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Advisors' Perceptions of Honors College Students' Experiences of Stress and Autonomy

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Honors college students experience stress and anxiety, which has the potential to affect their psychological well-being. The advice of honors academic advisors may influence the psychological well-being of honors students through recommendations of college engagement that can assist in the development of autonomy and self-authorship. Baxter Magolda's concepts of autonomy and self-authorship and Ryff's scales of psychological well-being were the conceptual framework used to examine the perceptions of honors college advisors regarding how cocurricular opportunities influence the reduction of student stress and anxiety and the increase of student autonomy and self-authorship. Using a basic qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with 9 honors college advisors from 8 different institutions in the United States. Transcripts were analyzed using open coding to determine emerging themes. Participants perceived cocurricular opportunities had a positive effect on students' psychological well-being and helped students to develop autonomy and self-authorship. Advisors also reported that reflective practices assist in the development of autonomy and self-authorship of honors college students and positively impact students' psychological well-being. Positive social change may result by further defining the role honors college advisors play, including helping students make choices that can reduce stress and anxiety. Higher education leaders may also gain guidance in adding value to higher education by giving honors college students more access to experiential and cocurricular learning opportunities to reduce stress and anxiety. Lastly, the findings have the potential to help bring awareness to and reduce the stigma surrounding student mental health concerns.

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Dedication

I dedicate this oeuvre to all past, present, and future students who have touched my life and propelled me forward. Education was a profession I never envisioned for myself yet consider to be blessed beyond measure to have experienced.

The stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by upper performing students are phenomena shared across ethnicities, genders, and borders. By bringing forth these issues and attempting to understand methods to address these experiences, my hope is that we will see a decline in the stigma associated with mental health issues.

Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank the students who impacted my overall desire to pursue this endeavor. I learned more from these invaluable experiences and am thankful for the lessons they taught me. Megan, I hear you.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family for sacrificing and supporting my dreams. Your presence and foundation made this document possible. Thank you for believing in me, we did this together. Parker Elise, the ceiling is shattered. Dream big baby girl.

Lastly, Dr. Keen, your patience, insight, and guidance enabled this dream to come true. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take this journey with you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Many U.S. college students face stress that has potential psychological consequences that could affect their overall achievement in college. College and university clinicians on 152 campuses reported that 54% of students were receiving counseling services for anxiety, depression, and stress (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019). Bowman (2010) found the more stress students reported experiencing, the less personal satisfaction and weaker academic outcomes students reported.

Learning communities and specialized programs within colleges and universities, such as honors programs, may influence academic outcomes and personal satisfaction of students. Honors programs often offer learning environments ideal for honors students that match the educational expectations of their students (Cuevas, Schreiner, & Kim, 2017). However, students in university honors programs have been found to have interpersonal challenges, feelings of isolation, and less satisfaction than their non-honors peers (Johnson, Walther, & Medley, 2018). Specialized academic advising has been identified as an important component for honors students' academic journey to maximize their potential and address their needs (Johnson et al., 2018). In addition, an important aspect of college student development that can help in improving the academic outcomes of students is autonomy, the ability to define one's belief and identity (Teasley & Buchanan, 2016).

Honors program advisors can help college students develop this autonomy through formal and informal interactions with advisees (Sheldon, Garton, Orr, & Smith, 2015). Ravert and Schneller (2018) found those relationships formed between students

and college personnel, such as advisors, faculty, and administrators, play an important role in student success, both academically and socially. Bowman and Culver (2018) found that honors students thrive, both academically and socially, in relationships based on developing their intellects. Teasley and Buchanan (2016) reported that advisors could encourage autonomy in their students and could help them avoid burnout and stress through helping students develop competence and responsibility. Kilgo, Mollet, and Pascarella (2016) stated that autonomy was of importance to both the student and the institution. Wang, Ng, Liu, and Ryan (2016) identified a positive relationship between autonomy and academic performance in students, while Bowman (2010) found the more stress a student reported experiencing, the less personal satisfaction and weaker academic outcomes a student experienced, making the advisor-advisee relationship pivotal in the development of autonomy and self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda (2008) advocated for the goal of higher education to be the guiding of students to become self-authored; self-authorship allows for the understanding of multiple perspectives and the ability to form conclusions based on evidence supporting the conclusion through experiences. Developing critical thinking skills prepares college students for life after graduation but requires purposeful design on the part of the institution and the learning experiences it provides. Baxter Magolda claimed all learners need to develop a strong sense of self to guide future decision-making. Thus, assisting in the development of building autonomy and self-authorship for college students is an area of opportunity for institutions. Developing self-authorship capability for students may potentially lead to an impactful college experience, which in turn may contribute to a

