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EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING FIRST GENERATION UNDERGRADUATE
COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEIVED SOCIAL-SELF EFFICACY (PSSE) AND ABILITY
TO SOCIALLY INTEGRATE WITH ACADEMIC ADVISORS

By

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A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memories of Nana and Rocky

Nana, you always believed in my wild and unconventional ambitions. You taught me to unapologetically chase after what genuinely makes my heart and soul happy, no matter where it would take me. Your words of wisdom, boundless humor, and unreserved support are with me every day. Thank you for always being my biggest fan. I love you and miss you, always.

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We will forever be together. I love you more than there are words in this world, always.

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To my readers - thank you for believing in my research and the dedicated work that has been put into learning more about the first-generation, college sophomore student experience. I sincerely appreciate you.

ABSTRACT

Academic advisors are an integral part of the undergraduate college student experience. Primarily recognized as one of the first connections to an institution that a college student encounters, academic advisors provide students with guidance, support, resources, and mentorship throughout a student's academic journey at the institution. Although academic advisors are found to have a profound impact on a college student's academic and social development, persistence to degree completion, and retention rates at the institution, many undergraduate college students are unable to socially integrate with academic advisors, primarily during a student's sophomore year of college. A student's sophomore year of college is found to be one of the most crucial times in a student's academic career, and it is unknown what factors influence a student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during this critical period in their academic journey. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a first-generation undergraduate student's sophomore year of college. A conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine was the setting for this transcendental phenomenological research study. This research study was guided by the following research questions: (1) From a first-generation, sophomore year undergraduate student participant perspective, what lived experiences have influenced their perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs? (2) How do first-generation undergraduate college students feel their lived experiences have influenced their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college? The data collected from the nine shared lived experiences of study participants were analyzed through thematic analysis to discover patterns, commonalities, and themes amongst the collected

data. The revealed themes from the data analysis process were representative of both research questions and were grounded in internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources. The results from this transcendental phenomenological research study found that a student's PSSE was predominately shaped during the lived experiences encountered in high school. Results also found that being a first-generation college student influenced a student's PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a student's sophomore year of college, as well as a student's perception of self. Additionally, results found that a student's first year of college provided an instrumental path for social integration during their sophomore year. With current relevant literature on the college student sophomore experience being limited, data from this transcendental phenomenological research study can be used to assist other higher educational professionals in understanding the factors that influence student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Keywords: social integration, sophomore college students, perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE), confidence, first-generation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Identified as one of the first academic professionals that new students meet during their post-secondary encounter, academic advisors “are a catalyst for the extension of the student learning environment” (Spratley, 2020, p. 34). Academic advisors aid students in traversing through their personal, social, and educational development by providing students with invaluable connections to internal and external campus resources, such as faculty members (Spratley, 2020). Historical research dating back to Tinto (1975) emphasized the importance that academic advisors play in a college student’s educational journey by suggesting that academic advisors have a direct influence on student persistence, retention, and time to degree completion through social integration and interactions they have with students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Spratley, 2020; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Although academic advisors are found to have a profound impact on student social and academic development and success, some undergraduate college students are unable to socially integrate with academic advisors (Hunter et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975). This inability to socially integrate with academic advisors is particularly pronounced during an undergraduate student’s sophomore year of college, when students are examining their purpose in life and reflecting on how they fit socially and academically into the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018).

Known as the “forgotten year” (Sterling, 2018, p. 137), sophomore year undergraduate college students are more likely to experience adverse effects from the lack of social integration with academic advisors, such as social neglect, abandonment, and indecisiveness of their place in college (Hunter, et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Williams & Manning, 2014). These adverse feelings exhibited by sophomore year college students are most commonly due to first-

year resources and programs, such as living learning communities (LLCs) and social and academic support systems, not extending beyond the first year of college (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Williams & Manning, 2014). Sterling (2018) explained how sophomore year college students “are experiencing an internal transition and are still in need of year-specific support to successfully meet the demands of progressing through college” (p. 136). Additionally, sophomore year college students, who are also first-generation students, are more likely to lack the social capital, social experience, perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE), and confidence needed to socially integrate and form social connections with others, such as academic advisors (Choy, 2002; Eleby, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Macias, 2015; Nunez & Carroll, 1998; Upah, 2017). McCall (2014) explained how one of the primary factors that college students, particularly first-generation college students, choose to pursue post-secondary education, is to provide themselves with additional opportunities for personal, social, and professional growth, yet many first-generation college students are unable to do so. This inability to socially integrate with others can impact a students’ academic and social development and success (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010).

Current and historical research findings indicate that an undergraduate student’s sophomore year of college is one of the most critical periods in their academic career and that roughly 20% of undergraduate college students dropout during this time (Hunter et al., 2010; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). An additional 10% of undergraduate college students drop out between sophomore and senior years, with negative social and academic experiences as a contributing factor to deciding to leave college before degree completion (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). In an interpretative phenomenological qualitative research study conducted by Sterling (2018), results found that sophomore year undergraduate college students felt that social engagement and

integration was one of the key differences between freshman and sophomore years. Students felt “less engaged, ignored, and abandoned by the institution” (Sterling, 2018, p. 144). Additionally, research findings suggest that students, who are also first-generation students, are eight times more likely to leave college during their sophomore year, and may lack the necessary social skills, experiences, confidence, and PSSE to remain socially integrated into a new social system (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014). Not only does leaving an institution before reaching degree completion negatively impact a student’s mental, emotional, and financial health, it also directly impacts the institution’s retention rates, graduation rates, and student college experience (Educationdata, 2019; Hjorth et al., 2016; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975).

Historical and current literature related to college student PSSE and social integration resides predominately in the quantitative purview of investigating the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and campus involvement of first-year and/or first-generation college students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017; Vuong et al., 2010). These examined relationships in the literature create a conspicuous deficiency in understanding the factors that influence first-generation, sophomore year student PSSE beliefs and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors beyond the first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). This transcendental phenomenological research study sought to contribute to existing literature by providing an understanding of common factors that influence first-generation undergraduate college student PSSE beliefs and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Definition of Key Terms

Academic advisor: An academic advisor is an academic professional employed at a higher education institution, who forms a collaborative relationship with students and “provides insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 2).

Continuing-generation undergraduate college student: A continuing-generation undergraduate college student is defined as having at least one parent who has received a bachelor’s degree or higher (Upah, 2017).

First-generation undergraduate college student: A first-generation undergraduate college student is defined as “neither parent having completed a bachelor’s degree” (Upah, 2017, p. 1).

Perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE): Alburrt Bandura (1994) defined perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) as personal confidence or “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 2).

Social integration: Social integration is defined as an individual’s confidence or ability to “participate in a variety of social relationships, including engagement in social activities or relationships” (Glanz et al., 2008, p. 184).

Sophomore student: Sophomore student is defined as an undergraduate college student who has earned between 24 and 53 undergraduate college credit hours (The University of Maine System, 2018)

Statement of the Problem

It is unknown what factors contribute to perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a first-generation, undergraduate student's sophomore year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Pajares, 1996; Sterling, 2018).

Historical and current literature related to college student PSSE and social integration resides predominately in the quantitative purview of investigating the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and campus involvement of first-year and/or first-generation college students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017). This creates a distinguished deficiency in the literature surrounding a qualitative perspective of lived experiences of undergraduate college students and the factors that influence PSSE beliefs and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during the sophomore year of college (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Hunter et al., 2010; Malik et al., 2017; Sarason et al., 1990; Smith, 2010; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010).

Current research surrounding first-generation undergraduate college student social integration and PSSE beliefs indicate that faculty and staff members at the institution “are instrumental in the social integration, academic adjustment and continued persistence of first-generation college students” (McCall, 2014, p. 2). Academic advisors not only assist college students in ensuring they have the institutional support, invaluable resources, and advisor mentorship they need to be academically and socially successful during their academic career, but academic advisors can also affect student retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Engle

& Tinto, 2008; Kuh, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Spratley, 2020; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Not only do undergraduate college students place themselves at a higher risk for dropping out of college when they are unable to socially integrate with academic advisors, but they also increase the risk for becoming socially disconnected or secluded from peers and the institution, developing a muted sense of institutional belonging, or failing to persist to degree completion (Chang, 2016; Connolly & Oberleitne, 2017; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Mccullagh, 2016; Pajares, 1996; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975). Relevant literature suggests that leaving a higher education institution before reaching degree completion can negatively impact a student's mental, emotional, and financial health, as well as directly impact the institution's retention rates, graduation rates, and student experience (Educationdata, 2019; Hjorth et al., 2016; Kulkin, n.d.; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). In addition to the social implications of not integrating with academic advisors, students who are unable to form social relationships with academic advisors place themselves at a higher risk of academic adverse events, such as enrolling in incorrect courses for their degree, remaining in a major or program that does not align with their goals or interests, and transferring in or out of incorrect courses for their degree (He & Hutson, 2016; Hunter et al., 2010; Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2013; Spratley, 2020).

Statement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the factors that influence a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Sterling (2018) and Hunter et al. (2010) noted that sophomore year undergraduate college students are often at a point in their academic career when they are trying

to form social relationships, learn their identity, and seek their sense of purpose in life. As most higher education institutions are focused primarily on providing resources and support for first-year undergraduate college students, sophomore year college students are often left feeling forgotten, abandoned, marginalized, and dissatisfied with their educational and social experience at the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018). In a qualitative interpretative phenomenological research study conducted by Sterling (2018), findings suggested that undergraduate sophomore college students felt that academic and social support resources were unavailable after their first year of college. These feelings can be potentially magnified for undergraduate sophomore college students, who are also first-generation students (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Upah, 2017). The literature reveals that first-generation undergraduate students are also noted to be approximately eight times more likely to leave college during their sophomore year than their continuing-generation peers (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014).

Additionally, the literature indicated that an undergraduate student's sophomore year of college is one of the most critical periods in their academic career, with 10% of undergraduate college students dropping out between sophomore and senior year (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Negative social and academic experiences were noted to be a contributing factor to deciding to leave college during this specific time (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Sterling (2018) highlighted how undergraduate sophomore college students strive to form meaningful social relationships with others at the institution during their sophomore year, but are often left feeling abandoned, forgotten, and confused, as first-year student resources are typically not carried over into the student's sophomore year. Sophomore college students, who are also first-generation undergraduate students, may feel these effects more prominently, as they may lack the social

capital, social experiences, and PSSE beliefs that are needed to be successful in college (McCall, 2014; Upah, 2017).

In a quantitative research study conducted by Upah (2017) that sought to measure the relationship between self-efficacy, student campus involvement, and academic performance between first-generation and continuing-generation undergraduate college students, findings noted a statistically significant relationship amongst self-efficacy, GPA, campus involvement, and a student's interest in becoming socially involved at the institution. Continuing-generation students were also found to have higher GPAs, possesses higher self-efficacy beliefs, and be involved more on campus than their first-generation peers (Upah, 2017). When undergraduate college students possess the ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, the naturally occurring effects are increased social capital, persistence to degree completion, enhanced PSSE, and dedication to institutional commitment (Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975).

Research Questions and Design

To aid in exploring the factors that influence first-generation student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college, Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) perspective of "focusing on the experience itself" (p. 25), were used to guide the following research questions:

- RQ 1: From a first-generation, sophomore year undergraduate student participant perspective, what lived experiences have influenced their perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs?

- RQ 2: How do first-generation undergraduate college students feel their lived experiences have influenced their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college?

To understand the explored phenomenon further, a transcendental phenomenological design was selected to capture the rich, descriptive lived experiences of study participants in relation to the studied phenomenon. This transcendental phenomenological design precisely focused on the exploration of participant “experiences as lived” (Peoples, 2021, p. 3), which constructed a unique reality of the explored phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenological design allowed for the lived human experiences of study participants to be woven into the fabric of the research study and revealed commonalities and themes that shaped the explored phenomenon in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2019; Peoples, 2021).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Upon thorough review of existing literature related to college student PSSE and social integration, it has been found that current knowledge is distinctively focused on the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and campus involvement of first-year and/or first-generation college students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017). For example, in a longitudinal quantitative study conducted by Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) on the influence that PSSE had on both first-generation and continuing-generation college students, the results found that first-generation college students held significantly lower levels of PSSE than continuing-generation students. A more recent quantitative research study conducted by Ayllón et al. (2019) investigated the relationship

between college student PSSE and interactions with faculty members and found that college students performed higher academically when they felt supported by faculty members. Running parallel to these research findings, the quantitative research study of Vuong et al. (2010) found that first-generation, second year college students had PSSE beliefs shaped by gender and ethnicity. This research study also found that PSSE impacted second year college student GPA and persistence rates (Vuong et al., 2010).

The theoretical framework that guided this research study was Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence (1993) theory. The spiral of silence theory is rooted in mass communication, social expression, and political science, and suggests that individuals suppress their social expressions, such as thoughts, perspectives, and opinions, if they feel they are in the minority opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). The primary factors for suppressing one's social expressions and communication is largely due to fear of social rejection, concern of social isolation, criticism, or worry of negative social reactions (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Once individuals resist or fail to socially express their thoughts, perspectives, and opinions, they enter a continuous "spiral" that prevents further public communication and expression from occurring (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). The spiral of silence theoretical framework provided a distinctive, multi-dimensional lens to view the factors that influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The assumptions of this transcendental phenomenological research study were related to the qualitative methodology itself. In phenomenological research studies, "the research is strictly aimed at understanding the lived experiences" (Peoples, 2021, p. 3) of the sample population studied. This suggests that research study participants who shared their lived experiences

communicated their perceptions, insights, and meaning of their experience in a way that is unique to them (Peoples, 2021). The researcher then analyzed the shared experiences of participants through data analysis to “construct a meaningful reality” of the collected data (Peoples, 2021, p. 5). The assumption of using transcendental phenomenology to explore the studied phenomenon further implied that participants were honest, truthful, and authentic when sharing their lived experiences. Additionally, the researcher presumed that participants understood the terminology and basis of this research study, as well as the one-on-one interview questions (Appendix D) asked of them during the data collection process.

Limitations of qualitative research studies were defined as “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher” (Creswell, 2019, p. 200). The potential limitations of this research study were identified as researcher biases, which are common limitations in phenomenological research studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher biases may include personal viewpoints and perspectives of the explored phenomenon, as well personal beliefs that may influence data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, due to the researcher’s professional affiliation with the site institution, this may contribute directly and indirectly to researcher biases and limitations that may exist due to this professional relationship. It was also noted that this research study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which restricted in-person interaction during the research study. This limitation was minimized by conducting all communication and interviews with research study participants virtually via a video and audio software platform called Zoom.

Furthermore, the scope of this transcendental phenomenological research study was limited to exploring the factors that influence first-generation student PSSE and the ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. The sample

explored during this research study was limited to first-generation, sophomore year college students, who were enrolled in a four-year college in Maine; therefore, the scope of the study was limited by this specific student population and geographic location. Additionally, the scope of this study did not include academic professionals outside of the academic advising role. This limitation eliminated the exploration of factors that influenced social integration with faculty members and other academic professionals in a higher education institution setting.

Rationale and Significance

Upon entering their first year of college, first-year undergraduate students are met with a myriad mixture of social and academic resources, such as first-year seminars and living learning communities (LLCs), that are designed to assist new first-year students with academic and social integration (Campbell et al., 2017; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Hunter et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; McCall, 2014; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975; US Department of Education, 2016; Vuong et al., 2010). However, after a student's first year of college, these social and academic resources are typically discontinued, leaving sophomore year students feeling socially abandoned, socially neglected, and indecisive about their college fit (Hunter et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Williams & Manning, 2014). These feelings are more prominent amongst college students who are also first-generation students, as they may not possess the PSSE beliefs, social capital, or social experiences needed for successful social integration into a new environment (Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Current and historical relevant literature has found a correlation between college student PSSE and academic and social success, which is indicative of the prominent role that PSSE beliefs play in a student's ability to socially integrate with others (Arefi & Jan, 2016; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Hermann, 2005; McCall, 2014; Pajares, 1996; Vuong et al., 2010). Additionally,

the literature reveals that college students who possess adequate PSSE are more likely to succeed in college socially and academically (Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Young-Jones et al., 2013). For example, a quantitative research study conducted by Ayllón et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between college student PSSE and interactions with faculty members. This research study found that college students performed higher academically when they felt supported by faculty members (Ayllón et al., 2019). With minimal knowledge and scholarly research on the first-generation, sophomore year college student experience and social integration with academic advisors during this critical time in their academic career, it is imperative that further research be conducted to understand what factors influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors beyond the first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018).

Summary

Identified as one of the first academic professionals that new students encounter during their transition to a higher education institution, academic advisors play a crucial role in promoting a prosperous, opportunistic, and positive college experience for all students (Hunter et al., 2010; Kuh, 2006; Spratley, 2020; Williams & Manning, 2014). Although academic advisors are found to have a profound impact on student social and academic success, many undergraduate college students are unable to socially integrate and develop social relationships with academic advisors (Gordon & Habley, 2000, as cited in Punyanunt-Carter & Carter, 2015, p. 15). This inability to socially integrate and form meaningful social relationships with academic advisors is particularly pronounced during an undergraduate college student's sophomore year of college, when students are examining their purpose in life and reflecting on how they fit socially and academically at the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018).

Sophomore year college students, who are also first-generation students, are also more likely to lack the social capital, social experience, perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE), and confidence needed to socially integrate and form social connections with others, such as academic advisors (Choy, 2002; Eleby, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Macias, 2015; Nunez & Carroll, 1998).

Existing knowledge related to college student PSSE and social integration resides predominately in the quantitative purview of investigating the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and college campus involvement of first-year and/or first-generation college students, which creates a conspicuous gap in understanding the lived experiences of students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Hunter et al., 2010; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017).

Chapter 2 reviews current and historical literature surrounding student PSSE and social integration amongst college students. Common themes and topics found in relevant literature are also be presented. This chapter concludes with reviewing the conceptual and theoretical framework of the research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic advisors are recognized as critical influencers in student social and academic development through student-centered approaches that help create an encouraging, supportive, and opportunistic social and academic college experience for all students from the point of admission through graduation (He & Hutson, 2016; Hunter et al., 2010; Kuh, 2006; Spratley, 2020; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Characteristically, being one of the first connections with an institution that students encounter through the college admissions process, new student orientation sessions, or selecting first semester courses, academic advisors assist students in socially integrating and acclimating into the new environment (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Higgins, 2015; Salisbury, 2014; Smith, 2010; Young-Jones et al., 2013). This social integration process is particularly vital for marginalized student populations, such as first-generation students, as these students may be predisposed to having ostracizing experiences that diminish their college experience and social and academic development (Salisbury, 2014). Once assimilated into an institution's social system, student perceived social self-efficacy (PSSE) is increased, in addition to persistence, retention, and development of institutional commitment needed to remain at an institution, being naturally occurring effects (He & Hutson, 2016; McCall, 2014; Spratley, 2020; Tinto, 1975; Vuong et al., 2010).

