundation because it emphasizes the strengths and genuine interests in students, rather than focus on negative problems that need to be resolved.

Recently I discovered the narrative advising theory in a speech from the keynote speaker, Rénard Harris, Ed.D., at the Region 3 NACADA 2018 conference. This theory has commonalities with my passion as a writer and storyteller that I already utilize during advising

sessions. People make sense of their lives by creating stories and more so connecting their stories with forms of literature. I constantly tell adequate stories "to teach or educate [my] advisees" (Hagen 48). Narrative advising is "intellectually engaging because it is connected in fundamental ways to other intellectual traditions: literature, philosophy, cultural studies, and ethics" (Hagen 170). The narrative approach to advising is not just about storytelling, but also story-listening. As Peter Hagan wrote, "advising is largely the telling, receiving, and interpreting of stories in an effort to get students to encounter the grand narratives such as the curriculum, the mission, and the idea of a university" (Hagen 20). I will continue to research and seek knowledge about how I can better implement this additional theory into practice. Regardless of which model I apply, I feel that students must learn to think beyond fulfilling a requirement and emphasize accountability for their education and actions.

Overall, I constantly am for inclusion, diversity, and sensitivity in all advising sessions as well as provide a safe and trusting environment for all students. I consider myself an advisor, an academic, and a storyteller. I have a true interest in improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of my advising skills and supporting students' success holistically by continuously discovering fresh advising methods and cultivating meaningful relationships with students.