successful outcome for students (Bowman, Linley, & Weaver, 2019). These practices have the potential to developmentally grow the self-authorship capacity of students when this design is intentional in implementation. While the stress, performance, advising, and self-authorship of honors students have all been researched, few researchers have focused on the development of self-authorship through the use of cocurricular activities and honors college advising.

In this chapter, I will address the background, problem statement, purpose, conceptual framework, nature of the study, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of this study.

Background

Colleges and universities, including their honors programs, have implemented cocurricular activities, seminars, and advising sessions to assist students in growing their autonomy (Yamashita, 2015). Over 1,500 universities and colleges in the United States offer honors programs or colleges that help to provide this support to the most prepared students (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2018). Providing support in building autonomy and self-authorship may be foundational in students' postsecondary education and may reduce the effects of stress and anxiety, as well as promote academic success. Higher education years are a formative time when young adults emerge and develop their mastery of life skills (Bruffaerts et al., 2018); however, one in three students have reported mental health problems, which were also associated with lower academic performance. This transition into higher education impacts the mental health of collegians either contributing to psychological disruption or maintaining continuity in the process

higher education entails (Huguenel & Conley, 2020). Better academic outcomes accrue when student-advisor relationships focus on autonomy and self-authorship (Bowman, 2010). Diaz, Farruggia, Wellman, and Bottoms (2019) suggested that high-quality faculty/student interactions have a significant influence on students. In addition, Bowman and Culver (2017) found that positive relationships shape the perceptions of honors college students, ultimately fostering their development.

In a yearlong study of 4,921 students, Bruffaerts et al. (2018) investigated academic performance and mental health problems. Students impacted by mental health problems experienced a decrease in their average yearly progress of 2.9–4.7%. Miller and Dumford (2018) found that programs offering cocurricular and curricular opportunities support a positive impact for their students. More recently, Hennessy, Parham-Mocello, and Walker (2019) found that cocurricular opportunities are popular with students and often enhance nonacademic portions of their lives, such as giving them an advantage applying for jobs and graduate school. Opoku-Acheampong et al. (2017) reported that stress affects the mental health of students negatively, impacting life and academic performance. Students can alleviate these stressors through strategies such as cocurricular opportunities.

Parker, Saklofske, and Keefer (2016) focused on the emotional and social aspect of honors college students, particularly on emotional intelligence as a more accurate predictor of academic success. Emotional intelligence allows students to interact with experiences utilizing their emotional beliefs, values, and concepts to influence their actions. These skills are akin to autonomy in that the attainment of emotional intelligence

is fostered around intrapersonal and interpersonal relations, adaptability based on experiences, and managing stress accordingly. Self-authorship in emotional intelligence consists of four core skills: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, (c) adaptability, and (d) stress management. Similarly, self-authorship of the individual, as described by Baxter Magolda (2008), is characterized by generating and aligning one's beliefs rather than relying on others, taking responsibility, and creating feelings rather than subjecting oneself to the feelings of others.

The role of an advisor in students' academic process began as early as 1636 in the United States when Harvard College president took on the role (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson & Barkemeyer, 2015). The role was then introduced first at Johns Hopkins University, which applied and continued to change and redefine the faculty academic advising model. Advising can offer critical perspectives for students, according to McGill (2018), but is still an emerging profession. Advising praxis requires professionals to meaningfully review routines and make intentional changes from theory to practice, as well as thought into action (van den Wijngaard, 2019). Advising can contextualize the mission of higher education and encourage students to pursue learning opportunities beyond the campus boundaries. Ultimately, advising is in place to ensure students can meet their goals of obtaining a specified degree within the parameters of the institution's requirements. Students are educated on the details of acquiring their long-term goals and develop short-term objectives based on their articulated interests. These conversations from advisor to advisee are considered an extension of the learning and

teaching process, according to van de Wijngaard (2019), and have the potential to enhance the learning process of the students.