The primary focus of this literature review was to explore existing knowledge and scholarly research surrounding college student PSSE and social integration, particularly during a student's sophomore year of college. Current and historical literature reveals that undergraduate sophomore students are more likely to experience adverse feelings, such as abandonment, from a lack of social integration during their sophomore year, which is found to be a critical time in a student's educational journey (Hunter et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018;

Williams & Manning, 2014). These feelings are primarily due to many first-year seminars, living learning communities (LLCs), and other social resources not continuing beyond the first year of college (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Williams & Manning, 2014). This resource deficit may inadvertently cause students to experience feelings of social neglect, confusion, or abandonment (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Williams & Manning, 2014).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Existing current and historical literature resides predominately in the quantitative purview of investigating the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and college campus involvement of first year and/or first-generation college students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017). The existing knowledge in the literature generates a conspicuous deficiency in understanding the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors beyond a student's first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018).

Topical Research

Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) conducted a longitudinal quantitative research study that sought to investigate the influence that PSSE had on both first-generation and continuing-generation college students. The results indicated that first-generation college students possessed significantly lower levels of PSSE than their continuing-generation counterparts (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). Additionally, this lower level of PSSE was discovered to be

connected to student college adjustment and the extent of persistence to degree completion (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007).

Aligning with Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007), Hermann (2005) conducted a quantitative correlational research study that investigated student PSSE in relation to sociopsychological feelings of depression and loneliness amongst first-year college students. This research study found that first-year college student were more likely to possess lower levels of PSSE, as a result of being transplanted to a new social environment and not having the social confidence needed to socially adjust to a new setting (Hermann, 2005). Additionally, this research study aligns with the quantitative research findings of Lai (2014), who found that first-year college students who entered college with higher levels of PSSE, were able to adjust to the academic and social demands of college, as well as develop more robust coping mechanisms to the adjustment process of college.

Conversely, in a quantitative research study conducted by Ayllón et al. (2019) that examined the relationship between student PSSE and faculty interactions, the study found that students performed higher academically when they felt supported by faculty members. When faculty members made themselves available to students, supported students during their college journey, and were known to be dependable resource for students, these actions had a significant effect on student academic achievement (Ayllón et al., 2019). Additionally, Ayllón et al. (2019) noted that when students “feel capable of organizing and implementing the courses of action necessary to acquire knowledge” (p. 1), they obtained higher grades.

Personal Interest

As an undergraduate academic advisor for a public, four-year institution in Maine, I am one of the initial academic professionals that new students encounter when connecting with the

institution. I serve as an early and continuing support system for each student and assists each student with academic and social development throughout their undergraduate educational journey. Primarily working with a diverse population of undergraduate students varying in age, social capital, economic background, major of study, and culture., I strive to provide a positive, opportunistic, and rewarding social and academic experience for all students. Although academic advisors are one of the primary support systems for college students, an observable problem that I have witnessed is that many students fail to socially integrate themselves amongst academic advisors. This social disconnect may take the form of students not actively or effectively communicating concerns with their academic advisor or faculty member(s), failing to attend academic advising meetings, not returning email and/or phone call communication, or socially expressing academic goals or interests. When students are unable to embed themselves into an institution's social system, primarily amongst the institution's academic professionals, students place themselves at a higher risk of becoming socially disengaged, socially isolated from others, or fail to adapt to the social demands of college that aid in developing a sense-of-belonging and institutional commitment (Connolly & Oberleitne, 2017; He & Hutson, 2016; Pajares, 1996; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975).

Being one of the primary support systems for undergraduate college students during their academic journey and a first-generation college student, I am naturally interested in exploring the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a student's sophomore year of college. This knowledge will contribute to existing literature and aid academic advisors and academic professionals in similar roles in discovering how to provide student-centered advising approaches to help retain first-generation sophomore

students during one of the most critical times in their academic career (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The exploration of discovering common factors that influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college, this research study was guided by the theoretical framework of Noelle-Neumann's (1993) spiral of silence theory. This theoretical framework allowed the researcher to construct, collect, and analyze this transcendental phenomenological research study through a unique mixture of lenses that are grounded in mass communication, social expression, and political science. Through the employment of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with nine research study participants, robust, descriptive lived experiences were collected and analyzed through inductive thematic analysis coding for maximum discovery of themes, patterns, and commonalities through the dialogue of the lived experiences of participants.

Spiral of Silence Theory

Grounded in political science, social expression, and mass communication, Noelle-Neumann's (1993) spiral of silence theory implies that individuals are more likely to suppress social expressions, such as thoughts, perspectives, and opinions, if they feel they are in the social minority group (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Noelle-Neumann (1993) highlighted that the primary driving factors for this social expression suppression are due to fear of social isolation, fear of social rejection, criticism, or fear of other negative social repercussions, such as humiliation. Once individuals begin to suppress their social expressions, they enter in a continuous "spiral," that prevents further public communication from taking place (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Review of Relevant Literature

Social Support Systems Influencing PSSE

Social relationships have been identified throughout history as being a key component of one's well-being and is thought to possess "far-reaching and cumulative effects on health" (Antonucci et al., 2013, p. 82). The study of social relationships in various environments and settings, such as in post-secondary education, is intertwined in various disciplinary fields, such as sociology and philosophy, and can be examined throughout history. These historical linchpins can be traced back to Young and Willmott (1957), whose research was ingrained in how community and familial support influences social relationships, to the modern research paradigms of August and Rook (2013), whose research within social connections resides within scientific workings.

Current and historical relevant literature further extends Young and Willmott's (1957) research by illustrating how social support systems in college, such as (a) peer support, (b) familial support, (c) academic professional support, and (d) institutional support, influences the level of PSSE that a college student possesses and exhibits throughout their postsecondary educational experience. How students socially integrate themselves into the institution's social structure, social environment, and institutional community, and the extent to which these integrations occur, are also observed throughout relevant literature. The literature identifies PSSE as being primarily a "cognitive appraisal of one's capabilities to fulfill a prospective performance, based on past performances" (Ayllón et al., 2019, p. 2), and the level of PSSE that a college student carries, has the ability to evolve, transform, and grow throughout the college experience, as student experiences, social capital, and support systems become available (Burke et al., 2009).

Peer Support

Peer support is one of the most influential social motivators and guiding factors for assisting undergraduate college students in becoming socially integrated into a college's social structure and environment (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Dennis et al., 2005; Sarason et al., 1990; Tinto, 1975). Peer support also possesses the ability to help students develop a sense of institutional belonging, increase personal levels of PSSE, create meaningful social support systems, and become purposefully committed to an institution, which can produce profound positive social and academic effects (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Dennis et al., 2005; Sarason et al., 1990; Tinto, 1975). The literature surrounding peer support systems and the influence these types of social supports play in student PSSE and social interactions with academic professionals, such as faculty members, is predominately quantitative. Additionally, current and historical relevant literature principally indicates that the higher a student's PSSE level is, the more socially integrated into the institution and socially comfortable they are with forming new social connections and relationships during their college experience (Dennis et al., 2005; Smith, 2010; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

In a qualitative interpretive phenomenological research study conducted by McCall (2014), the author noted that a student's PSSE can be strengthened through the social interactions that they participate in, such as through a class project, social event, or in-class group discussions. These social interactions and verbal exchanges may induce constructive feedback, social support, and positive affirmations from peers and/or faculty members, providing a student with a feeling of support and success (McCall, 2014). Extending further into peer support groups, Smith (2010) emphasized the importance that peer support groups, such as

student clubs and organizations, have on the development and sustainment of student PSSE, and the influence that student PSSE has on the construction of one's social support networks.

To aid students in developing and sustaining higher levels of PSSE and become socially integrated into the campus community, the literature recommends that higher education institutions encourage students to participate in social networking groups and support systems (McCall, 2014; Smith, 2010). These social networking groups and support systems can take the shape of student clubs and organizations, sports teams, campus community projects, peer mentor programs, as well as living learning communities (LLCs) or first-year seminar courses for first-year students (McCall, 2014; Smith, 2010). Additionally, by socially immersing themselves into social activities and groups on-campus, students may develop the motivation and social support needed to persist to degree completion (Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975).

Familial Support

In addition to peer support, familial support has been shown to provide positive influences on student PSSE and social interactions within a college environment, which may have encouraging profound effects on student persistence and retention (Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Wayt, 2012). Smith (2010) explained how familial support systems, such as parents, grandparents, and siblings are critical components in helping students develop a sense of belonging at an institution, as well as promote student persistence and retention, particularly among low socioeconomic, first-generation college students. Smith (2010) further noted how students who do not possess familial support are often left feeling underprepared for the social and academic demands of college, disconnected from the institution, or excluded from the college environment, which can influence student PSSE levels. Aligning with the influence of

familial support on student PSSE and social interactions in a college setting, Torres and Solberg (2001) found that college students who possess a strong familial support system, are able to build more meaningful and cohesive connections with peers, faculty, and staff members at the institution, as well as possess higher levels of student PSSE and academic self-esteem needed to complete goals.

While a majority of the literature surrounding familial support produces a positive empirical relationship between student PSSE, familial support, and social interactions, Dennis et al. (2005) found that some first-year undergraduate college students received pressure from their family to attend college or achieve high grades. This perceived stress had a negative impact on a student's motivation, PSSE, and interest in forming social connections within the institution (Dennis et al., 2005). It should be noted, however, that Dennis et al. (2005), Smith (2010), and Torres and Solberg (2001) studied different student populations and academic levels (e.g., first-year, sophomore year, etcetera.), which may have influenced student feelings and overall attitude towards familial support, or the level of familial support received.

Furthermore, Engle and Tinto (2008) highlighted an important factor in the level of familial support that an undergraduate college student receives. Students in their later years of college (e.g., junior or senior year) are more likely to be independent from their family, due to working full-time jobs, familial responsibilities, or have other demanding obligations that place themselves as their own primary support system. Students who are in advanced standing in their undergraduate college career may not be as socially embedded into the institution due to external responsibilities (e.g., full-time employment, children, etcetera.), which can hinder a student's social and academic participation and college experience (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Academic Professional Support

For students who possess low PSSE, it can be challenging to form social connections with not only other students, but also with institutional faculty and staff members (Burke et al., 2009). Students who possess low or no PSSE have lower levels of self-confidence, which can hinder their ability to initiate, engage in, or complete social tasks (Burke et al., 2009). Burke et al. (2009) further noted how several “Intervention studies have shown that changing a person's confidence in her or his ability to perform a particular behavior - her or his perceived self-efficacy - will likely change the behavior itself” (p. 112). Thus, if a student has higher levels of PSSE, they may be more likely to engage in more socially demanding or unfamiliar tasks.

Forming cohesive social relationships with academic professionals not only aids students in building their PSSE level and active social integration into the college environment, but it can also assist in promoting student retention and persistence (Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Tinto (1975) and Nutt (2003) noted the importance that social integration plays in the student college experience and how social emersion is primarily through peer support and interaction with faculty and staff members throughout the institution. When a student forms social connection with faculty and staff members, their commitment to the institution becomes more profound because they may feel that they have a support system and social connection to the institution that produces social rewards, such as new friends or student clubs and activities (Dennis et al., 2005; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975).

Establishing social connections with faculty and staff members have also been found to produce a positive influence on academic achievement, PSSE, and completing academic and social goals (Ayllón et al., 2019; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; McCall, 2014; Smith, 2010; Torres & Solberg, 2001). For example, in a quantitative research study conducted by Ayllón et al. (2019)

among undergraduate college students and student PSSE, faculty interactions had the most profound effect on student academic achievement. This study noted how “Students obtain higher marks when they believe that their teachers are dependable and available to offer resources, and when they feel capable of organizing and implementing the courses of action necessary to acquire knowledge” (Ayllón et al., 2019, p. 1). It should be noted, however, that this research study had participants answer a survey just a few weeks prior to final exams, which may have influenced or impacted their survey responses.

Aligning with these findings, an interpretive phenomenological research study conducted by McCall (2014) produced similar results in terms of the relationship between PSSE, faculty interactions, and academic achievement. Study findings noted how institutional faculty and staff support were integral components in helping undergraduate college students become socially integrated into the institution (McCall, 2014).

Institutional Support

Living Learning Communities (LLCs) are social support systems for first-year, residential students that are primarily thematic based (Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Tinto, 1975). For example, a first-year, residential student may be participating in an LLC focused on health-related topics and are housed with other students and academic professionals who share similar interests and goals. LLCs have the potential to socially integrate incoming first-year, residential students into the institution’s environment and social structure, allowing these students the opportunity to meet and develop new social connections and friendships, form campus social support systems, identify social norms, and become familiar with institutional social resources (Friswold-Atwood, 2018).

LLCs have the power to influence a student's PSSE, prior to formally arriving on campus for their first day, through an institution's application and selection process (Friswold-Atwood, 2018). For example, a student can choose the LLC that appeals most to them, allowing their PSSE to play into the decision-making process. Once a student arrives on campus and moves-into their LLC, their PSSE will continue to develop and transform, as new social connections and relationships are formed with peers and academic professionals (Friswold-Atwood, 2018). In a quasi-experimental quantitative research study investigating the relationship between PSSE and LLCs, researchers found a strong relationship between the influence that LLCs have on a student PSSE and their social and academic integration into the college community by providing first-year, residential students with co-curricular opportunities, structured student activities, and social experiences (Friswold-Atwood, 2018).

Current literature also includes the influence that first-year experience (FYE) or seminar courses has on student PSSE and social interactions among undergraduate college students (Campbell et al., 2017; US Department of Education, 2016). FYE or seminar courses are geared towards helping first-year students transition to college, develop a sense of belonging, and become socially integrated into the institution (US Department of Education, 2016). Further research is needed to develop a more unified conclusion surrounding the influence that FYE or seminar courses have on PSSE and social interactions with academic professionals, as there are currently findings that support *and* reject the effectiveness of these classes (Campbell et al., 2017; US Department of Education, 2016).

PSSE and Social Adjustment in College

Social adjustment in college, particularly among first-generation students, is among one of the overarching themes present in current literature related to student PSSE and social

integration with peers and academic professionals. For this literature review, the definition of social adjustment outlined by Ayele (2018) as “interacting and forming relationships with peers and staff” (p. 1327) is followed. Current and historical literature surrounding student PSSE and social interactions with peers and academic professionals presented three underlying supportive pillars of (a) loneliness/homesickness, (b) ability to form social connections, and (c) social expression, which has been found to influence student PSSE and social interactions with peers and academic professionals (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Hermann, 2005; McCall, 2014; Pajares, 1996).

Loneliness/Homesickness

Undergraduate college students transitioning to a new academic environment (typically from high school) can be presented with a myriad mixture of feelings, including loneliness and/or homesickness. These feelings are defined as being “interpersonal deficit that exists as a result of fewer or less satisfying personal relationships than a person desires” (Ponzetti, 1990, p. 336), which can have a negative effect on the student college experience, social integration, and PSSE. These new, and sometimes frightening feelings are particularly common amongst new residential college students, who are moving away from home and familial and peer support systems and entering a new and unknown environment that they are forced to adapt to (Arefi & Jan, 2016; Hermann, 2005; Ponzetti, 1990).

A quantitative research study conducted by Arefi and Jan (2016) investigating the relationship between PSSE, academic motivation, and homesickness among roughly 130 male and 150 female undergraduate college students, found that PSSE had a significant correlation to achievement motivation. This motivation, in turn, had a mediating effect on feelings of homesickness on the study population (Arefi & Jan, 2016). The study further found that as

students' PSSE levels increased, their academic motivation also increased, which means students have greater self-confidence, motivation, and self-esteem needed to sustain both academic achievement and PSSE (Arefi & Jan, 2016).

Additionally, Hermann (2005) found an added mediator amongst roughly 700 undergraduate student feelings of loneliness in that PSSE has a mediating effect on a students' "instrumentality and loneliness" (p. ii) and social expressiveness had a partial mediating effect between PSSE and feelings of loneliness amongst the study population. These findings run parallel with results noted by Ponzetti (1990), who found that college students experiencing loneliness, often have fewer social support networks, view their college experience in a pessimistic manner, and are often disengaged or unresponsive in social interaction attempts. Current relevant literature surrounding student PSSE, loneliness/homesickness, and social interactions with peers and academic professionals are primarily quantitative, with a focus on the relationship between student PSSE and feelings of loneliness/homesickness in relation to peer interactions only (American Institute of Stress, 2019; Connolly & Oberleitne, 2017; Grøtan et al., 2019).

Ability to Form Social Connections

A primary factor noted in the literature is that one of the main reasons that college students, specifically first-generation college students, decide to attend college, is to provide themselves with additional opportunities for personal, social, and professional growth (McCall, 2014). Peer support programs and social networks have also been found to contribute to student academic success, increased student PSSE, academic persistence, and social and academic growth (Lai, 2014; McCall, 2014; Pajares, 1996; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975). To further understand the influence that student PSSE has on social connections amongst undergraduate

college students, Lai (2014) conducted a quantitative research study that investigated the relationship between PSSE, social integration, and college adjustment. Study findings noted that first-year college students who possessed higher levels of PSSE, also had higher levels of cognitive function, which resulted in the ability to overcome academic and social obstacles and form better coping mechanism to the college adjustment process (Lai, 2014).

This research study partially conflicts with Hermann's (2005) noted study limitations of how first-year college students may typically possess lower levels of PSSE, primarily due to low social confidence in an unfamiliar environment. The lack of social comfortability, particularly in an unknown environment, can negatively impact the college social and academic adjustment process (Hermann, 2005). It should be noted that the research studies conducted by both Hermann (2005) and Lai (2014) contained different instruments (PSSE Scale vs Student Adaption to College Questionnaire SACQ), which may have influenced the data collected or lens of findings.

Social Expression

Social expression amongst undergraduate college students can vary greatly, depending on the level of social comfortability, sense of belonging, social environment, level of PSSE and support systems present. Through the current literature that has been reviewed, the spiral of silence theory has been a theoretical lens that researchers have used to capture the depths and dimensions of social expression. The factors that influence one's ability to actively speak out against the majority opinion or viewpoint in a variety of industries and settings are also noted.

One of the noted factors in the literature that influences one's level or extent of social expression, is one's individual personality. In a quantitative research study conducted by Nam (2002) on the influence that one's personality has on social expression amongst college students,

two personality types were explored: “independent/interdependent self-construal and right-wing authoritarian” (p. v). Of these two personalities, authoritarian personality types were more vocal towards controversial topics, such as abortion and capital punishment.