The application of Baxter Magolda's (2001) definition of self-authorship in the educational context is prevalent in the literature and applicable to the development of honors college students. The development of this personal identity is relevant to the field and helps to aid students in navigating the stressful process of higher education. Student learning and development are opportunities for institutions to foster the growth of self-authorship capacity through developmentally effective experiences (Bowman et al., 2019). Self-authorship capacity is promoted through the experiences of diversity, academic challenges, and faculty and staff interactions to aid in its development. These developmentally effective experiences can create effective learning environments that support self-authorship. Fostering the development of self-authorship has the potential to indirectly affect psychological well-being, enabling overall student success.

In this study, I examined honors college advisors' perceptions regarding how cocurricular opportunities influence the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increases autonomy and self-authorship. The findings regarding stress, performance, advising, and self-authorship of honors students have the potential to influence the cocurricular opportunities afforded this population of students.

Problem Statement

The problem I sought to explore through this basic qualitative study was the need to reduce stress for honors college students to maximize academic performance and personal development. I accomplished this through examining the perceptions of honors

program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase of their autonomy and self-authorship. The research problem required understanding the relationship between stress and anxiety and the autonomy and self-authorship of honors college students. Academic advisors have opportunities to challenge and support students in developing self-authorship (Quinn, 2017). Little is known about academic advisors' perceptions regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase of autonomy and self-authorship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of student stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship. Specifically, I focused on describing how advisors perceive supports offered to the honors students having a positive influence on the honors students' autonomy or self-authorship as well as what honors program advisors recommend would further students' development of autonomy and self-authorship.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of student stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship?

RQ2: What additional strategies do honors program advisors recommend that could be used to assist in increasing honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship and reducing their stress and anxiety?

Conceptual Framework

The framework that informed this study included Ryff's (1989) construct of autonomy within Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being and Baxter Magolda's (1994/2007) theory of self-authorship. The concepts of autonomy and self-authorship are similar in their focus on internal personal identity. Autonomy, as conceived by Ryff, is closely linked to self-authorship, which addresses how students can create autonomy by reflecting on past experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2007).

Ryff (1989) claimed psychological well-being incorporates the dimensions of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Ryff claimed the six dimensions are useful to learners in managing and overcoming the stressors of academic life and contribute to outcomes of academic life. Psychological well-being is relevant to a higher education experience and to honors college students' mastery of autonomy and self-authorship. Using both Ryff's scales of psychological well-being and Baxter Magolda's (2007) concepts of autonomy and self-authorship will help to interpret these experiences.

Baxter Magolda's (1994/2007) concept of self-authorship has aided researchers in the investigation of how students link meaning to interpret experiences, define identity, and draw on positive social relations, ultimately shaping perceptions. Studies of academic advising have been based on Baxter Magolda's work, including Pizzolato's (2006) study.

Pizzolato (2006) analyzed 132 student narratives about their advising and selection of academic majors and found that students' decision-making and self-authoring abilities were enhanced by advising sessions that focused on goal reflection and volitional planning. Baxter Magolda's work regarding learning partnership models and application in engaged university learning are utilized in higher education to bring out the self-authorship of students. The learning partnership model is a way for students to grow through the use of challenging questions to create innovative solutions that can translate to 21st century applications (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Similarly, this use of self-authorship propelled a new curriculum model to be explored, called the engaged learning university, which can be applied university-wide and allows for the steps that lead to self-authorship to occur in the meaning making of interactions (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009). Concurrently, these models allow for self-authorship to be supported in the higher education classroom for the benefit of students.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a basic qualitative inquiry. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) characterized a basic qualitative approach as including interviews as the data source; this method allowed me to explore how honors program advisors perceive the honors program and the effectiveness of cocurricular opportunities afforded students in the reduction of stress and anxiety levels and how they perceive this may affect the students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship. I interviewed nine honors college advisors from eight campuses in the United States.