Sociocultural Factors That Influence PSSE

Evaluating current and historical literature surrounding student PSSE and social interactions with peers and academic professionals has revealed that sociocultural factors play an influential role in the level of PSSE a student possesses, as well as the level of social output they will exude during the college experience (Byrd, 2018; Chang, 2016; Gecas, 1989). Current and historical relevant literature suggests that the most common sociocultural factors that influence a students’ PSSE and social interactions during their college experience are (a) socioeconomic status (or social class), (b) generational status, and (c) cultural background or beliefs (Byrd, 2018; Chang, 2016; Choy, 2002; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Gecas, 1989; Merritt & Buboltz, 2015)

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is defined as being one’s position in the social hierarchization structure, and is primarily based on one’s education level, financial security, and personal income (American Psychological Association, 2017; Quiroga-Garza et al., 2018). College students, particularly first-generation students, who enter college on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, have been found to have a more difficult time adjusting to the social and academic demands of college, including forming new social connections with peers and academic professionals and academically succeeding in courses (American Psychological Association, 2017; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Huang et al., 2019; Merritt & Buboltz, 2015). Additionally, the literature highlighted low socioeconomic students entering college, who are *also* first-generation students, have not had optimal exposure to academic and social resources

needed to be prepared for the social and academic demands of college (American Psychological Association, 2017). This student population are also less likely to engage in social groups, activities, or programs on campus that help foster a prosperous college experience, have lower levels of PSSE, and are nearly four times more likely to drop-out of college before earning a four-year degree (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Although not conducted in a higher education setting, Quiroga-Garza et al. (2018) found that there is a significant relationship between one's socioeconomic status and overall PSSE, and that individuals perceived to be of higher socioeconomic status possessed higher levels of PSSE and more control over their thoughts and actions. Conversely, individuals perceived to be of lower socioeconomic standing were thought to have a reduction in their basic needs being met, such as having enough food and clothing, which lowered their PSSE levels (Quiroga-Garza et al., 2018). This study's findings align similarly with the results of the quantitative research study conducted Huang et al. (2019), which sought to investigate the relationship between general self-efficacy and socioeconomic status of Chinese medical students. The author found that students from higher socioeconomic families achieved higher academically, were more prepared for the social and academic demands of college life and had higher levels of critical thinking skills and general self-efficacy, than their lower socioeconomic peers. It was also determined that students of lower socioeconomic status were perceived to have an overall lower level of general well-being (Huang et al., 2019).

Generational Differences

First-generation college students are perceived to be at a social disadvantage than their continuing-generation peers, as first-generation college students typically do not possess the social capital, social experiences, high level of PSSE, and/or social motivation that is needed to

form new social relationships and connections in a new social system, such as a college environment (Choy, 2002; Eleby, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Macias, 2015; Nunez & Carroll, 1998). Engle and Tinto (2008) found that first-generation college students had lower levels of PSSE, had a more challenging time becoming socially integrated into a college environment, and were less likely to persist to degree completion than their continuing-generation peers. These findings are similar to that of a quantitative longitudinal study conducted by Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007), which studied the effects that PSSE had on first-generation and continuing-generation college students. The authors found that first-generation college students had much lower PSSE levels than their continuing-generation peers, which were found to be related to degree persistence and college adjustment (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007).

Cultural Background/Beliefs

The literature suggests that higher education institutions can provide unparalleled and boundless social experiences to students by bringing together and connecting individuals from all over the world in one setting. Due to increasing diversity, particularly amongst postsecondary institution student populations, higher education institutions that embrace diversity and provide an equitable and inclusive environment for students can become a socially safe place for underrepresented student populations, such as international students or students from different cultures (Byrd, 2018; Chang, 2016; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). By promoting equity, inclusion, and diversity, higher education institutions can help to reduce culture shock, strengthen social relationships among peers and academic professionals, and provide advantageous social opportunities for students by integrating multiple cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs into the college community in a safe and equitable environment (Byrd, 2018; Chang, 2016; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

To understand the impact that student PSSE plays on social interactions and adaption to college life, Chang (2016) conducted a quantitative research study among international college students from 13 countries and found that international students who were able to adjust to initial cultural or social barriers of attending an international higher education institution were found to possess higher levels of PSSE and a reduction in sociocultural adaptation to their new environment. In opposition, students with lower levels of PSSE had a more difficult time socially and culturally adjusting to the campus environment and had perceived higher levels of discrimination than native country of origin college students (Chang, 2016). Similarly, Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) found that international college students studying in a higher education institution in Canada reported lower levels of social integration and adjustment in college than native country of origin college students. This resulted in a decrease in social interactions with peers, academic professionals, community members, and the host family (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). International students or students with varying cultural backgrounds or beliefs, who are unable to adapt to a differing college atmosphere socially or culturally may perceive the institutional setting as being racially hostile or a hostile environment to socially interact in (Byrd, 2018)

Sociopsychological Factors Influencing PSSE

Evaluating current literature surrounding student PSSE and social interactions in college has revealed an additional layer of socio-like influences that impact student PSSE and social interactions in college and can be categorized through the overarching theme of sociopsychological characteristics. Current relevant literature suggests that the most common underlying pillars that influence student PSSE and social interactions during the college experience are (a) mental and social stress, (b) social self-identity, and (c) fear of public opinion

(The American Institute of Stress, 2019; Childress, 2018; Cleofas, 2020; Green-Eneix, 2016; Grøtan et al., 2019). These sociopsychological factors may negatively influence the student experience and impact student retention, institutional commitment, sense-of-belonging, social expression, and persistence (The American Institute of Stress, 2019; Childress, 2018; Cleofas, 2020; Green-Eneix, 2016; Grøtan et al., 2019).

Mental and Social Stress

Students preparing for college may experience a wide range of emotions, such as excitement, fear, stress, or enthusiasm, as they strive to achieve high grades in their final semesters of high school, participate in extracurricular activities, and aim to be a top candidate for the college of their choice. Many students neglect to fully understand, however, that the added pressure of needing to be a top candidate for college admissions adds to the already increased pressure and stress they are experiencing to attend college (The American Institute of Stress, 2019). In a quantitative research study conducted by O'Sullivan (2011), findings noted a significant relationship between an undergraduate student's stress levels, PSSE, and life satisfaction.

Similarly, the literature reveals that eight out of 10 college students experience stress frequently (The American Institute of Stress, 2019; Childress, 2018). These feelings may stem from being away from home, not having a supportive social network, or inability to form new social experiences and connections, experiencing social anxiety, or trying to adjust to a new social and academic environment that aligns with the student's interests (The American Institute of Stress, 2019; Childress, 2018). Childress (2018) further explained how social relationships and connections at the college level are not always easy for students to achieve, due to a variety of psychological and sociological factors. These personal stressors may further disable the ability

for a student to become socially integrated into the college environment or establish and sustain new social relationships with peers and academic professionals (American Institute of Stress, 2019; Childress, 2018).

Conversely, students who are able to socially adjust to the college environment more favorably, are able to form social connections with academic professionals and peers, have been found to possess a higher quality of life, PSSE, and increase mental health quality (Cleofas, 2020). Mental health quality was also examined by Grøtan et al. (2019) in a quantitative research study amongst Norwegian college students, which found that students who did not experience severe mental health issues, were more likely to persist academically and possess higher levels of PSSE than students who experienced severe mental illness. This quantitative research study aligns with the findings of Adams et al. (2016), who found that undergraduate college students who exhibited higher levels of stress, were less likely to socially integrate into the institution's social system. Higher levels of stress were also found to be more prominent in first-generation college students and students experiencing financial duress (Adams et al., 2016).

Social-Self Identity

Social identity can possess numerous definitions and delineations. Social identity is defined as “the extent that group memberships become internalized and part of our self-concepts they have implications for our sense of self” (Smith & Nezlek, 2004, p. 243). In other words, social identity is a perception of oneself in a social group or social structure and allows the individual to take advantage of social rewards, social experiences, and social status that are given by the group (Smith & Nezlek, 2004).

In a quantitative research study conducted by Smith and Nezlek (2004) investigating the relationship between social identity and social interactions among undergraduate college students

that are members of fraternities and sororities, findings revealed that students who possessed high social dominance (position in a group's social hierarchy) involved in these social groups (Smith & Nezlek, 2004). Additionally, these members were more respected, held a higher level of social identity, and had a more positive social experience with others in the group than group members who had low social dominance, thus resulting in higher levels of PSSE (Smith & Nezlek, 2004). Additionally, it was revealed that biases occurred between non-members of and members of the sororities and fraternities, and that non-members who attempted to socially interact with members of these social groups, had unpleasant and negative experiences than those who socially interacted between group members (Smith & Nezlek, 2004). These findings reject the discoveries of other research studies that found a positive relationship between student PSSE and social interactions in college, such as with student organizations, clubs, and groups. (American Psychological Association, 2017; Cleofas, 2020; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Tinto, 1975).

Furthermore, relevant literature indicates how social identity is not an automatic process, but one that develops and takes shape over time, as one's social experiences, social comfortability, and social interactions become established (Smith & Nezlek, 2004). The relationship between social identity and PSSE among other types of student social groups, as well as the influence social identity and PSSE has on social interactions with academic professionals, is not robust in the literature and a relationship between these variables cannot be determined at this time.

Fear of Public Opinion

Russell (2009) explained how a majority of one's happiness depends on the social acceptance and approval of those around them. Individuals who feel their opinions, viewpoints,

and perspectives lie within the minority of the public opinion, may suppress expressing their views for fear of social isolation, social rejection, or social backlash (Hampton et al., 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Russell, 2009). These findings align with the literature surrounding public opinion and the fear of expressing one's own thoughts and ideas in a public setting, where their viewpoints may be seen as being in the minority of others. Noelle-Neumann (1993) describes this phenomenon as the beginning of a spiral of silence and how "the climate of opinion depends on who talks and who keeps quiet" (p. 4).

Fear of public opinion can occur in any setting, particularly in a college environment where differing genders, races, social experiences, social status, social comfortability, and political views, are constantly circulating (Jussim, 2018). Individuals who suppress their social views or perspectives are found to do so for fear of becoming socially isolated from peers, fear of disappointment, fear of being socially rejected, or fearful of getting into arguments with others over differing viewpoints (Hampton et al., 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Students may feel that not participating in social expression, such as that in a classroom or other college campus setting, is easier than offending someone, engaging in a potential debate or uncomfortable social situation with others (Jussim, 2018; Knight Foundation, 2018). In fact, just over 50% of college students "feel intimidated" in expressing their personal opinions, thoughts, or ideas that are different than college instructors, which emphasized the hold that public opinion has on college student social expression (Freeman, 2018, para. 2).

Summary

As defined by Tinto (1975) social integration refers to the "degrees of congruency between the individual and his social environment" (p. 107), such as social interactions with peers, participation in extracurricular clubs and activities, and social relationships with

institutional faculty and staff members. These developed social connections and relationships can increase a student's institutional commitment, sense-of-belonging, and social capital by allowing the student to become socially emerged in the institution's social structure (Dennis et al., 2005; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975). Additionally, students who develop social relationships with an institution's faculty and staff members are more likely to persist to degree completion and commit to the institution (Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Tinto (1975) and Torres and Solberg (2001) highlighted the effects of students who fail to socially immerse themselves into the social fabric of an institution, by noting how students may develop feelings of marginalization or alienation, are more likely to drop-out of college, or fail to develop a strong institutional commitment that motivates students to persist to degree completion. These feelings are particularly prominent amongst first-generation, first-year college students who may not possess the social capital, confidence, or social experiences that are needed to form social relationships with peers and academic professionals (Arefi & Jan, 2016; Hermann, 2005; Ponzetti, 1990).

Dennis et al. (2005), Nutt (2003), and Tinto (1975) highlighted the need for college students to become socially integrated amongst academic professionals, such as academic advisors. Students who can develop social relationships with academic advisors raises their level of institutional commitment and sense-of-belonging to the institution, as well as encounter new social rewards and opportunities, such as engaging in new student clubs or activities (Dennis et al., 2005; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975). This perspective aligned with that of Ayllón et al. (2019), who conducted a quantitative research study examining the influence that faculty interactions with undergraduate students had on academic achievement. The authors found that students who had a social connection with faculty members, achieved higher grades and academic

achievement because “they believe that their teachers are dependable and available to offer resources” (Ayllón et al., 2019, p. 1).

Chapter 3 reviews this transcendental phenomenological research study’s methodology. Site information and demographics, participants and sampling method, and instrumentation and data collection are also reviewed. The chapter concludes with examining the data analysis process, limitations, delimitations, ethical issues, and trustworthiness of the research study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Academic advisors are amongst one of the first connections to an institution that new students communicate with, yet many undergraduate college students are unable to socially assimilate themselves with academic advisors beyond their first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Kuh, 2006). Undergraduate college students who fail to socially integrate and form social relationships with academic advisors are placed at an increased risk for becoming socially disconnected or secluded from peers and the institution, developing a muted sense of institutional belonging, or failing to persist to degree completion (Chang, 2016; Connolly & Oberleitne, 2017; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Mccullagh, 2016; Pajares, 1996; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975).

Running parallel to these potentially detrimental outcomes, students who are unable to socially integrate themselves with academic advisors may experience additional academic effects of enrolling in incorrect courses for their degree, a weakened sense of degree requirements, remaining enrolled in a major that does not meet their needs, or transferring into or out of courses that are irrelevant to their degree plan (He & Hutson, 2016; Hunter et al., 2010; Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2013; Spratley, 2020). Moreover, when a student possesses the perceived ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, their institutional commitment, persistence to degree completion, perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE), and social capital increases due to the production of social rewards stemming from social integration (Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975).

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the factors that influenced perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a first-generation undergraduate student's sophomore year of college.

A thorough analyses of current and historical literature related to college student PSSE and social integration resides predominately in the quantitative purview of investigating the empirical relationship between PSSE and academic integration or achievement, PSSE and student-peer social relationships, and PSSE and campus involvement of first-year and/or first-generation college students (Ayele, 2018; Ayllón et al., 2019; Dennis et al., 2005; Friswold-Atwood, 2018; Julia & Veni, 2012; Lai, 2014; Tinto, 1975; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Upah, 2017). These examined relationships in the literature create a conspicuous deficiency in understanding the factors that influence first-generation, sophomore year student PSSE beliefs and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors beyond the first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018).

Research Questions and Design

Aligning with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) perspective of "focusing on the experience itself" (p. 25), the researcher employed a transcendental phenomenological study design to support the grounding of student lived experiences and perspectives into the heart of the research. Through the application of a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design, the researcher explored the factors that influenced student PSSE and the ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during the student's sophomore year of college. To aid in understanding this phenomenon further, the resulting research questions provided guided direction and discovery on common factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors:

- RQ 1: From a first-generation, sophomore year undergraduate student participant perspective, what lived experiences have influenced their perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs?

- RQ 2: How do first-generation undergraduate college students feel their lived experiences have influenced their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college?

The ability to root interpreted human experiences into the fabric of the research study allocated for personal lived experiences to surface and be interwoven into the commonalities and themes that shaped the explored phenomenon in this research study and assisted in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2019; Peoples, 2021).

Site Information and Demographics/Setting

A conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine was chosen for the conduction of this transcendental phenomenological research study, due to the accessibility and proximity of the geographic location to the researcher. The site institution is comprised of three locations in southern and mid-coast Maine and is one of the member schools in a seven-member public education system in the state of Maine. Between all three campuses, the site institution has roughly 6,500 part-time and full-time, residential and commuter undergraduate students enrolled and about 23 full-time undergraduate professional academic advisors. Of the estimated 6,500 enrolled students, about 47% are first-generation degree seeking college students, indicating that neither parent of the student possesses a bachelor's degree (Maine's Public Universities, 2021). The sample for this study was nine current undergraduate degree-seeking college students that did not possess a previous or current working or personal relationship with the researcher. Participants were enrolled either full-time or part-time at any of the three campuses at the site institution. This sample size aimed to provide information saturation on understanding the explored phenomenon further and was centered on understanding student lived experiences in relation to the phenomenon, rather than on the

number of participants in the research study (Peoples, 2021). The examined sample were not restricted to enrollment status, residential status, age, or enrolled major.

Participants/Sampling Method

Supporting current and historical literature suggests that first-generation college students are more inclined to being socially disadvantaged than that of their continuing-education peers, primarily due to a lack of established social capital, social experiences, awareness of PSSE, and social motivation, which are the primary ingredients for a successful social integration into a new environment (Choy, 2002; Eleby, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Macias, 2015; Nunez & Carroll, 1998). Due to the enrichment of providing first-generation college students with a plethora of institutional social and academic resources during their first-year of college, such as campus living learning communities (LLCs), first-year student seminars, and faculty mentors, first-generation undergraduate college students may develop feelings of abandonment, neglect, or disconnection from the institution when they reach their sophomore year of college (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Williams & Manning, 2014). These adverse feelings are often a direct result of first-year enrichment programs not extending past the first year of a students' college experience, causing social and academic challenges for sophomore year students to remain integrated with the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). Sophomore year college students, who are also first-generation students, are also eight times more likely to drop out of college during their sophomore year, and are predisposed to lacking the necessary social skills, experiences, confidence, and PSSE to remain socially integrated into a new social system (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014). Hunter et al. (2010), Schaller (2014), and Sterling (2018) emphasized the importance of additional research needed

for this specific population, as there is limited research regarding sophomore students and their specific student experience.

This transcendental phenomenological research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to obtain eligible undergraduate sophomore year college students that met the required criteria for the research study. A sample pool of nine participants allowed the researcher to obtain rich, descriptive data of a distinct group, while amplifying the information collected until the point of saturation was achieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). The required criteria selected for participant candidacy in the research study were (a) must be a self-identified first-generation college student, (b) an active undergraduate degree seeking student with 24-53 credits accumulated, (c) enrolled at [site institution] at least part-time, (d) does not possess a working or personal relationship with the researcher, (e) have completed at least two semesters of study at [site institution], and (f) able to participate in a 60-90 minute Zoom interview.

Purposeful sampling was chosen for this research study because this sampling method allowed for participants to be representative of “what is typical, normal, and average” in the college environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). As most higher education institutions possess a student body encompassed of sophomore year, transfer, residential, commuter, and first-generation students, the researcher was able to capture data from typical student body groups, while specifically focusing on a sophomore year, first-generation student sub-population.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

To obtain participants for this research study who met the required criteria, the researcher employed several virtual recruitment strategies to gather volunteers for this research study. Once the appropriate permissions from the site institution to advertise the need for eligible participants for the research study were obtained, social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook,

advertised information about the research study and required criteria to be eligible to participate in the study. In addition to social media posts, the researcher also utilized professional advising colleagues to offer word-of-mouth referrals for students who met the required criteria to participate in the research study, as well as had academic advising colleagues securely email undergraduate, first-generation sophomore students a research study advertisement (Appendix A) and recruitment flyer (Appendix B). A total of 10 participants had volunteered to participate in the research study and were confirmed by the researcher to have met the required criteria. The researcher securely emailed each participant's institution-issued email account to schedule a mutually convenient time to conduct a semi-structured one-on-one recorded virtual interview. A semi-structured one-on-one interview format was chosen for this transcendental phenomenological research study due to this format providing the researcher with moderate control over interviews questions, while simultaneously offering flexibility for follow-up and probing question to be asked during the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Once equally convenient interview days and times were established with each study participant, one-on-one interviews were conducted through a video and audio software platform called Zoom, to ensure both researcher and participant safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant received, reviewed, and acknowledged the participant consent form (Appendix C), which was securely emailed to each participant's site institution-issued email address prior to the interview. By reviewing this participant consent form, participants indicated that they had their questions answered and agreed to take part in this research study. Each participant, however, had the right to withdraw their participation at any time during the research study, in which the researcher would cease to use and destroy any data that may have already been collected from the participant to preserve data collection dependability. Once the participant

consent form had been acknowledged at the start of each participant interview, the researcher began recording the interview with Zoom. After each one-on-one interview was completed, audio and video recording were turned off, and the transcript from the interview was saved and stored on the researcher's password protected work-issued laptop to safeguard confidential information and participant privacy.

Upon completing each one-on-one interview and storing each interview transcript securely on the researcher's work-issued laptop, the researcher manually transcribed each interview transcript line-by-line against the audio recording for accuracy and validity. Once each interview transcript had been manually transcribed by the researcher, the final transcription was securely sent via email to each study participant's institution-issued email address to confirm accuracy of the data collected during their one-on-one interview. Following confirmation of accuracy from each study participant, participants securely emailed the transcript back to the researcher via the student's institution-issued email address within five days. If one or more participants did not provide email confirmation of transcript accuracy from their one-on-one interview, the researcher followed-up with the participant(s) via email, requesting that the confirmed transcript be emailed back to the researcher within two days from the follow-up email. If email confirmation from the participant(s) were still not achieved, the researcher sent one final email request to the participant(s), indicating that if confirmation of transcript accuracy was not emailed back to the researcher within one day, the participant(s) would be withdrawn from the research study, and the data collected during their one-on-one interview would be destroyed and not used in the data analysis process. Of the 10 study participants, the researcher withdrew one participant from the research study, due to the participant not confirming accuracy of the data collected during their one-on-one interview in the allotted timeframe provided to the participant.

This participant was notified via email to their institution-issued email address that they had been withdrawn from the research study and data collected from their one-on-one interview was destroyed and would not be used in the data analysis process. A total of nine study participants were sustained throughout the duration of the remainder of the research study. After the researcher received each confirmed one-on-one interview transcript from participants within the allotted timeframe, the researcher began the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to understand and illuminate the unique lived experiences of a sample in relation to a specific phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). To provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the research study's phenomenon, inductive thematic analysis of the collected data was performed to analyze each participant transcript from the conducted one-on-one interviews. Inductive thematic analysis was chosen as the coding and analysis method for this research study because it allowed the researcher to immerse themselves into each line of dialogue from the participant transcripts to discover embedded themes, patterns, and commonalities within the distinct lived experiences of study participants. Additionally, inductive thematic analysis is widely used in phenomenological research studies, as this coding and data analysis method allows for researchers to explore and illuminate participants' beliefs, experiences, emotions, feelings, and perspectives, and allows themes to emerge directly from the data (Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2015).

The data analysis process involved the researcher sorting the data from each participant interview transcript into datums, which allowed for the information to be coded more efficiently and adequately (Saldaña, 2015). Once the data from each participant transcript were sorted into datums, the researcher performed a line-by-line microanalysis of the data from each participant

transcript to form initial codes of the data. Thoroughly analyzing the data from each participant transcript to form initial codes assisted in promoting validity amongst the collected data, as this form of comprehensive analysis “builds directly from the “raw data” (Khandkar, 2014, p. 8).

Once initial codes were created, the researcher analyzed each code to form numerous primary categories that represented initial commonalities amongst the lived experiences of participants in relation to the study’s research questions (Kuckartz, 2015). Once the data were coded and organized into manageable primary categories, the researcher reviewed data from each primary category to determine sub-categories of collected data. Once the sub-categories were established and collected data within each sub-category were comprehensively analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, the researcher generated a summary of results based on the detected themes in accordance with the study’s research questions (Kuckartz, 2015). Seven themes emerged from the collected data that were representative of both research questions.

To maintain validity and credibility during the data analysis process, research study participants were securely emailed the discovered themes from their one-on-one interview to their site institution-issued email address. This opportunity allowed for each research study participant to review the revealed themes from their one-on-one interview for confirmation of accuracy of themes present in the collected data. This additional layer of participant member checking permitted for the data collected in the research study to be a confirmed, accurate representation of the lived experiences of research study participants and that revealed themes were correct (Peoples, 2021).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues

There were several limitations in this transcendental phenomenological research study that were recognized. Peoples (2021) defined limitations in research as “methodological

weaknesses” (p.36) that are typically outside of the control of the researcher conducting the study, such as time constraints. Identified limitations of this research study included researcher biases, which are common in phenomenological study designs (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Biases typically stem from personal assumptions and beliefs of the studied phenomenon and may subjectively influence data analysis in a reactive manner (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Moreover, because the researcher is employed at the site institution where this research study was conducted, direct and indirect researcher biases may have existed.

Additionally, the sample for this research study were restricted to a distinctive group of first-generation, sophomore year college students, who have earned between 24-53 undergraduate college credits at a four-year college in Maine: therefore, limiting the collection of experiences from other student groups, such as first-year students and geographic locations. Furthermore, conducting one-on-one participant interviews via Zoom instead of in-person may have limited the social expressions and comfortability level of participants that added to the richness of their shared experiences. It is also noted that this research study had taken place during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which may have impacted a students’ mental, personal, emotional, or physical health and ability to participate in a research study.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) defined a research study’s credibility as “whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the reader” (p. 176). Cultivating credibility ensures that the research study’s methodology, research questions, and data analysis align with the research study’s purpose and match the intended goals of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). To promote credibility of the research study, the

researcher practiced full disclosure to study participants. Full disclosure explained the researcher's identity, purpose for the research study, how data collected will be used, and how participant's identity will be protected through practiced confidentiality and with pseudonyms (Lavrakas, 2008). Additionally, the researcher engaged in auditability by having a virtual or paper trail outlining the steps of the research process. Auditability ensures the audience can follow the steps and thought processes of the research study in a logical, ethical, and credible manner (Auburn University, n.d.; Beck, 1993) Furthermore, the researcher established internal validity and transferability of this research study through participant member checks, ample engagement in the data collection process, bracketing/epoché, and phenomenological reduction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021).

Participant Member Checks

Participant member checks refers to the process of ensuring the data collected is accurate and adequately captures the participant's experience, story, expressions, and perspectives, by having each participant review the collected data or interview transcript (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To promote credibility and accuracy of collected data in this transcendental phenomenological research study, the researcher securely emailed each participant their completed interview transcript to their institution-issued email address for review. Each participant had up to five days to review their interview transcript for accuracy and to validate that the data collected during the one-on-one interview were correct. If one or more participants did not provide email confirmation of transcript accuracy from the one-on-one interview within the noted timeframe, the researcher followed-up with the participant(s) via email, requesting that the confirmed transcript be securely emailed back to the researcher within two days of the follow-up email. If email confirmation from the participant(s) were still not achieved, the

researcher sent one final email request to the participant(s), indicating that if confirmation of transcript accuracy is not emailed back to the researcher within one day, the participant(s) will be withdrawn from the research study, and their interview transcript would not be used in the data analysis process or research study. Additionally, the researcher engaged in an additional layer of participant member checking by confirming accuracy of discovered themes from each participant one-on-one interview. This process was conducted by the researcher securely emailing to each participant's institution-issued email address, the revealed themes from their one-on-one interview for confirmation.

Ample Engagement

Ample engagement in the data collection process refers to “trying to get as close as possible to participants’ understanding of a phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). In transcendental phenomenological research studies, ample engagement is often reflected in allowing adequate time for study participant to share their lived experiences in conducted one-on-one interviews, as well as ensuring flexibility is given for follow-up and probing questions to be asked by the researcher (Peoples, 2021). Peoples (2021) further highlighted the importance for researchers to engage directly with the lived experiences shared by participants by immersing themselves into the data to discover, explore, and understand the studied phenomenon further. Once the researcher received the same information repeatedly from participants, such as common themes or patterns in the lived experiences shared, the researcher has reached a point of information saturation and were ready to begin the data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Bracketing/Epoché

In phenomenological research studies, the goal of this methodology is to “depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26), thus personal beliefs, biases, and prejudices should be suspended from the research process (Peoples, 2021). Personal beliefs, biases, and prejudices of the researcher can influence data collection and analysis, which reduces the study’s credibility, validity, and transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To aid in suspending the immersion of personal beliefs, biases, and prejudices into the research study, the researcher employed Husserl’s (1906) concept of bracketing/epoché. Bracketing/epoché, refers to intentionally setting aside personal assumptions or judgements temporarily, to avoid inadvertently influencing data collection or analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). This strategy does not focus on eliminating personal biases or judgements, but rather setting them aside (Peoples, 2021).

Bracketing/epoché, allowed the researcher to “become a stranger in a strange land” (Peoples, 2021, p. 30), by viewing the data, phenomenon, and student experiences from an unknown, novel perspective. Husserl believed that in order for researchers to minimize predisposed biases, judgements, and assumptions of information, they must immerse themselves into the data with a new, objective perspective (Peoples, 2021). To minimize the influence of researcher biases, judgments, or assumptions of the research study, the researcher utilized Husserl’s bracketing/epoché, through the use phenomenological reduction by “temporarily suspending judgements to focus on analysis of experience” (Peoples, 2021). Bracketing/epoché, and phenomenological reduction were maintained through a reflective notebook before the data collection process began, which delineated the researcher’s personal judgements, biases, or assumptions of the research study, study findings, and participant experiences.

Transferability

Transferability implies the capability that a research study can be conducted in another setting and produce findings that can be applicable to other research studies or situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This transcendental phenomenological research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to obtain eligible undergraduate sophomore year college students that met the required criteria for the research study. This sample, methodology, and setting can be applied to other research studies for further exploration and investigation and may produce similar student experiences. Due to the research study taking place at a public higher education institution in Maine, findings from future studies in different geographic locations may produce unique findings.

Dependability

To support protecting participant rights and fostering credibility within this research study, each participant received, reviewed, and acknowledged the participant consent form prior to the start of each one-on-one interview via Zoom. The participant consent form described the purpose of the research study, risks and benefits associated with participating in the research study, and what is involved in the research study, including the method used for data collection. By reviewing and acknowledging the consent form, participants indicated that they had their questions answered and agreed to take part in this research study.

Assisting in reducing any ethical concerns or personal biases in this research study, eligible participants must not have had a known personal or professional relationship with the researcher. A known personal or professional relationship were defined as being one of the researcher's current or former advisees in the site institution's School of Business or Computer Science department, having been a student in a previously taught course by the researcher, or

knowing the researcher personally. To confirm that participants did not have a known personal or professional relationship with the researcher, and to maintain ethical standards during this research study, participants were screened to ensure they met the outlined criteria for participation eligibility. If a participant possessed a known personal or professional relationship with the researcher, the participant was informed via their institution-issued email address that they were ineligible to participate in the research study.

Confirmability

Confirmability in research is established through the employment of remaining reflective, neutral, and aware of oneself in the research process (Nyirenda et al., 2020; Queens University of Charlotte, 2020.). Incorporating one's personal biases, judgement, and assumptions into research is inherent in the research process, particularly in qualitative research studies, where subjective participant experiences are collected and analyzed (Nyirenda et al., 2020). To encourage confirmability in the research study, the researcher employed strategies, such as practicing reflexivity and neutrality, to acknowledge personal biases or judgements and minimize the influence they have on the research process. Nyirenda et al. (2020) stated that personal biases cannot be completely disregarded or ruled out from the research process, as it is natural to have preconceived notions or assumptions about the research process. To minimize any preconceived judgements, biases, or assumptions, the researcher engaged in bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction to temporarily suspend one's personal biases from influencing the research process, including data collection and shared lived student experiences (Peoples, 2021). Bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction were maintained before the data collection process through a reflective notebook that expressed any personal assumptions, biases, and judgements that the researcher had with the research study and collected data

Summary

Academic advisors are amongst one of the first connections to an institution that new students communicate with, yet many undergraduate college students are unable to socially assimilate themselves with academic advisors beyond their first year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Kuh, 2006). Students who do not possess the ability to socially assimilate with academic advisors place themselves at a heightened risk for becoming isolated from peers, disconnected from the institution, and failing to persist to degree completion (Connolly & Oberleitne, 2017; Pajares, 1996; Smith, 2010; Tinto, 1975). This research study sought to add further knowledge, discovery, and understanding of common factors that influenced student perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and students' ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

This research study followed a transcendental phenomenological design, which was designed to understand the lived experiences of a specific phenomenon through vivid, rich descriptions and "meaningful reality" (Peoples, 2021, p. 5). This research study took place at a four-year, public higher education institution in the state of Maine. To assist in producing credibility, internal validity, and transferability of this research study, the researcher conducted participant member checks, utilized bracketing/epoché, and phenomenological reduction, to temporarily append personal biases, judgements, and assumptions during data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). Additionally, the researcher practiced ample engagement during data collection to promote adequate time for one-on-one interviews to be conducted and researcher immersion of collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). Furthermore, participant rights and ethical concerns were also at the forefront of this research

study, as conflict of interest and ethical concerns were minimized through reliable data collection and analysis methods, specific eligible requirements for participants, and informed consent.

Chapter 4 presents research study participant demographics, such as enrollment status and major of study. Following this information, a comprehensive presentation of themes that emerged during the data analysis process and association to both research study questions are reviewed. This chapter concludes by summarizing research study results in relation to the purpose and problem statement of the research study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Albert Bandura (1994) defined PSSE as personal confidence or "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). Current and historical research findings indicate that an undergraduate student's sophomore year of college is one of the most critical periods in their academic career and that roughly 20% of undergraduate college students dropout during this time (Hunter et al., 2010; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). An additional 10% of undergraduate college students drop out between sophomore and senior years, with negative social and academic experiences as a contributing factor to deciding to leave college before degree completion (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Hunter et al., (2010) further explains how sophomore year college students are learning who they are as a person and their purpose in life, what their beliefs are, exploring various majors and academic interests, and questioning whether to remain at the institution or transfer out.

This research study delved into the rich, descriptive, lived experiences of first-generation undergraduate college students to "construct a meaningful reality" (Peoples, 2021, p. 5) of the experienced phenomenon and understand the factors that influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during the sophomore year of college. This transcendental phenomenological research study was conducted at a conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine. The site institution is comprised of three locations in southern and mid-coast Maine and is one of the member schools in a seven-member

public education system in the state of Maine. The sample for this study were nine current undergraduate degree-seeking sophomore college students, who met the required criteria for participating in this research study. The required criteria selected for participant candidacy in the research study were (a) must be a self-identified first-generation college student, (b) an active undergraduate degree seeking student with 24-53 credits accumulated, (c) enrolled at [site institution] at least part-time, (d) does not possess a working or personal relationship with the researcher, (e) have completed at least two semesters of study at [site institution], and (f) able to participate in a 60-90 minute Zoom interview. To aid in understanding this phenomenon further, the following research questions provided guided direction and discovery on common factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors:

- RQ 1: From a first-generation, sophomore year undergraduate student participant perspective, what lived experiences have influenced their perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs?
- RQ 2: How do first-generation undergraduate college students feel their lived experiences have influenced their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college?

The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling method to recruit eligible participants that met the required criteria for the research study. A semi-structured one-on-one interview format was chosen for this research study, and data analysis were conducted using inductive thematic analysis to discover themes, patterns, and commonalities amongst the collected data and lived experiences of study participants. Inductive thematic analysis was chosen for maximum discovery of themes, patterns, and commonalities through the dialogue of the lived experiences of study participants.

Participant Demographics

This transcendental phenomenological research study utilized a purposeful sampling method to obtain eligible participants that met the required criteria for the research study. This sample pool allowed the researcher to obtain rich, descriptive data of a distinct group, while amplifying the information collected until the point of saturation was achieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). Out of 10 participant volunteers, a total of nine participants were sustained throughout the duration of the research study. The researcher withdrew one study participant during the data collection process, due to the participant not confirming accuracy of the data collected during their one-on-one interview in the allotted timeframe provided to the participant. This participant was notified via email to their institution-issued email address that they had been withdrawn from the research study and data collected from their one-on-one interview was destroyed and would not be used in the data analysis process.

Research study participants expressed diverse attributes and demographics. These diverse attributes and demographics varied in age, major of study, enrollment status, culture, and social experiences. A summary of this demographic information is in Table 1:

Table 1*Summary of Study Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Major	Enrollment Status	Residential Status
Victoria	Psychology	Full-time	Commuter
Amy	Criminology	Full-time	Commuter
Elizabeth	Health Sciences	Part-time	Commuter
Anna	Nursing	Part-time	Commuter
Richard	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Full-time	Residential
Maggie	Undeclared	Full-time	Commuter
Anthony	Undeclared	Full-time	Commuter
Emersyn	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Full-time	Commuter
Jack	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Full-time	Commuter

Note: Table 1 illustrates the demographics of participants in this transcendental phenomenological research study. Table 1 and all incorporated data were constructed by the researcher and is unique to this specific research study.

Analysis Method

A semi-structured one-on-one interview format was chosen for this transcendental phenomenological research study due to this format providing the researcher with moderate control over interviews questions, while simultaneously offering flexibility for follow-up and probing question to be asked during the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One-on-one participant interviews were conducted through a video and audio software platform called Zoom, to ensure both researcher and participant safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the data collection and analysis process, the researcher utilized Husserl's (1906) concept of bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction. Bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction refers to intentionally setting aside personal assumptions or judgements temporarily, to avoid inadvertently influencing data collection or analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021). This strategy does not focus on eliminating personal biases or judgements, but rather setting them aside (Peoples, 2021). Bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction allowed the researcher to "become a stranger in a strange land" (Peoples, 2021, p. 30), by viewing the data, phenomenon, and student experiences from an unknown, novel perspective. Bracketing/epoché and phenomenological reduction were maintained through a reflective notebook prior to the data collection process, which delineated the researcher's personal judgements, biases, or assumptions of the research study, study findings, and participant experiences.