Operational Definitions

Autonomy: Involves taking ownership of one's learning and allowing the construction of forming beliefs, values, and inter/intrapersonal commitments through experience. Autonomy relates to how students interpret the world around them through their inner conscience (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Learning partnership model: A learning model that promotes engaging students and providing support for them to develop autonomy through interactions that require mutually constructed meanings, complexity, and guidance, ultimately leading students to develop their self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Self-authorship: The mode of making meaning by becoming critically aware of one's perception of reality, participation in dialogue toward truth, and responding in just ways in interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Assumptions

This study was based on several assumptions, the first being that honors college advisors would be interested in participating in a study regarding honors college students. Second, I could not be sure that all the participants would accurately represent their perceptions regarding the research problem. Lastly, I interviewed two participants who had previous experience working with honors college students but were not currently in that role, and I assumed their previous work as an academic advisor would be the source of their contribution to the study. Only one participant was not currently working with honors college students. Participants' roles varied from advisor to directors within the honors college.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative study was established by the research questions and was limited to honors college advisors who have had direct interactions with honors college students. As a result, some of the data collected may have limited the generalizability to other honors college advisors' experiences with their advisees based on geographic differences in student behaviors, local college policies or institutional influences, size, or potentially curriculum and cocurricular opportunities. Generalizability may also have been limited to the population at large and not just the honors population at an institution. Due to the targeted sample size, these results might not be representative of the entire honors population. Examining honors college advisors and not general or disciplinary or field advisors delimits my study in general. Delimitations also include the selection criteria that honors advisors needed to have a minimum of 1 year of experience with honors college students. My study was not delimited by the gender or race of the academic advisors.

Limitations

Limitations for transferability of the results of this study could potentially occur as a result of not soliciting participants from professional organizations such as the National Academic Advising Association and National Collegiate Honors Council. This self-selection of organizations from which I recruited via listservs might have limited participation along with limiting my findings based on the advisors' perceptions of their honors advisees as I was looking specifically at the honors college students and their honors college advisors, not the student body as a whole. I am the only researcher who

conducted, compiled, and analyzed the data collected, and there is a potential for biases to infiltrate the study and potentially impact the results. Data were collected in the United States, which might potentially limit the scope of my study internationally and may only be generalizable to the United States. Lastly, results may not be representative of all honors programs and all institutions.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study have the potential to provide insight into how honors college advising contributes to the growth of honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship through advisors' direct involvement with students and the results have the potential to contribute to increasing effectiveness of honors programs. Trusted and attentive honors college advisors can assist students in understanding who they are and what they value and can help honors college students attain their goals through this advising relationship (Hause, 2017). The perceptions of honors college advisors may help to bridge the experiences within the classroom to the use of self-authorship in cocurricular interactions of honors college students. Positive social change may result in understanding what cocurricular opportunities are offered for students and about the possible importance of students having extracurricular involvement as part of their college experience—particularly as it might reduce stress and anxiety. Positive social change may result as institutions apply research findings to improve methods to help honors students handle their stressors and develop methods to manage them, and in doing so, increase students' psychological well-being, specifically autonomy and self-authorship, and academic success.

Summary

Honors college students have been the focus of a multitude of studies pertaining to higher education. In this study, I focused on the perceptions of honors college advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of student stress and anxiety and increase of autonomy and self-authorship. Chapter 2 includes strategies I used to search for prior research, further analysis of the conceptual framework, and an empirical review of extant literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that defined this study was to explore the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of student stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship. College students in the United States experience stress and anxiety, which lead to potential psychological consequences that can affect their overall achievement in college. College and university clinicians on 152 campuses reported that 54% of students were receiving counseling services for anxiety, depression, and stress (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019). Bowman (2010) found the more stress students reported experiencing, the less personal satisfaction and weaker academic outcomes students reported they experienced.

In Chapter 2, I present an analysis of the conceptual framework using Baxter Magolda's (1994/2007) concepts of autonomy and self-authorship and Ryff's scales of psychological well-being (1989), which are important in understanding the perceptions of honors college advisors regarding students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship. In the final section, I analyze empirical studies regarding high ability college students, the advisor's role in the process of this development, and how previous researchers have viewed stress and anxiety for high-achieving students.