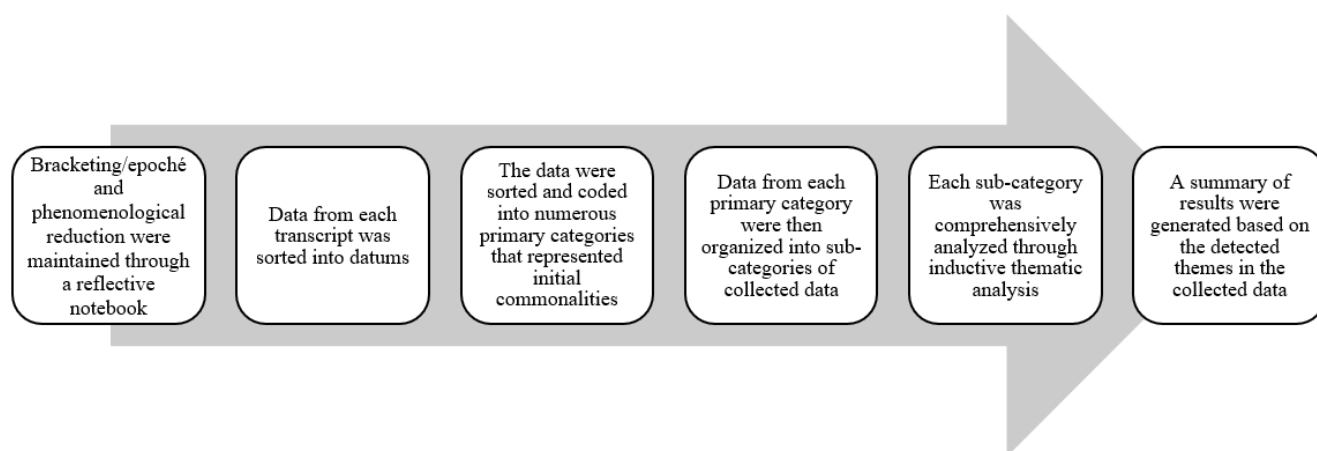
Once the researcher received the same information repeatedly from participants, such as common themes or patterns in the lived experiences shared, the researcher had reached a point of information saturation and was ready to begin the data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis process began by the researcher sorting the data from each participant interview transcript into datums, which allowed the information to be coded more efficiently and adequately (Saldaña, 2015). Once the data from each participant transcript were sorted into datums, the researcher performed a line-by-line microanalysis of the data from each participant transcript to form initial codes of the data. Thoroughly analyzing the data from each participant transcript to form initial codes assisted in promoting validity amongst the collected data, as this form of comprehensive analysis "builds directly from the "raw data" (Khandkar, 2014, p. 8).

Once initial codes were created, the researcher analyzed each code to form numerous primary categories that represented initial commonalities amongst the lived experiences of participants in relation to the study's research questions (Kuckartz, 2015). Once the data were coded and organized into manageable primary categories, the researcher reviewed data from each primary category to determine sub-categories of collected data. Once the sub-categories were established and collected data within each sub-category were comprehensively analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, the researcher generated a summary of results based on the detected themes in accordance with the study's two research questions (Kuckartz, 2015). Seven themes that emerged from the collected data that were associated with both research study questions. The discovered themes that emerged from the data analysis process were internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources. A summary of the coding and data analysis process is in

Figure 1:

Figure 1

Summary of the Coding and Data Analysis Process



Note: Figure 1 illustrates the coding and data analysis process that the researcher utilized in this transcendental phenomenological research study. Figure 1 and all incorporated data were constructed by the researcher and is unique to this specific research study.

Presentation of Results and Findings

The ability to root interpreted human experiences into the fabric of the research study allocated for personal lived experiences to surface and be interwoven into the commonalities and themes that shaped the explored phenomenon in this research study and assisted in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2019; Peoples, 2021). The themes that were revealed in the data analysis process from the lived experiences of the nine research study participants were internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources. These discovered themes were representative of both research study questions. These discovered themes represented the lived experiences that study participants faced with the phenomenon and how these experiences have influenced their PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Internal/External Social Support Systems

A common theme that was derived from the lived experiences of study participants were the influence that internal and/or external social support systems had on their social confidence, PSSE beliefs, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. These internal and external social support systems surfaced in the lived experiences of study participants as peers, collegiate teammates, family members, workplace colleagues, faculty and staff members, and friends. When asked about what lived experiences

have influenced one's confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors, Emersyn shared that living with her mother away from their home country has directly impacted her social confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors. Emersyn stated, "She's my biggest supporter. She plays a major role in everything that I'm doing in life. I even wrote my college essay about her." Emersyn explained how having her mother's support throughout her life has directly influenced her social confidence and ability to reach out and communicate with academic advisors with questions, concerns, and support.

Similar to Emersyn, Maggie shared that her lived experiences with her parents have influenced her social confidence and PSSE beliefs, as well as ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Maggie shared that her parents instilled an "open relationship" with her throughout her life, which has allowed Maggie to feel safe and comfortable when sharing information with others. Maggie shared that she has had "a very good support system throughout my years, and I think that really carried over into college." Maggie expressed that these support systems have allowed her to "learn to trust people" in her life, which has made it easier for her to socially integrate with academic advisors.

Additionally, Jack shared that his workplace colleagues have directly impacted his social confidence, PSSE beliefs, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors due to being able to "communicate and know what we have to do when one is down. We can build each other up to be at that level again." Jack communicated that this type of confidence continues to build over time with these lived workplace experiences, which can be applied to various settings and environments, such as a higher education institution. In addition to workplace colleagues, Jack shared that the support from his wife, grandmother, and aunt also helped him to build the confidence he needed to pursue an education and advocate for himself. "She pushes me to get

my education. She pushes me to get this degree, and that's what I'm doing. I'm going as hard as I can," Jack stated when describing the support of his wife in his educational pursuits.

Similarly, Anthony shared that his fiancé accounts for "90%" of his support system, along with his family. "I think support helps with confidence a lot. I have a very supportive family, have very supportive advisors, and I live with my fiancé," Anthony shared. Anthony expressed that these support systems have influenced his social confidence and ability to communicate with new people and in new settings, such as academic advisors. "If I didn't have any of them, I probably would have just tried to deal with it on my own, and probably failing all of my classes, then probably not be in the greatest spot," Anthony further shared.

Furthermore, Amy shared how her lived experiences with her academic advisor as an internal support system has been beneficial to her academic success and social adjustment in college. Amy expressed how when she first started college, she had to "find a way to figure things out myself or find an outside source to be able to help me do this because I wasn't sure where to start or to end." Amy further described that this experience is when she reached out to her academic advisor and began to form a social relationship with them. "That was when I really noticed, like the importance and how impactful they are," Amy vocalized. Amy further vocalized that she had "a lot of questions for my advisor, and a lot of them honestly, about 80% of them had to do with the school." Without the support of her academic advisor, Amy shared that her academic advisor's support has "absolutely" contributed to her confidence, PSSE, and ability to continue the social relationship with her academic advisor.

In comparison to Amy, Elizabeth expressed that the support of her academic advisor has influenced her PSSE and ability to socially integrate with her academic advisor. Elizabeth shared that when she was applying to the nursing program at [site institution], her academic advisor

illustrated all possible avenues into the nursing program and how to achieve admission. Elizabeth vocalized that since she had been out of school for a length of time and is an older student, and without the support of her academic advisor, applying to the nursing program would have “felt a lot more out of reach.” Elizabeth further vocalized how an important component of building confidence and PSSE to communicate in new social situations and environments is “I think it’s important, in part, to the success of feeling confident or being confident is feeling heard and really feeling like people are understanding of what you’re trying to get across,” Elizabeth expressed. Elizabeth further emphasized how her academic advisor has helped her to build her confidence in helping others communicate and achieve educational goals as well, such as with Elizabeth’s daughter, who will be starting college in the near future.

These internal and external support systems described by study participants had influenced their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Without these internal/external support systems, study participants felt that they may not have developed the confidence they needed to actively communicate with others, such as academic advisors, or have the PSSE needed to engage in communicative tasks. Amongst these internal/external social support systems shared by study participants, family members, peers, and academic advisors were amongst the most common represented support systems for study participants.

Social Relationship with Academic Advisor

All nine research study participants agreed that lived experiences with their academic advisor had directly impacted their social confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors beyond their first year of college. When participants were asked what they feel contributes to the development of one’s confidence, particularly in social situations, such as

communicating with an academic advisor, the most common keywords used by participants were “support,” “first-impressions,” “trust,” “reassurance,” and “honesty.” Study participants vocalized that their social relationship with their academic advisor has the ability to build, develop, and boost their confidence in social situations, as well as communicate questions, concerns, academic plans, and academic interests with their academic advisor.

When responding to this interview question, Anthony stated that his lived experiences with his academic advisor is an “important part of social integration,” and that his academic advisor’s willingness to help, support, and quick response time has provided him with the confidence he needs to actively communicate with his academic advisors. “I don’t think I would really have the confidence to even be able to talk to my advisor if I didn’t have as much support as I did,” shared Anthony. Anthony expressed that the support he has received from his academic advisor has contributed to his confidence level, PSSE, and ability to initiate and continue communicating with his academic advisor. “She definitely supports me all the time because whenever I reached out to her, she has helped me get through a pretty rough year and just supporting me in making decisions,” Anthony further described.

Similarly, Jack stated, “I feel, I try to reach out to my advisors as much as possible because I need them throughout this process, and I know I can’t do this alone.” Jack further shared how his academic advisor has always listened to his academic goals and interests and provided him with the confidence he needed to “be successful in college and be able to know that I can at my age,” Jack explained. Jack shared that when he first began college, after being out of school since 2013, he chose a different major that did not align with his academic and career goals. Jack described that how his academic advisor “knew what he should be taking” and

“pointed me in the right direction” for exploring other majors that fit with Jack’s career and academic goals.

When sharing her lived experiences for the same interview question, Emersyn explained how her first year of undergraduate studies were “confusing” and “overwhelming” and that her experience with a previous academic advisor were not a good fit. Emersyn shared that once she changed her major and got assigned a new academic advisor, her confidence to actively communicate with the new academic advisor developed and helped her to form a social relationship with the new advisor. “If you have a person [advisor], who is available to you, like any time of the day, any time you have a question. I’ll say I’m pretty confident now, but back then, no,” Emersyn shared when describing her first-year lived experience with a previous academic advisor. Emersyn further described that whenever she has a question or concern about something, she is confident in her ability to reach out to her academic advisor and communicate these questions and concerns. “Whenever I have, like if there’s any time of day that a question pops in my head, I just give her a quick email, and I get a response within like two hours, so I think it’s great, Emersyn described.

Running parallel to these participant perspectives and lived experiences, Richard shared that if he has encountered a negative social situation in the past, it will prevent him from actively engaging in a similar situation in the future. Richard stated, “If I have a lot of bad experiences with talking to people, then why would I go into a new meeting assuming that it would be good?” Richard further shared that lived experiences, whether positive or negative, in a social setting, such as with an academic advisor, will predict how confident and communicative he will be in new, similar social situations. Richard also expressed that power dynamics contributes to his confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors. Richard described this

experience as not feeling “like you are below someone,” but rather “learning from someone.” Conversely, Richard explained how “If something good has happened before, I’m more likely to feel as that will happen again.” Richard further shared that he recently emailed his academic advisor regarding a question that he had and that he “wasn’t afraid” and “felt comfortable” in doing so, primarily due to previous successful attempts in communicating with his academic advisor about questions, concerns, and academic goals.

When responding to this interview question, Amy vocalized that she is “not too confident” when communicating with her academic advisor, which may hinder her ability to reach out to her academic advisor for assistance. Amy shared that “reassurance from the advisors themselves. Like actually showing me that they’re willing to help me and that this isn’t a bother” would help improve her social confidence and PSSE beliefs. Amy further expressed how academic advisors who “check-in regularly, just to make sure we are doing okay,” also helps to build the advisor/advisee social relationship and confidence in one’s ability to communicate with academic advisors. Amy further shared how she feels that “there could be a little room to reach out a little more” from academic advisors to students but feels that “students and advisors are trying to bridge that gap of confusion and communication” during their sophomore year.

When study participants were asked how their lived experiences have influenced their confidence and ability to *continue* communicating with an academic advisor, many participants expressed that their lived experiences had caused them to be “nervous,” “anxious,” or “confused,” when initially meeting with an academic advisor. These feelings were typically generated due to being uncertain of the role of academic advisors and the anxiety of meeting someone new. However, a majority of study participants conveyed that after meeting with their

academic advisor a few times and learning the role of the academic advisor, their confidence builds, and it becomes easier to communicate and socially integrate with academic advisors.

Victoria stated how her confidence “builds as it occurs” and once she had a few meetings with her academic advisor, she felt like “this is something that I’m going to be able to kind of keep up.” When comparing her lived experiences from first year to sophomore year of college, Victoria shared how “had a lot more questions, just because I was still new.” Victoria further explained how “Now, I feel a little bit more comfortable navigating things myself. It’s not so much like frantic, ‘oh my God,’ what is happening? It’s more like, hey this is chill sort of thing,” Victoria described. Victoria further vocalized how she has “gotten more comfortable and confident as a student,” as well as in “advising and sort of my ability to communicate.”

Comparably, in response to the same interview question, Anthony shared that his lived experiences with his academic advisor have provided him with the support, reassurance, and confidence he needs to feel good about communicating with his academic advisor. Anthony vocalized that this social integration with his academic advisor has led him to “being more confident” in knowing that his academic advisor is going to support him and help him “make better decisions.” Anthony further shared how he frequently meets with his academic advisor to discuss course registration, academic goals and interests, and course scheduling. “I have meetings with her all the time about registering for classes and trying to figure things out for reaching my goals,” Anthony expressed. “I think I’m pretty good at communicating, and I do it all the time because I need a lot of help,” Anthony further stated.

Similarly, Maggie shared that having the support and trust of her academic advisors, professors, and collegiate sports coach has “really helped my social skills, my communication skills, and my ability to do my schoolwork confidently.” Maggie shared how “my advisor has

been really good at balancing the academics, as well as the mental and social and emotional aspect of being a student.” Maggie further expressed that “Any advisor, to me, needs to understand that you are a student, but first you need to be emotionally and mentally able to take on the courses.” Maggie further elaborated that because of the support she has received from her academic advisors, she has been able to “manage my courses really well.”

Study participants expressed how their social relationship with their academic advisor contributed to their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. When study participants felt supported, trusted, and heard by their academic advisor, it triggered a “confidence boost” in most study participants, which allowed them to generate the PSSE needed to socially integrate with academic advisors. This PSSE and feelings of trust and support from academic advisors also allowed participants to continue their social relationship with their academic advisor and feel supported when future questions or concerns arose.

Sociocultural Influences

An additional common theme that emerged from the collected data amongst study participants were sociocultural influences, such as culture or cultural beliefs, generational status, and personal belief system. The most common sociocultural factor that influenced student confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college was being a first-generation student. The subsequent influential sociocultural factors were culture or cultural beliefs, followed by personal beliefs system, such as placing a valued emphasis on education.

When study participants were asked the follow-up question of how being a first-generation college student has impacted their confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors, eight out of nine study participants expressed that being a first-generation

college student has either positively or negatively impacted their social confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, primarily due to not having parents who had experienced college. Elizabeth shared that her lived experiences as a first-generation college student stemmed from having “baby boomer parents, who worked really, really hard.” Elizabeth stated that due to this, she had a very “naïve college experience” and did not know how to navigate the college experience. Elizabeth stated that being a first-generation college student “definitely didn’t make me more confident. If anything, it might have made me feel perhaps a little less confident.” Elizabeth further vocalized how, “education, I don’t know that it wasn’t highly valued in my family, I just think that it was pretty unobtainable for generations and inherently leaked into mine.” Although Elizabeth shared that being a first-generation student caused her to feel “less familiar with the whole process” than if she had parents that attended college, she described her feelings as a first-generation student as “feeling proud,” primarily because “I am going to be the nurse that I’ve always wanted to be and it kind of broke that [generational] cycle,” Elizabeth described. “It takes one person to be the first-gen, but then it’s like, you know it can break into habit in the family, so I just think it was good for my family to see that,” Elizabeth further vocalized.

Jack shared a similar perspective as a first-generation college student and shared that he “grew up in the system” and was raised by his grandmother and aunt, who were “real old school Puerto Rican women.” Due to these cultural beliefs and practices, Jack shared that his upbringing was grounded in “church and education,” which contributed to Jack’s interest in furthering his education as a first-generation college student. When describing the cultural practices and beliefs of his aunt, Jack expressed that “she’s a former retired special education teacher,” and that her educational and cultural beliefs “gave me the confidence to go out there, and speak to people,

and be able to learn from people's mistakes, and just pick up a book every now and then," Jack shared. Jack vocalized that he is proud to be a first-generation college student and "I can show my future that I can be successful and only move forward and never backwards, so that's what I try to teach everybody that comes in my path," Jack stated.

Comparatively, Anna expressed that because she did not have parents or grandparents who had attended college, she "didn't get the help because they don't really know it either." Anna expressed how "My dad has no idea either. My grandmother has no idea either. A lot of my friends have a ton of help from their parents, and it's like I have the support from my parents, but I can't get the help because they really don't know it either." Anna further explained how being a first-generation college student has influenced her confidence and ability to communicate with her academic advisor because it has caused her to "be in contact more with my advisor because I have a lot more questions." Anna further stated, "Just being a first-gen student is just so different than if you've had experience in your family. I don't even know how to explain it, but I am the only one of my friends an out of like everyone I know, who has parents who haven't gone to college yet," Anna described.

Additionally, Emersyn vocalized that "it is not easy" being a first-generation student and having lived in a culture that does not typically practice higher education opportunities for women. "First, it is not easy at all when you don't know about college or anything. I'll say it's not easy," Emersyn shared when describing her lived experiences as a first-generation college student. Emersyn expressed that being a first-generation college student has been stressful and overwhelming because her parents had never gone to college. "They don't know anything about college, so they just feel like it's kind of like middle school work," Emersyn explained. When describing her lived experiences as a first-generation college student further, Emersyn stated that

in her first year of college, she felt “so lost” and was not communicating with academic advisors or “paying attention to whomever I needed to.” These adverse feelings and lack of confidence in communicating with academic advisors had Emersyn questioning whether or not she was “on the right path” in college.

Running alongside these participant perspectives and lived experiences, Richard felt it was also challenging to obtain the confidence needed to actively communicate with academic advisors, mostly due to not having parents to “advocate” or “guide” him. Richard shared that “It made it hard in the beginning, made it hard in high school,” but now he is building social confidence through interactions with his academic advisor and self-advocacy. Richard expressed that communicating with his academic advisor “becomes easier and easier” the more he reaches out with questions, concerns, academic plans, and academic interests. “I didn’t have the parents to help guide me, so that I get help in different ways and finding myself,” Richard explained. “I didn’t have my parents to tell me what college is like or anything like that,” Richard shared, which has influenced his confidence and ability to actively communicate with academic advisors.

Additionally, Maggie shared how being a first-generation college student is “a little nerve wracking, I guess, but I think having the support is really nice.” Maggie explained how “when I do get nervous, and I do get scared, I can rely on these advisors.” Maggie further expressed that when she reaches out to her academic advisor, her academic advisor’s response has helped “with building my confidence and being able to reach out on my own.” Maggie described a previous experience when she had reached out to her academic advisor who was on vacation but knew that she would receive a response back “as soon as they get back in the office,” which helped build Maggie’s confidence.

When asked the same interview question regarding how being a first-generation college student has impacted their confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors, Anthony expressed that he “doesn’t really know the answer to that question” because he has never been in a position where he knows what it is like to not be a first-generation college student. “I don’t know what it would have been like if someone else went to college before, if I would have been more confident in making my decision or wouldn’t have,” Anthony stated. Anthony further explained how his personal beliefs of putting in “100% of my effort” into his schoolwork and education has played “a really big part of my confidence.”

Study participants shared that being a first-generation college student have either positively or negatively impacted their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors due to primarily not having the familial support needed to learn what to expect when attending college. Study participants expressed that they did not receive the guidance, knowledge, social experiences, or information they needed from family members, to assist them in navigating the social and academic demands of higher education, as well as how to prepare for this next educational journey in their life. Additionally, the lived experiences of cultural practices and personal belief systems also contributed to some study participants’ confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors.

Lived Experiences in High School

Six out of the nine study participants shared that their lived experiences in high school played a direct role in their social confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Two study participants indicated negative lived experiences in high school, while four study participants indicated positive lived experiences in high school. Three study participants did not express that the lived experiences in

high school had impacted their social confidence, PSSE, or ability to socially integrate with academic advisors.

Positive lived experiences in high school that influenced social confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college were exhibited by Victoria, Amy, Anthony, and Emersyn. These positive lived experiences in high school were commonly found to be related to encounters with high school guidance counselors and programs designed to assist high school students with college preparatory, such as completing college applications, and dual enrollment college classes. When asked to describe what lived experiences participants felt have influenced their confidence and ability to actively communicate with their academic advisor, Victoria shared that her high school guidance counselor assisted her with understanding what classes she needed to take in high school, how to complete paperwork, and “navigate that side of being a student.” Victoria further explained, “I would say that I’ve always had a very close relationship with my guidance counselors,” which contributed to building her confidence and ability to communicate with other academic professionals, such as academic advisors, when she got to college.

Similar to Victoria, Amy responded to this interview question by sharing that her lived experiences throughout high school also helped build her social confidence and PSSE by always having guidance counselors to talk to and share questions or concerns with. Amy stated that her high school guidance counselors “have always been there for me and nobody had ever led me down the wrong direction, so that has kept me up and kept me going.” Amy further vocalized that she initially developed trust and confidence in high school when working with guidance counselors, which has allowed her to feel more comfortable and confident in socially integrating with academic advisors in college.

Comparably, Anthony expressed that his lived experiences in high school that influenced his confidence and PSSE were dual enrollment college classes that Anthony took while in high school. Anthony also shared that he had taken Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school and participated in Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), which helped prepare him for college and build his confidence for communicating with others in a new social setting, such as academic advisors in college. Anthony vocalized that these programs in high school were “reassuring that I’m doing things that are good, even though sometimes it felt like everything was crashing down.” Anthony continued by stating how these various programs in high school “led me to be more and more confident and making bigger decisions.”

Following this pattern and theme of lived experiences in high school influencing confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with academic advisors during a student’s sophomore year of college, Emersyn expressed that her social relationship with her high school guidance counselor allowed her to “feel more confident coming to college.” Emersyn explained how her high school guidance counselor would review all the requirements Emersyn needed for college, including how to complete the college application, choosing a major of study, and what it would be like to attend college. Emersyn further shared that her high school guidance counselor helped Emersyn choose her college major of study, which helped Emersyn to build her confidence and trust in academic professionals. Additionally, Emersyn further vocalized how her high school guidance counselor encouraged her to participate in a high school program called Make it Happen. This program was designed to help students prepare for college by learning how to complete college applications, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and apply for scholarships. Make it Happen also encouraged students to participate in their high school community by attending various events and activities and meeting new peers. Emersyn

shared that if her guidance counselor did not “push me towards being involved,” she would not have been “confident enough to just walk in” to participate in the program. “I honestly built a lot of confidence through that program,” Emersyn further shared.

In contrast to positive high school experiences, Maggie and Anna shared negative lived experiences in high school that also contributed to influence social confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with academic advisors. Maggie shared that, although her confidence and social skills developed in high school, she had a few encounters with teachers that “impacted me as a person.” Maggie further explained how she “kind of became not myself” and reached out to other teachers for help. “Those teachers really helped me build myself back up and feel like myself, and then they continued, and went steps further to making me feel like I am able to accomplish things,” Maggie shared. Maggie expressed that these negative experiences in high school ultimately helped to shape her confidence and ability to communicate with others.

Similar to Maggie, Anna also described her lived experiences in high school as being negative. Anna stated that she “did not talk to any of my academic people at all because I didn’t really feel like they cared.” When asked to elaborate more on this feeling, Anna explained how “I was just lucky to figure it out by myself. Like at one point, I had two days to get three letters of recommendation.” Anna shared that these negative experiences and feelings in high school directly influenced her confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors in college. Anna shared that when she first met with her academic advisor, she thought, “oh, gosh, this is scary. She is just going to put me in random classes, but that is not what happened at all.” Once Anna had a few meetings with her academic advisor, she felt more confident in communicating and reaching out for help.

A majority of study participants indicated that their lived experiences in high school played a direct role in their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. These lived experiences, whether described by study participants as positive or negative, had a foundational effect on how socially confident, prepared, and efficacious they were to begin college. These lived experiences, feelings, and emotions fundamentally shaped the way study participants socially integrated with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Lived Childhood/Adulthood Experiences

Lived childhood/adulthood experiences were an additional theme that emerged from the rich, descriptive lived experiences of five out of the nine study participants. These lived childhood/adulthood experiences were impactful memories that altered the way participants developed confidence and PSSE, which thus influenced their ability to further initiate or actively engage in communication with others, such as academic advisors. These lived childhood/adult experiences were revealed by Elizabeth, Jack, Anna, Anthony, and Emersyn, and these experiences varied from having a positive or negative effect on social confidence and PSSE.

When describing the lived experiences that has influenced Elizabeth's confidence and PSSE, Elizabeth shared that being a full-time employee in the health care field and working with a variety of patients and leadership personnel, has positively impacted her confidence in social situations, as well as ability to initiate and actively communicate with others on a more meaningful level. Elizabeth shared that her lived experiences with "having to communicate, not only with my coworkers, but with management or the physicians that I work with" have aided in gaining the social experience and confidence to communicate in new social settings. "You know, as you have these experiences, you become more attuned to it," Elizabeth shared.

In contrast to Elizabeth's lived adulthood experiences, Jack described his lived experiences that influenced his confidence and PSSE as traumatic and devastating. Jack vocalized that the trauma of losing a very close family member in 2011 and a close friend to suicide in 2013, had directly impacted his confidence and life choices moving forward. When describing these lived experiences more thoroughly, Jack shared that the close family that had passed away placed a high value on education for Jack and wanted to see Jack succeed in getting an education. "That was extremely devastating to me. He always wanted me to get an education," Jack shared. After losing both his close family member and friend, Jack explained how he "gave up the lifestyle I was living. I chose to just go on the straight path and focus on what I had to try and get my education right." Jack further expressed how he was homeless "throughout the whole way" until he moved to Maine. Although these lived experiences were traumatic and devastating for Jack, he stated that these events "were the strong things in my days that kept me strong and helped me build the confidence to continue." Jack shared that the confidence he developed in himself and ability to communicate with others has allowed him to advocate for himself and his family, as well as succeed in his life goals.

When vocalizing the life experiences during her childhood, Anna shared that she had a negative childhood experience that influenced Anna's confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with others. Anna shared that when she was a child, she used to "speak out," which would result in people saying to Anna that she is "so loud" and to "be quiet" and "stop talking." Anna explained that because of these harmful and negative social reactions from others, it caused her to "not be who I am now" throughout middle school and the "first couple years of high school." Anna further explained how her "super outgoing" and "confident" nature was "hindered for a couple of years due to people like that." Anna continued sharing that "I felt judgement from

other people, so once again with the judgement and saying things. I just don't want people judging me," Anna further described. These negative social interactions with others during Anna's childhood directly impacted her confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with others. Anna expressed that these feelings of judgement and social isolation changed once she reached her first-year of college and met with her academic advisor, who helped Anna build her confidence and trust in communicating with academic advisors.

In contrast to Elizabeth, Jack, and Anna's lived experiences in childhood and/or adulthood, Anthony shared that his lived childhood experiences were positive events that helped shape his confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with academic advisors. Anthony vocalized that the childhood events that led to the development and sustainment of his confidence was his active participation in "performing arts, such as with the violin and playing in orchestras" throughout elementary school. Additionally, Anthony shared that when he was in middle school, he moved from Texas to Maine, which "involved having a lot of confidence and self-assurance to make new friends and do new things." These lived childhood experiences helped shape Anthony's confidence and PSSE, which allowed him to feel comfortable and confident when meeting new people and being in new social situations, such as integrating with academic advisors in college.

When describing lived experiences that have influenced confidence, PSSE, and ability to communicate with academic advisors, Emersyn shared that she grew up outside of the United States, where "some people believe that a woman should not go to college. They just get educated up to high school. There's no need for them to pursue a college degree." Emersyn shared that her confidence and PSSE were influenced by the "insecurities" she experienced during childhood. "When you have some insecurities, that is when your self-esteem and

confidence are no more,” Emersyn explained. “Growing up, when you’re called by your insecurities, you just get used to it,” Emersyn described. Emersyn vocalized that her confidence and PSSE began to shift when she participated in a high school program that allowed her to meet new students, particularly other first-generation students, communicate with others, and get involved in high school events.

The lived childhood/adulthood experiences shared by study participants contributed to their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. These lived childhood/adulthood experiences, whether described as being positive or negative by study participants, influenced participant confidence and PSSE in various future social situations and settings, and had a profound impact on how participant’s felt they could navigate new social experiences. Some study participants felt that their lived childhood/adulthood experiences hindered their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, while other participants felt that their lived experiences were the catalyst to propel them forward into achieving PSSE to navigate new social settings, situations, and environments.

Perception of Self

Perception of self is an additional theme that surfaced from the descriptive lived experiences shared by study participants. Seven out of nine study participants shared that their self-efficacy, or perception of their confidence and abilities to engage in various actions or tasks, have impacted their confidence, communication skills, and PSSE. Victoria described herself as “an anxious person” and someone who “likes to be able to plan ahead for things, and things that pop up, I don’t handle very well.” Due to this, Victoria feels that this has increased her communication with her academic advisor. “Even if it’s just like small things, like when I was registering for classes. One of the Core requirements was listed differently, and it kind of freaked

me out,” Victoria shared. Victoria further described herself as “more mature” and “wants to have that kind of open communication with people.” Victoria further described herself as “someone that likes to really know things and understand next steps,” which has influenced her confidence and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors.

When sharing her lived experiences with the phenomenon, Elizabeth shared that she feels she is “more of a social person by nature” and “does not tend to get tongue tied.” Elizabeth further explained how being naturally socially outgoing has assisted her in recognizing self-efficacy and being confident in new social situations and meeting new people, such as socially integrating with academic advisors in a college setting. “Having lived longer and done more things, I think you get more comfortable and confident,” Elizabeth shared. “Myself, personally, I’m not a big element of surprise. I really like to know the details and I really like to understand something,” Elizabeth further described.

Additionally, Maggie described herself as “a very talkative person,” which has assisted her in communicating with her academic advisor and building her confidence in various social situations. “I will feel very confident in emailing,” Maggie shared. Additionally, Maggie further shared that she has “built up the courage and the experience to feel comfortable now” with meeting with her academic advisor but shared that she previously felt “the nerves” of meeting with her academic advisor in-person, primarily due to “sitting in person with somebody” and “feeling like you need to know the answers,” as well as “not knowing what type of person they are.” Maggie expressed that she tries to “read somebody else’s energy and try to acclimate myself to the environment.”

Anthony described his perception of self as “being a relatively confident person. I wouldn’t say completely confident, but I think its just being willing to do something.” Anthony

shared that this confidence and perception of ability to meet new people and engage in new social situations has assisted him with forming a social relationship with his academic advisor and actively communicating with them. “I think you just need to be willing to be out there and go do it,” Anthony expressed. “I’ve always had confidence throughout my whole lifetime because leading up, especially in elementary school, I did a lot of performing arts and things with the violin,” Anthony shared. These activities directly influenced Anthony’s confidence and PSSE, as well as ability to feel comfortable and confident enough to socially integrate with his academic advisor in college.

In contrast, Amy perceives herself to be “not too confident,” when encountering something new, such as meeting new people or entering a new social setting, which has influenced her PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. “I think I’m also kind of a person who has a lot of questions about everything,” Amy further expressed. This perception was also exhibited by Jack, who stated “I didn’t think I was educated enough to be at college.” Jack explained that he had been out of school since 2013 and when he decided to further his education, the site institution “made me feel real comfortable and they didn’t make me feel stupid. They actually gave me the confidence to be able step in and begin my first semester” Jack shared when discussing his perception of self and feelings about starting college. Similarly, Emersyn describes herself as someone with “quiet confidence,” who has been working on developing her confidence and ability to actively communicate with her academic advisor. Emersyn shared that the lived experiences she has encountered with her academic advisor will continue to help her build confidence “in a very good way” during college and “even after college and everything,” Emersyn shared.

The lived experiences expressed by study participants that shaped their perception of self was expressed to have an impact on confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Participants who felt they were ‘talkative’ or had a more outgoing personality by nature, had a stronger sense of confidence and PSSE, which resulted in being able to socially integrate with academic advisors more effortlessly. Study participants who described themselves as being “nervous” or “anxious” or someone who is not comfortable in new social situations or settings, shared that they have had a more difficult time obtaining the confidence they need to socially integrate with academic advisors.

Institutional Resources

The final theme that emerged from the shared lived experiences of study participants were institutional resources. When asked what institutional resources are available to participants during their sophomore year of undergraduate studies to help them communicate with their academic advisors, all nine study participants responded with keywords such as “Zoom,” “email,” “phone,” and “in-person.” However, three study participants shared that beyond these common institutional resources, such as Zoom and email, they were unaware of any other institutional resources available to help sophomore students build their social confidence and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. The additional institutional resources could be student clubs or groups, institutional programs, workshops, or courses designed to specifically assist sophomore year college students with strengthening their confidence and socially integrating with academic advisors.

When sharing her lived experience on what institutional resources are available to participants during their sophomore year of undergraduate studies to help them communicate with their academic advisors, Amy stated “there isn’t any resources really given out like that. As

for the institution giving you resources to be able to communicate with your advisor, I don't think there was any for me." Amy further shared that the COVID-19 pandemic has also made it hard to get involved on campus and meet new students. "It's hard to have all these student gatherings, and things that would get students to meet each other and communicate just because it's a pandemic," Amy shared.

Similarly, Maggie shared that aside from utilizing the commonly known institutional resources, such as Zoom, phone, email, and in-person communication, she was not provided with any additional resources to help build confidence and communication skills with academic advisors. Maggie vocalized that a course or program specifically designed to help students develop and build their confidence and communication skills "would have been useful," as "when you hit sophomore year, they kind of expect you to do a little bit more by yourself," Maggie shared. Additionally, Maggie shared that when she was a first-year college student, she was given more attention and institutional resources to assist her with adjusting to college. "Freshmen, I feel like, they're really on top of you. They want you to know what you're doing, and they want to make sure that you're on top of things," Maggie explained.

Similarly, Anna described her lived experiences to this interview question as also being unaware of any additional institutional resources available to assist sophomore year college students with building their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Anna vocalized that "nothing really at [site institution] has helped me with that. I've kind of used some online resources, like tutoring, but it hasn't directly helped me with my advisor." Anna continue to explain how having an anonymous forum or "discussion board" would be helpful for sophomore year college students, who may be afraid or hesitant to communicate directly with academic advisors. "I know if I had a question that I was like 'this is

a dumb question,' I would be hesitant to ask it," shared Anna. "So, definitely like anonymous ways to reach out or like ask questions," Anna continued would be helpful and beneficial for helping students overcome social anxiety, fear, or communication hesitancy. Anna further shared that many sophomore year college students may avoid actively communicating with academic advisors due to "pride." Anna vocalized how she feels students "are really hesitant to reach out and ask questions. I know that's how I used to be. Not even just with school, but in other ways, too. Now it's different," Anna described. By employing an anonymous forum or discussion board platform, Anna feels this may encourage students to reach out to academic advisors, which would result in increasing their confidence and PSSE.

When responding to the same interview question, Jack described his lived experiences with institutional resources as being "on-point," and that "other academic resources like clubs and things like that, mental health, if I need it," have been available for Jack to utilize. Jack also shared that he utilizes external resources as well, to help build his confidence, PSSE, and communication skills. "I'm Catholic, so I like to use resources like that. A priest to talk to, and confession, and things like that." Jack feels that a combination of these internal and external resources have assisted him feeling confident in himself and his academic success. Jack further shared that it is important for students who feel "no judgement" and "honesty" when utilizing institutional resources and when communicating with academic advisors, as Jack feels this is an important part of developing and maintaining confidence and being able to socially integrate with academic advisors.

In response to this interview question, Victoria shared, "I don't have a great answer for that." Aside from utilizing the most common institutional resources to communicate with

academic advisors, such as telephone, email, and Zoom, Victoria did not express an awareness of other institutional resources available.

Most study participants exhibited an unawareness to institutional resources *outside* of telephone, email, and Zoom meetings, to assist them with developing confidence and socially integrating with their academic advisor. Institutional resources, such as student clubs or groups, institutional programs, workshops, or courses designed to specifically assist sophomore year college students with strengthening their confidence and socially integrating with academic advisors, were only described by one study participant, indicating that there may be gap in knowledge of institutional resources available and accessibility to sophomore college students.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the factors that influence a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Albert Bandura (1994) defined PSSE as personal confidence or "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2).