Literature Search Strategies

Databases I used in locating relevant articles included EBSCO, ProQuest Central, Education Source Search, Multi-Database Search, Sage Premier, PsycINFO, Project Muse, and Google Scholar. The scope of this literature review search is dated from 2015

to 2020. Key words included: *gifted students, gifted and talented students, honors students, gifted person, honors college advisors, advisors, high-achieving, mental health outcomes, stress, mental health study & teaching, cocurricular, cocurricular opportunities, cocurricular activities, autonomy, college, higher education, university, college outcomes, academic success, educational success, psychological well-being or PWB, self-authorship and autonomy, anxiety,* and *Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being.*

Conceptual Framework

I combined the concepts of autonomy and self-authorship, as described by Baxter Magolda (2008), and the construct of autonomy Ryff (1989) proposed in the scales of psychological well-being to form the conceptual framework for this study. Seifert (2005) suggested that in higher education Ryff's scales of psychological well-being pertain to counseling centers, vocational planning, health or wellness programs, educators assessing program success, or institutions enhancing psychological well-being. Baxter Magolda elaborated Kegan's concept of autonomy to enhance students' growth by including the lens of self-authorship that allows students to become self-authored. This framework allows for educators and faculty to gauge the preparation of college students and empowers the implementation of teaching and mentoring processes that aid in the development of self-authorship in a learning partnership model.

Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being and the Construct of Autonomy

Ryff's (1989) scales of psychological well-being are framed to emulate aspects of thriving or flourishing and enable respondents to assess psychological well-being through

a 42-item, 6-point Likert scale. Ryff's scales of psychological well-being demonstrate balance overall, negating the need for psychological well-being to merely focus on happiness. The psychological well-being of a person is determined through the balance of all six dimensions, and Ryff's construct of autonomy is closely related to the development of autonomy and self-authorship. The dimensions are scaffolded, so I review all six, starting with the initial dimension of self-acceptance and ending with the sixth dimension of autonomy.

The first dimension of Ryff's (1989) scales of psychological well-being is *self-acceptance*. Self-acceptance is the ability to accept the positive and negative aspects that make up who a person (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Self-acceptance can also include the feeling of self-satisfaction despite any deficiencies that might exist. For individuals to score high in this category, they must have the self-awareness to accept these parameters and accept who they are. *Personal growth*, or realizing one's potential, is the second dimension of psychological well-being. Scoring high in this category entails that students have an awareness of the potential they hold and are working toward improving themselves over time. Students are also open to new experiences that may increase their personal growth and challenge their own ideas when new experiences call into question their existing assumptions. These two dimensions are similar to the cognitive dimension of Baxter Magolda's journey toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Students must challenge their current thinking to move forward to the next level.

The third dimension of psychological well-being, *purpose in life*, is demonstrated through having strong conviction and drive toward a goal or purpose (Ryff & Keyes,

1995). Respondents score high on this dimension when a clear goal is desired and plans are in place to attain it. The fourth dimension, *positive relations with others*, is attained when students demonstrate ability to empathize reciprocally and demonstrate affection toward other human beings (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Scoring high in this dimension indicates meaningful relationships are engaged and a certain level of intimacy is shared. These two dimensions are similar to the intrapersonal dimension of Baxter Magolda's theory (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Students ask the question "who am I" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). *Environmental mastery*, the fifth dimension, indicates the ability to master external factors and situations, creating opportunity for personal benefit (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Students score high in this dimension when they perceive they can make effective use of spontaneous situations that arise and turn those situations to their benefit.

Lastly, the sixth dimension, *autonomy*, is the independence and self-control to make decisions without outside influences (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Freer from social pressures, confidence in oneself and one's experiences determine the developmental outcome. These two dimensions are similar to the interpersonal dimension of Baxter Magolda's theory (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Respondents have mastered the concept of "how do I want to construct relationships with others" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Baxter Magolda's Concepts of Self Authorship and Autonomy