This research study explored the lived experiences of nine first-generation undergraduate college students to understand factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. This transcendental phenomenological research study was conducted at a conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine. The sample for this study were nine current undergraduate degree-seeking sophomore college students. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling method to filter and gain eligible participants that met the required criteria for the

research study. A semi-structured one-on-one interview design was chosen for this research study, and data analysis were conducted using inductive thematic analysis to discover themes, patterns, and commonalities amongst the collected data. Research study participants expressed diverse attributes and demographics that ranged in age, major of study, enrollment status, skillsets, culture, employment status, social experiences, and socioeconomic status. The themes that were revealed in the data analysis process from the lived experiences of the nine research study participants were internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources. These discovered themes were associated with both research questions.

Chapter 5 reviews the interpretation and importance of research study findings. Implications, recommendation for action, and recommendations for further study are also presented. The chapter concludes by providing a comprehensive conclusion of this transcendental phenomenological research study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Historical research dating back to Tinto (1975) emphasized the importance that academic advisors play in a college student's educational journey by suggesting that academic advisors have a direct influence on student persistence, retention, and time to degree completion through social integration and interactions they have with students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Spratley, 2020; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013). An undergraduate student's sophomore year of college is one of the most critical periods in their academic career, with 10% of undergraduate college students dropping out between sophomore and senior year (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Sophomore college students, who are also first-generation undergraduate students, may feel these effects more prominently, as they may lack the social capital, social experiences, and PSSE beliefs that are needed to be successful in college (McCall, 2014; Upah, 2017). Additionally, Hunter et al., (2010) further illustrated how sophomore year college students are experiencing a myriad mixture of feelings and emotions, as they attempt to learn who they are as a person and their purpose in life, understanding their values and beliefs, exploring various majors and educational interests, and determining if they should stay at the institution or transfer out. Hunter et al., (2010) further explained how sophomore year college students exhibit added pressure to related to academic interests, appropriate major of study, and life after college.

This transcendental phenomenological research study explored the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. A conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine was chosen for the conduction of this transcendental phenomenological research study to obtain nine undergraduate

sophomore year college students that met the required criteria for the research study. A total of 10 participants volunteered to participate in this research study, but this number was reduced to nine total study participants after one participant failed to confirm transcript accuracy from their one-on-one interview in the allotted timeframe provided to them. A total of nine study participants were sustained throughout the duration of the research study.

Aligning with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) perspective of "focusing on the experience itself" (p. 25), the researcher employed a transcendental phenomenological study design to support the grounding of student lived experiences and perspectives into the heart of the research. To aid in understanding this phenomenon further, the resulting research questions provided guided direction and discovery on common factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors:

- RQ 1: From a first-generation, sophomore year undergraduate student participant perspective, what lived experiences have influenced their perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) beliefs?
- RQ 2: How do first-generation undergraduate college students feel their lived experiences have influenced their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college?

Additionally, the theoretical framework guiding and directing this research study was Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence (1993) theory. The spiral of silence theory is rooted in mass communication, social expression, and political science, and suggests that individuals suppress their social expressions, such as thoughts, perspectives, and opinions, if they feel they are in the minority opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). This theoretical framework allowed the researcher to construct, collect, and analyze this transcendental phenomenological research study through a

unique mixture of lenses that are grounded in mass communication, social expression, and political science.

A one-on-one, semi-structured interview format was conducted with study participants to explore the robust, descriptive lived experiences that each study participant shared and described. The collected data were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis for maximum discovery of themes, patterns, and commonalities through the dialogue of the lived experiences of participants. Additionally, to establish and maintain credibility, validity, and transferability of this research study and during the data collection process, the researcher engaged in participant member checks, ample engagement in the data collection process, bracketing/epoché, and phenomenological reduction to temporarily suspend personal biases, judgements, and assumptions during the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Peoples, 2021).

The themes that were revealed in the data analysis process from the lived experiences of the nine study participants were internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources, and were associated with both research questions. These discovered themes represented the lived experiences that study participants faced with the phenomenon and how these experiences have influenced their PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Social integration during a student's sophomore year of college is more significant than other years in college due to sophomore year students may having "lost their informal contacts from the first-year of college" (Hunter et al., 2010), due to discontinued first-year programs or courses, a change in student living arrangements, and enrollment in different courses or majors.

Interpretation and Importance of Findings

The current literature focused on the sophomore year college experience is innately marginal, with distinguished gaps in the knowledge in understanding this critical time in a college student's academic career (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). This deficit in the knowledge and understanding of this significant period in a student's academic year can cause long-lasting negative impacts to student retention, persistence, sense-of-belonging, and institutional commitment (Hunter et al., 2010; Pajares, 1996; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975). Sophomore year undergraduate college students are often at a point in their academic career where they are trying to form social relationships, learn their identity, and seek their sense of purpose in life (Hunter et al., 2010; Sterling, 2018). As most higher education institutions are focused primarily on providing resources and support for first-year undergraduate college students, sophomore students are often left feeling forgotten, abandoned, marginalized, and dissatisfied with their educational and social experience at the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). Sophomore college students, who are also first-generation undergraduate students, may feel these effects more prominently, as they may lack the social capital, social experiences, and PSSE beliefs that are needed to be successful in college (McCall, 2014; Upah, 2017). Tinto (1975) and Pajares (1996) stated how essential PSSE and social integration amongst academic professionals, such as academic advisors, is for the college student success and achievement, yet historical and current literature surrounding these topics are exceedingly limited.

Through a transcendental phenomenological research study exploring the factors that influenced PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during the sophomore year of college, the shared lived experiences of study participants aimed to provide newfound

knowledge on these topics. With the sophomore year of college being a period of self-reflection, inward thinking, and discovery, it is vital that additional research is conducted on the sophomore year college experience. The lived experiences that were shared by study participants were grounded in the discovered themes of internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources.

These themes represented the common factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. The most common prominent factors shared by study participants that were described to have influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college were lived experiences in high school, sociocultural influences, first-year college student experience, and perception of self. The following sub-sections guide the interpretation and importance of these key research study findings and are representative of both research study questions.

Lived Experiences in High School

The most prominent factors shared amongst student participants that influenced PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors were lived high school experiences and sociocultural influences. For example, six out of the nine study participants shared how experiences directly related to high school have influenced their confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors when they entered post-secondary education. These lived experiences in high school were grounded in the student's experience with their guidance counselor and/or college preparatory programs or classes. Victoria shared that her high school guidance counselor assisted her with understanding what classes she needed to take in high

school, how to complete paperwork, and “navigate that side of being a student.” Victoria further explained, “I would say that I’ve always had a very close relationship with my guidance counselors,” which has contributed to Victoria’s confidence and PSSE.

Similarly, Emersyn shared how her high school guidance counselor encouraged her to participate in a high school program called Make it Happen. This program was designed to help students prepare for college by learning how to complete college applications, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and apply for scholarships. Emersyn shared that if her guidance counselor did not “push me towards being involved,” she would not have been “confident enough to just walk in” to participate in the program. “I honestly built a lot of confidence through that program,” Emersyn further shared.

Additionally, Maggie shared that, although her confidence and social skills developed in high school, she had a few encounters with teachers that “impacted me as a person.” Maggie further explained how she “kind of became not myself” and reached out to other teachers for help. “Those teachers really helped me build myself back up and feel like myself, and then they continued, and went steps further to making me feel like I am able to accomplish things.”

The lived experiences in high school that study participants shared exemplifies the important role that high school guidance counselors provide for high school students. High school guidance counselors not only have the ability to prepare students for the social and academic demands of college, but they also have a profound impact on student PSSE and communication development (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2020; Paolini, 2019). Forming cohesive social relationships with academic professionals not only aids students in building their PSSE level and active social integration into the college environment, but it can also assist in promoting student retention and persistence (Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

When a student forms social connection with faculty and staff members, their commitment to the institution becomes more profound because they may feel that they have a support system and social connection to the institution that produces social rewards, such as new friends or student clubs and activities (Dennis et al., 2005; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975).

Sociocultural Influences

Eight out of nine study participants expressed that being a first-generation college student has either positively or negatively impacted their social confidence, PSSE, and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, primarily due to not having parents who had experienced college. For example, Maggie expressed that because she did not have parents or grandparents who had attended college, she “didn’t get the help because they don’t really know it either.” Similarly, Elizabeth shared that her lived experiences as a first-generation college student stemmed from having “baby boomer parents, who worked really, really hard.” Elizabeth stated that due to this, she had a very “naïve college experience” and did not know how to navigate the college experience. Elizabeth stated that being a first-generation college student “definitely didn’t make me more confident. If anything, it might have made me feel perhaps a little less confident.” Jack shared a similar perspective as a first-generation college student and shared that he “grew up in the system” and was raised by his grandmother and aunt, who were “real old school Puerto Rican women.” Due to these cultural beliefs and practices, Jack shared that his upbringing was grounded in “church and education.” Furthermore, Emersyn vocalized that “it is not easy” being a first-generation student and having lived in a culture that does not typically practice higher education opportunities for women. Emersyn further vocalized that her parents “sometimes might not understand if you’re being overwhelmed or if you’re being stressed because of school things.”

These sociocultural lived experiences exhibited by study participants partially conflict with Engle and Tinto (2008), who found that first-generation college students had lower levels of PSSE, had a more challenging time becoming socially integrated into a college environment, and were less likely to persist to degree completion than their continuing-generation peers. This research study found that first-generation college students, who believe themselves to be more socially outgoing or confident before beginning their sophomore year of college, are able to socially integrate with academic advisors more fluently than study participants who did not have a positive perception of self. For example, although Elizabeth shared that being a first-generation student “definitely didn’t make me more confident. If anything, it might have made me feel perhaps a little less confident,” her perception of self was described as positive. Elizabeth felt that she is more “socially outgoing” in nature, which she stated “definitely helps” in building confidence and socially integrating with academic advisors.

Although study participants shared that sociocultural factors, such as being a first-generation college student and cultural beliefs, have influenced their PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, none of the study participants shared other contributing cultural factors, such as socioeconomic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation, or racial and ethnic diversity factors. Hunter et al., (2010) stated how these various “characteristics affect students in the sophomore year in important ways” (p. 25), which is vital for developing beneficial institutional programs and initiatives that address all student populations and the challenges that each student experience faces.

First Year College Student Experience

Research study findings from the lived experiences shared by study participants indicated that a student’s first year of college effectively “sets the stage” (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 15) for a

student's sophomore year of college. A student's first year of college typically consists of first-year student programs, courses, and support systems that are designed to prepare students to integrate into the institution socially and academically, as well as support students in "making the transition from high school to college" (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 15). These first-year support systems are commonly utilized amongst higher education institutions nationally and are designed to prepare students for their academic career including developing PSSE, academic self-efficacy, development of sense-of-belonging, and institutional commitment beyond the first year of college. While many higher education institutions employ these first-year programs with the goal of achieving social integration within the first-year, Hunter et al., (2010) stated that social integration is not fully achieved in a student's first year, but rather a student's sophomore year of college. Additionally, the first year of college also forms a cohesive foundation for student retention, persistence, and commitment to the institution, which changes considerably from a student's first year of college to their sophomore year (Hunter et al., 2010).

The lived experiences shared from study participants indicated the vital importance of a student's first year of college in relation to the extent of social integration with academic advisors and level of PSSE that is achieved. Directly aligning Hunter et al., (2010), data from this research study revealed that students do not fully socially integrate with academic advisors until they reach their sophomore year. This full social immersion with academic advisors is found to be due to an increase in student PSSE, comfortability with being a college student, understanding the higher education environment and developing a sense of trust and honesty with academic advisors. All nine study participants revealed in various expressions and statements that they possess an open, trusting, and communicative relationship with their academic advisor during their sophomore year of college. This communicative relationship,

however, was not fully developed in the student's first year of college, but rather evolved, built, and grew as the student progressed through their first year of college and into their sophomore year. This social integration cycle directly aligns with Hunter et al., (2010) and offers insight as to how vital it is for first-year support programs be carried over into the student's sophomore year of college, as students are becoming fully socially integrated with academic advisors (Hunter et al., 2010).

When describing the lived experiences that influence confidence and ability to communicate with academic advisors, Anthony shared that his lived experiences with his academic advisor have provided him with the support, reassurance, and confidence he needs to feel good about communicating with his academic advisor. "I have meetings with her all the time about registering for classes and trying to figure things out for reaching my goals," Anthony expressed. "I think I'm pretty good at communicating, and I do it all the time because I need a lot of help," Anthony further stated.

Similarly, Maggie shared how "my advisor has been really good at balancing the academics, as well as the mental and social and emotional aspect of being a student." Maggie further expressed that "Any advisor, to me, needs to understand that you are a student, but first you need to be emotionally and mentally able to take on the courses." Maggie further elaborated that because of the support she has received from her academic advisors, she has been able to "manage my courses really well."

Additionally, Emersyn shared how many first-year students are confused and unsure about how to navigate the college experience and who to communicate with for help. "You know, for the first-year, I was kind of confused. You know, where to go, if I had an advisor, her name, and everything," Emersyn shared. As a sophomore year college student, Emersyn shared

that she now feels “so comfortable” and confident in communicating with her academic advisor. “Once I got the hang of it, like who my advisor was and everything, I just felt so confident,” Emersyn further explained.

Similarly, Amy shared that as a sophomore year college student, she now feels “it is never a burden to ask for help, and every time I do ask for help, I do receive the help that I’m asking for.” Amy further shared that her lived experiences in her first year of college have allowed her to get “a little more comfortable in the college setting.” Amy expressed that the social relationship she has built with her academic advisor over the last two years has positively influenced her confidence and ability to communicate with her academic advisor. Study participants expressed that they felt more comfortable and confident communicating and socially integrating with their academic advisor during their sophomore year, primarily due to having already completed one year of college, understanding the social and academic demands of college, and building a social, trusting relationship with their academic advisor.

Perception of Self

Collected data from the shared lived experiences of study participants found that participants who shared positive lived experiences *and* had a positive perception of self, expressed being able to socially integrate with academic advisors more seamlessly, which carried into the participant’s sophomore year of college. Conversely, study participants who shared negative lived experiences *and* had a negative perception of self, expressed feelings of hesitancy and nervousness when needing to communicate with their academic advisor for the first time. Study participants who shared negative lived experiences, but had a positive perception of self, also felt more inclined to socially integrate with academic advisors. For example, Victoria described herself as “an anxious person” and someone who “likes to be able to plan ahead for

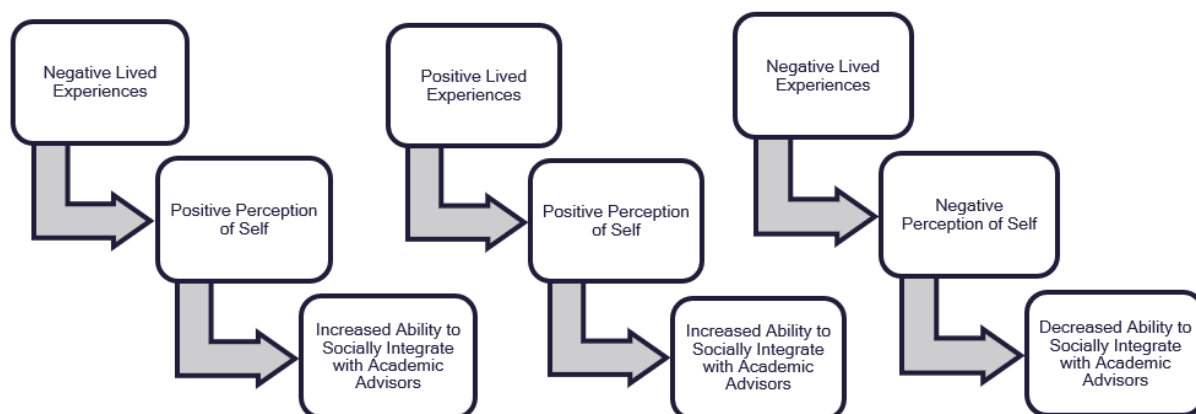
things, and things that pop up, I don't handle very well." Due to this, Victoria feels that this has increased her communication with her academic advisor. "Even if it's just like small things, like when I was registering for classes. One of the Core requirements was listed differently, and it kind of freaked me out," Victoria shared.

Similar to Victoria, Maggie shared that she has "built up the courage and the experience to feel comfortable now" with meeting with her academic advisor but shared that she previously felt "the nerves" of meeting with her academic advisor in-person, primarily due to "sitting in person with somebody" and "feeling like you need to know the answers," as well as "not knowing what type of person they are." Maggie expressed that she tries to "read somebody else's energy and try to acclimate myself to the environment." Maggie describes herself as a "talkative" person, which has aided in the development of her confidence and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors.

The sophomore year of college is a "unique and important developmental period when students are examining their life purpose" (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 13). Sophomore year college students are learning who they are as a person, how they fit into the institution, and reflecting on their life choices, both during and after college (Hunter et al., 2010). This research study shows that a student's perception of self has the power to build and shape their PSSE, thus resulting in the extent and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. A summary of the phased awareness of lived experiences, perception of self, and extent of social integration is in Figure 2:

Figure 2

Summary of the Phased Awareness of Lived Experiences, Perception of Self, and Extent of Social Integration



Note: Figure 2 illustrates the phased awareness of participant lived experiences, perception of self, and extent of social integration. Figure 2 and all incorporated data were constructed by the researcher and is unique to this specific research study.

The significance of the data collected from the lived experiences of study participants offers a qualitative, descriptive perspective of the factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. Study findings emphasized the importance that guidance counselors play in helping high school students develop PSSE and college preparedness, which data from this research study shows is a necessary component for social integration with academic advisors. Additionally, study findings indicated the profound position that academic advisors have on assisting college students in developing PSSE and maintaining a social relationship with academic advisors once they enter post-secondary education, as well as beyond their first year of college. Current and historical literature suggests students, who are also first-generation students, are eight times more likely to

leave college during their sophomore year, and may lack the necessary social skills, experiences, confidence, and PSSE to remain socially integrated into a new social system (Ishitani, 2006; Schaller, 2014). Furthermore, perception of self was a common theme that emerged from the collected data, which aligns with the literature of Hunter et al. (2010). Sophomore year college students are trying to determine “who I am” (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 73), and often find themselves in situations where they are judging previous actions, choices, and feelings. Some study participants indicated that their perception of self was derived directly from previous lived experiences, which inadvertently caused them to perceive themselves in a specific way.

Implications

This transcendental phenomenological research study provided a qualitative purview of the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student’s PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during a student’s sophomore year of college. The lived experiences shared by study participants provided rich, illustrative perceptions as to what factors have influenced their PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. The conclusions produced from the shared lived experiences of study participants provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student’s PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Historical and current literature surrounding the undergraduate sophomore year student experience is exceedingly limited, with minimal exploration or investigation surrounding first-generation college student PSSE and social integration with academic professionals, such as academic advisors during the sophomore year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010). With the sophomore year of college being one of the most

important periods in a student's academic career, it is imperative that additional research be conducted to understand the sophomore year college experience more robustly (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). Results from this research study may assist other researchers and academic professionals, such as faculty members and others in similar professional roles, in understanding the factors that influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors or other academic personnel. Since the sophomore year of college is of vital importance for both students and the institution, understanding the factors that influenced student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, or other academic professionals, may have a long-lasting impact on student retention, persistence, institutional commitment, and sense-of-belonging (Hunter et al., 2010; Pajares, 1996; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975; Vuong et al., 2010).

Implication #1: Importance of High School Support Systems

An implication of this research study is that lived experiences in high school, primarily the social relationship with a high school guidance counselor and participation in college preparatory programs or courses, significantly influences a student's PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors in a post-secondary education environment. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2021, only 44% of high school students enrolled in a post-secondary education institution immediately upon completing high school. Out of that 44% of high school students, only 22% of students enrolled in a 2-year post-secondary education institution. Primary factors influencing this low post-secondary institution enrollment amongst high school students were being a first-generation student, under preparedness for college, and lack of post-secondary educational guidance from high school guidance counselors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Corroborating with this data from the NCES,

this transcendental phenomenological research study found that students who expressed having negative lived experiences in high school, such as with a guidance counselor, felt underprepared for college, did not possess adequate PSSE, and were more hesitant to communicate with academic advisors in their first year of college. The lived experiences in high school that study participants shared exemplifies the important role that high school guidance counselors and college preparatory programs have in the social and academic development of high school students, particularly amongst first-generation students. This social and academic influence shaped in high school is thus carried into a student's first year of college, as well as the sophomore year of college. The qualitative research study findings of Brookover et al. (2014) provide an extension of the results found in this transcendental phenomenological research study by concluding that high school students who have a social relationship with guidance counselors, feel more prepared and supported for college. Similarly, Paolini (2019) emphasized the importance that high school guidance counselors and college preparatory programs have on high school student college preparedness, social and academic development, and establishing student expectations both in secondary and post-secondary education. The results from this transcendental phenomenological research study emphasized the importance of high school guidance counselors and college preparatory programs in PSSE and social integration with academic advisors.

Implication #2: Social Integration Is Not Fully Achieved During First year

An additional implication of this research study is that social integration is not fully achieved during a student's first year of college, as many first-year student programs and initiatives are designed to achieve (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). Due to higher education institutions placing a considerable emphasis on social integration during the

first year of college and incorrectly assuming that social integration will be achieved from students during the first year of college, it creates a negative supposition that students will be fully socially integrated into the institution once they reach sophomore year (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018).) Due to this misleading assumption, most first-year programs that are designed to assist students with social integration are not carried over into the student's sophomore year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018). Vuong et al. (2010) explains how the lack of resources, support systems, and programs during a student's sophomore year of college poses a particular risk for first-generation students. Data from this research study aligns with the perspectives of Hunter et al. (2010), Schaller, (2014), Sterling (2018) and Vuong et al. (2010) and found that the social integration process begins once a student enters post-secondary education, *and* extends into a student's sophomore year of college, where social integration has the most optimal capacity to be achieved. Student social integration is not fully achieved during the student's first year of college, as contrary to belief. The extent to which a student socially integrates with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college were found to be principally dependent upon the student's high school experience, PSSE, and first-year student experience. The data from this research study found that, for students who expressed having lived high school experiences influencing their PSSE, this PSSE carried over into the student's first year of college, which thus extended to the student's sophomore year of college. Additionally, two study participants expressed that they were non-traditional aged students, thus did not feel their lived experiences in high school contributed to their PSSE or ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Additionally, the results from this transcendental phenomenological research study run parallel with the quantitative research study findings of Salisbury (2014), who found that first-

year college students who felt comfortable and confidence to form new social connections with academic professionals during their first year of college, were more likely to continue establishing new connections beyond their first year of college. Conversely, first-year college students who were not comfortable or confident in new social situations or creating new social relationships with academic professionals, were significantly less likely to communicate with academic professionals or participate in social events, organizations, and student clubs (Salisbury, 2014). The data from this transcendental phenomenological research study accentuate the importance that social integration is not fully achieved during a student's first year of college, but rather extends to the student's sophomore year of college, where social integration has the most capacity to be achieved. This information is vital for higher education professionals because, contrary to current beliefs, social integration programs, courses, and initiatives should be carried over into a student's sophomore year of college (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010).

Implication #3: Generational Status Matters

A further implication of this research study is that a student's generational status influenced their PSSE. Eight out of nine study participants indicated that being a first-generation student directly influenced their PSSE, which thus impacted their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. As a marginalized student population, study participants shared that not having parents or caregivers who attended college, caused them to feel uncertain, underprepared, and anxious about the college experience and what to expect when attending college. These transcendental phenomenological research study findings align with Engle and Tinto (2008), who found that first-generation college students had lower levels of PSSE, had a more challenging time becoming socially integrated into a college

environment, and were less likely to persist to degree completion than their continuing-generation peers. Additionally, first-generation college students are perceived to be at a social disadvantage than their continuing-generation peers, as first-generation college students typically do not possess the social capital, social experiences, high level of PSSE, and social motivation that is needed to form new social relationships and connections in a new social system, such as a college environment (Choy, 2002; Eleby, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Macias, 2015; Nunez & Carroll, 1998). With sophomore year college students already experiencing a unique set of challenges and obstacles, it is vital that higher education professionals are aware of the specific needs and challenges that sophomore year colleges students, who are also first-generation students, encounter during their educational career.

Implication #4: The Importance of Institutional Resources

An additional implication of this research study is that many sophomore year college students were unaware of any institutional resources that may be available to them to assist in building PSSE and socially integrating with academic advisors. Aside from telephone, Zoom, and email communication, institutional resources, such as programs or support initiatives, are unknown. The lack of knowledge on institutional resources available to sophomore year college students may be multifaced in that many institutions do not carry over first-year college student resources into the student's sophomore year; therefore, institutional resources available may be limited. Additionally, the literature indicates that first-generation students may lack the knowledge needed to navigate what resources are available to them (Beresin & Watkins, 2021; Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010). The results from this transcendental phenomenological research study demonstrate that additional resources need to be available, known, and accessible to sophomore year college students.

Implication #5: The Need for Supportive Academic Advisors

A final implication of this research study is that the social relationship between student and academic advisor is a vital component in PSSE development, as well as the social integration process. Once a student begins their first year of college, they are typically assigned an academic advisor, who builds a supportive, collaborative partnership with the student. A student who does not possess adequate PSSE may be hesitant or resistant to meeting with their academic advisor, thus influencing the ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Once a student has gained enough PSSE, either through social support systems, increased perception of self, or academic advisor initial outreach, the student becomes more comfortable, confident, and trusting of their academic advisor. This comfort, confidence, and trust extends into the student's sophomore year of college, which promotes full social integration with academic advisors.

As research studies surrounding sophomore year college students are limited, results from this research study may assist other academic professionals, such as faculty members and others in similar professional roles, in understanding the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors or other academic personnel. Since the sophomore year of college is of vital importance for both the student and institution, understanding the factors that influence student PSSE and their ability to socially integrate with academic advisors, or other academic advisors, may have a long-lasting impact on student retention, persistence, institutional commitment, and sense-of-belonging (Hunter et al., 2010; Pajares, 1996; Schaller, 2014; Spratley, 2020; Sterling, 2018; Tinto, 1975; Vuong et al., 2010).

Recommendation for Action

This transcendental phenomenological study provided gainful insight of the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student's PSSE and ability to socially

integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. The collected data of the shared lived experiences of study participants provided a comprehensive qualitative perspective of the factors that influenced PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during an undergraduate college student's sophomore year. Data collected from this research study were used to make the following recommendations for action:

Recommendation for Action #1

The first recommendation for action is to create a collaborative partnership between higher education institutions and local high schools. Paolini (2019) emphasized the importance that high school guidance counselors and college preparatory programs have on high school student college preparedness, social and academic development, and establishing student expectations both in secondary and post-secondary education. By creating a cohesive partnership between higher education institutions and local high schools, academic advisors or other academic professionals can connect with local high school students to discuss how to prepare for college and answer any questions students have about the college environment and social and academic demands. This collaboration can be a high school visit from academic advisors, college campus tours set-up by high schools, or an information meeting or event. With only 44% of high school students having enrolled in a post-secondary education institution immediately upon completing high school in 2021, it is vital that universal partnerships between secondary and post-secondary education institutions are created (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Recommendation for Action #2

The second recommendation for action is to ensure higher education institutions are implementing resources and support systems for both first-generation and sophomore college

students that are aimed towards helping students build PSSE and socially integrate with academic advisors. These resources and support systems may be a specific course that students can enroll in, events to meet other first-generation or sophomore year college students, or programs designed to assist sophomore year college students in navigating college beyond their first year of post-secondary education. Hunter et al. (2010) stated that academic advisors “should be involved in any campus-wide programs designed to assist second-year students” (p. 94). These programs and resources are sophomore-year oriented and may consist of a course or orientation program designed to help sophomore year college students continue the social integration process with academic advisors, as well as other areas of the institution (Hunter et al., 2010). Additionally, these programs and resources are centrally focused on assisting sophomore year college students with self-identity, self-reflection, identifying their purpose, and providing guidance to this specific population of college students (Hunter et al., 2010).

Recommendation for Action #3

The third recommendation for action is to encourage all academic advisors in post-secondary institutions to actively communicate with students to ensure that students are aware of who their academic advisor is and that this support system is available to them. This communication with students will aid in PSSE development and the social integration process during a student’s sophomore year of college. The results from this transcendental phenomenological research study indicated that academic advisors play a vital role in assisting first-generation, sophomore year college students with building PSSE and providing optimal advantage for achieving full social integration with academic advisors. Spratley (2020) emphasized the importance of academic advisors in a student’s academic career by stating that academic advisors “are a key element in the higher education experience that facilitate students’

development of self...” (p.95). This perspective is echoed by Hunter et al. (2010) who highlighted that the “academic advising has long been acknowledged as an integral part of higher education” (p. 83) and is of vital importance during a student’s sophomore year of college.

Recommendations for Further Study

The sophomore year student experience is one of the most critical times in a student’s academic career (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010). Sophomore year college students are often pressured with a myriad mixture of feelings and reflective thinking regarding who they are as a person, what their purpose in life is, and how they fit into the institution (Hunter et al., 2010; Schaller, 2014; Sterling, 2018; Vuong et al., 2010). Additionally, retention and persistence rates of sophomore year college students are given “less attention” (Hunter et al., 2010, p. 16) than other academic years, which emphasized the importance for continued research surrounding the sophomore year student experience. First-generation college students, who are also in their sophomore year, are also significantly more likely to leave the institution before degree completion (Ishitani, 2006). Driven by the data and findings from this transcendental phenomenological research study, the following recommendations are outlined for further study:

Recommendation for Further Study #1

The first recommendation for further study is to conduct a similar qualitative research study with first-generation undergraduate sophomore year college students in a different geographic location. The geographic location of this transcendental phenomenological research study was limited to southern Maine, and a different geographic location may yield different lived experiences of the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors. Additionally, by conducting a similar qualitative research study in a different

geographic location, results may be used in combination with the results from this transcendental phenomenological research study to form a deeper understanding of the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Recommendation for Further Study #2

The second recommendation for further study is to explore factors that influence social integration in other marginalized student populations, such as international students, low socioeconomic status students, or military veteran students. Chang (2016) conducted a quantitative research study among international college students from 13 countries and found that international students who were able to adjust to initial cultural or social barriers of attending an international higher education institution were found to possess higher levels of PSSE and a reduction in sociocultural adaptation to their new environment). Conversely, Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) found that international college students studying in a higher education institution in Canada, reported lower levels of social integration and adjustment in college, than native country of origin college students. Lee (2019) emphasized the importance of understanding the college experience for marginalized student populations by noting how the college experience for marginalized students is a very different experience from non-marginalized student populations. Marginalized student populations are often left experiencing different pressures and feelings than non-marginalized student populations, which highlights the importance for continued study on marginalized student populations (Lee, 2019).

Recommendation for Further Study #3

The third recommendation for further study is to explore the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors amongst undecided sophomore

year college students. Hunter et al. (2010) stressed the fact that there is minimal research on sophomore year college students who are undecided in their major of study, which thus causes these students to “even more complications” (p. 86) than students who have declared a major. Hunter et al. (2010) further noted that undecided sophomore year college students need a specific type of academic advising that includes both academic and career planning. With the sophomore year of college already being a critical point in a student’s academic career, further study exploring the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors amongst undecided sophomore year college students is vital.

Conclusion

An undergraduate student’s sophomore year of college is one of the most critical periods in their academic career, with 10% of undergraduate college students dropping out between sophomore and senior year (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). Sophomore college students, who are also first-generation undergraduate students, may feel these effects more prominently, as they may lack the social capital, social experiences, and PSSE beliefs that are needed to be successful in college (McCall, 2014; Upah, 2017).

This transcendental phenomenological research study explored the factors that influenced a first-generation undergraduate college student’s perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. A conventional four-year, public higher education institution located in Maine was chosen for the conduction of this transcendental phenomenological research study. A total of nine participants were sustained throughout the duration of this research study. A one-on-one, semi-structured interview format was conducted with study participants to explore the robust, descriptive lived experiences that each study participant shared and described. The collected data were analyzed

through inductive thematic analysis coding for maximum discovery of themes, patterns, and commonalities through the dialogue of the lived experiences of study participants.

The themes that were revealed in the data analysis process from the lived experiences of the nine study participants were internal & external social support systems, social relationship with academic advisor, sociocultural influences, lived experiences in high school, lived childhood/adulthood experiences, perception of self, and institutional resources, and were associated with both research questions. These discovered themes represented the lived experiences that study participants faced with the phenomenon and how these experiences have influenced their PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college. The most common prominent factors shared by study participants that were described to have influenced student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college were lived experiences in high school, sociocultural influences, first-year college student experience, and perception of self.

Driven by the data and findings from this transcendental phenomenological research study, the following recommendations for further study are (a) conduct a similar qualitative research study with first-generation undergraduate sophomore year college students in a different geographic location, (b) explore factors that influence PSSE in other student populations, such as international students, low socioeconomic status students, or military veteran students, and (c) explore the factors that influence student PSSE and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors amongst undecided sophomore year college students.

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Appendix A: Digital Recruitment Flyer

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore the factors that influence a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Who

To be eligible to participate in this research study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Must be a self-identified first-generation college student
- An active undergraduate degree-seeking student with 24-53 credits accumulated
- Enrolled at [site institution] at least part-time
- Have completed at least two semesters of study at [site institution]
- Does not possess a working or personal relationship with the researcher, Kaycee Gnatowski
- Able to participate in a 60–90-minute Zoom interview

If you do not meet all the requirements outlined above, you are not eligible to participate in this research study.

Your voice matters and is vital to producing positive change. Sharing your experiences that have influenced your perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors as a sophomore student at [site institution] will help academic advisors create a more individualized, personalized, and supportive experience for sophomore students.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, have questions, or would like to learn more, please contact the researcher, Kaycee Gnatowski, at kgnatowski@une.edu.

This research study will be seeking eligible participants during [dates].

Appendix B: Print Recruitment Flyer



Volunteers are needed for a research study exploring the factors that influence a first-generation undergraduate college student's perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors during their sophomore year of college.

Eligibility requirements:

- Must be a self-identified first-generation college student
- An active undergraduate degree-seeking student with 24-53 credits accumulated
- Enrolled at [site institution] at least part-time
- Have completed at least two semesters of study at [site institution]
- Does not possess a working or personal relationship with the researcher, Kaycee Gnatowski
- Able to participate in a 60–90-minute Zoom interview

If you are interested in participating in this research study, have questions, or would like to learn more, please contact the researcher, Kaycee Gnatowski, at kgnatowski@une.edu.

This research study will be seeking eligible participants during [dates].

Appendix C: Consent for Participation in Research **CONSENT FORM**

Title of Study or Project: Exploring Factors Influencing First Generation Undergraduate College Students' Perceived Social-Self Efficacy (PSSE) And Ability to Socially Integrate with Academic Advisors	
Date of Review: 12/2/2021	
Principal Investigator: Kaycee Gnatowski	Phone: 860-917-1394

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. The information that will be discussed gives you important information about the study. It describes the purpose of this research study, and the risks and possible benefits of participating. The word “we” means the study investigator and other research staff.

Why are you being asked to take part in this study?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you meet the eligibility requirements to participate in this research study.

What is the purpose of this research study?

We are conducting a research study on factors that influence first generation undergraduate college students' perceived social-self efficacy (PSSE) and ability to socially integrate with academic advisors.

What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a few questions about your ability to actively communicate with academic advisors, your lived experiences, social integration with academic advisors, and factors that influence your ability to communicate with academic advisors during your sophomore year of college. If you agree, the recorded Zoom interview will be between 60-90 minutes long.

What are the risks and benefits of this study?

As with any study involving collection of data, there is the possibility your confidentiality information will be shared with others. Every precaution will be taken to secure your personal information to ensure confidentiality.

Do you need to give your consent in order to participate?

By reviewing this consent form, you are indicating that you have had your questions answered, and you agree to take part in this research study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part. If you decide not to take part or if you change your mind later there will be no penalties or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop the questionnaire at any time.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. People from oversight agencies and organizations such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections may also look at your study records.

The results of this study may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. We will keep your identity private in any publication or presentation about the study.

By law, the investigators are required to protect your private information. The investigator and staff involved with the study will keep your private information collected for the study strictly confidential.

What if you have questions about the study?

If you have questions about the study, call the study investigator, Kaycee Gnatowski at kgnatowski@une.edu You may also talk to Dr. Jennifer Scott at jscott25@une.edu if you have questions or concerns.

APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol

1. What does social integration between students and academic advisors mean to you?
2. How would you describe confidence?
3. What do you feel contributes to the development of one's confidence, particularly in social situations, such as communicating with an academic advisor?
4. How would you describe your ability to actively communicate with academic advisors, such as when you have questions or concerns?
5. Can you describe what lived experiences you have encountered that have influenced your confidence and ability to actively communicate with your academic advisor?
6. How would you describe your ability to initiate communication, such as in-person, email communication, or phone, with an academic advisor?
7. How have your lived experiences influenced your confidence and ability to continue communicating with an academic advisor?
8. Can you describe how your confidence in communicating with academic advisors has changed from your first-year of undergraduate studies to your sophomore year of undergraduate studies?
 - a. If there has been a change in your confidence in social situations, such as communicating with your academic advisor, why do you feel this is?
9. What institutional resources are available to you during your sophomore year of undergraduate studies to help you communicate with your academic advisor?
10. How do you feel these resources have influenced your confidence and ability to actively communicate with your academic advisor?
11. Can you describe if these resources have changed from your first-year of undergraduate studies to your sophomore year of undergraduate studies?