Baxter Magolda (2014) defined self-authorship as people's ability to define their personal beliefs and identity and their ability to navigate social situations successfully in their adult life. A learner's capacity to develop self-authorship to manage their adult life

and their learning environment can lead to enhancing their academic experience. Baxter Magolda addressed the importance of the interdependence of support systems in developing self-authorship. When self-authorship is developed epistemologically, interpersonal and intrapersonal development is reached (Hodge et al., 2009). Once this pinnacle is met, learning becomes transformational and development occurs for the individual. Baxter Magolda's self-authorship model calls for students to separate from external authorities and impart their understandings from their lived experiences, which allows them to make decisions based on their personal ideals (Dugas, Geosling, & Shelton, 2019). Autonomy and self-authorship are the culmination of the deeper understanding of these lived experiences that enable learners to interpret the world around them through their inner conscience (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Applying Baxter Magolda's definition of self-authorship assists in the comprehension of the process as well as an understanding of the importance of developing self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda's (2008) theory of self-authorship provides a theoretical scope to examine the development of autonomy and self-authorship of students. This process of adult development begins around college and continues to unfold as experiences shape the perspective of the student as cognitive maturity increases (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Baxter Magolda's constructive developmental theory spans nearly 30 years, occurring in three phases, including the concept of self-authorship (Perez, 2017). Phase one begins with an external definition of self-authorship that is assisted by authoritative figures in one's life. These figures help to define beliefs and identities as well as relationships in the initial phases of self-authorship (Perez, 2017). Phase one eventually leads to a crossroads

once a person's own inner voice begins to emerge and internal and external voices start guiding the decision-making process (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Eventually the crossroads phase ends once internal definitions become firmly established and the external voice is silenced through the internal voice solidifying the foundation to guide reactions (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Closely linked with self-authorship, *autonomy* is defined as having the ability to control the actions, words, and emotions of oneself (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Autonomy is developed when learners can voice their opinions. Learners become the sole operative in the development of their personal autonomy (Yamashita, 2015). Self-authorship and autonomy advance the development of students to solidify their independence (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Taking educational experiences in and outside of the classroom to the interpretation of these experiences leads to the developmental growth and ultimately to develop the meaning making capacity that defines self-authorship.

Learning Partnership Model

The learning partnership model as developed by Baxter Magolda (2004) emerged from a 17-year longitudinal study. This model is grounded in the constructivist tradition and guides those involved with the learning process to develop the self-authorship of students. The learning partnership model has three areas of development—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—that offer the supports necessary for student development (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Epistemological capacity involves the way students make postulations about the surety of their knowledge to make claims about their knowledge (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Using cognitive maturity to

interpret judgments defines this contextual knowledge. Intrapersonal development reflects the changing ways students view themselves and demonstrates their ability to understand their personal history. The ability to construct this internal belief system defines the interpersonal development of the student. The interpersonal dimension of development is defined by the ability to respect and collaborate with others whose beliefs, identities, and cultures are different from one's own. The three areas (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) are linked to the development of autonomy of students and the ability to self-author and be independent thinkers and to follow their inner voice to make conscientious decisions through building constructed autonomy desired for college graduates (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Baxter Magolda's (2004) learning partnership model guides students through three tiers of learning, where monitoring is slowly released as students matriculate through the process. Tier 1, usually designated for those new to the college experience, allows for students to set goals for themselves. Advisors, additionally, help support parents in their role during Tier 1 and address their concerns for their students (Hodge et al., 2009). Tier 2, also known as the crossroads phase, begins when students start to question authoritative definitions and beliefs, identify their personal beliefs, and attempt to approach questioning of authority in their personal and academic lives. Students can apply these ideas to everyday interactions and become receptive to others' ideologies and experiences. Faculty, advisors, and parents can help students in this process as the self-authorship is beginning to solidify in the students as they begin to make meaning. Meaning making is also linked to making sense of the world—discerning what to believe

and how to behave (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). When students move from Tier 1 to Tier 2, they are moving from taking the meaning from a person of authority to questioning the person of authority and acting upon their own ideas and assumptions (Hodge et al., 2009). During Tier 3, which is the culmination of these efforts, students are listening to their internal voice, making decisions, and acting upon them. Students demonstrate this self-authorship by founding organizations, creating meanings, and navigating their lives with that internal voice as their guide, no longer looking for the authority figure to help make these decisions for them.

Baxter Magolda (2004) stated that the learning partnership model is a way for students to grow through challenging questions they use to create innovative solutions that can translate to 21st century utilization. Challenging questions include strategies, such as higher-order thinking, contemplating differing ideas, or open-ended prompts, aid in the development of necessary critical thinking skills. Students garner support from their educational experiences and training and translate it to their own constructed meaning, as they are building their own behaviors to master self-authorship. These skills are supported by mutual connections from educators, faculty, and staff to help participants through this journey (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). This epistemological growth challenges the learner to move toward the goal of self-authorship through the blending of connection and autonomy, mutually characteristic of self-authorship. Educational professionals' use of the learning partnership model capitalizes on this movement toward self-authorship and helps students develop holistically.

Engaged Learning University

The framework for this model stems from Baxter Magolda's learning partnership model that validates the students' potential as scholars, connects learners with their experiences, and allows them to mutually construct meanings with their experiences (Hodge et al., 2009). The development of self-authorship defined by Baxter Magolda (2001) propelled a new curriculum model, the engaged learning university, which can be applied university-wide where appropriate. This model allows for the steps that lead to self-authorship to occur in the meaning making of interactions foundational in the mastery of self-authorship (Hodge et al., 2009). Hodge et al. claimed to promote self-authorship in the engaged learning university; the shift from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm needs to take place. In the traditional, instructional role of educators, the delivery of information from teacher to student is in a defined flow that limits the accountability of students in ownership of their learning. Cooperative learning in its essence, is more structured, leading into collaborative learning, which is less structured, then ultimately leading to student ownership of learning (Hanson, Trolian, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2016). Educational professionals consider this instructional paradigm to be the most efficient way to disseminate information to students. The learning paradigm requires educators to move away from the traditional role in the classroom and incorporate participatory learning, drawing students in for active participation in the learning process.

Empirical Literature Review of Key Factors

The review of empirical literature is divided into the following sections: high-achieving students, honors students' emotional and social well-being, cocurricular involvement in higher education, advisor's role in higher education, students' perceptions of academic advising, and assessing self-authorship in the higher education context. By researching these focused areas of higher education, I have sought to attain a deeper understanding of the experiences of advisors.

High-Achieving Students

Students who are identified as high achieving are oftentimes recruited for programs such as honors colleges, where integrative learning, collaboration, and faculty interaction are commonplace (Miller & Dumford, 2018). Honors students have met the admittance guidelines to qualify for entrance into colleges and universities honors programs based on their academic strength. Rinn and Plucker (2018) conducted a literature review utilizing a grounded theory approach and reported that enrollment into the honors program is largely based on honors students' own desire to apply to the honors college directly. This thematic finding of the 52 empirical articles analyzed, generated a typology defining high achieving or honors college students. These academic characteristics set high-achieving learners apart and make them desirable for institutions across the United States.

Participation in honors college has been associated with higher graduation rates. Diaz et al.'s (2019) research at a large, Midwestern university with a well-established honors program. With 21,723 participants, logistic regression determined honors college

students were three times more likely to graduate within 4 years than their non-honors peers. This study did not specifically address the features of the honors college program that might enhance academic success such as potentially high-impact practices involved in honors college education however, participants suggested that small class sizes, cocurricular opportunities, and socioemotionally supportive practices potentially aided in the retention of these students.

Cuevas et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study aimed at better understanding the psychological aspect of honors college students. Being engaged, internally motivated, or as having high academic self-concepts are adjectives describing honors college students. These characteristics are part of a larger theme Cuevas et al. (2017) identified as *thriving*. Thriving can be identified by five factors: engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness. The first three factors: engaged learning, academic determination, and positive perspective are characteristics that honors college students are recognized as possessing. Despite these identifying academic characteristics, institutions may put stress on honors college students that inhibit their success. The latter factors, diverse citizenship and social connectedness, are part of a much larger umbrella that encompasses the psychological sense of community established through the faculty-student interactions present on campus. These faculty-student interactions help to build this sense of community, reducing the stress honors students face. However, just because an honors student is academically successful in college, does not necessarily translate to them thriving at the institution.

Honors Students' Emotional and Social Well-Being

Honors college students are subject to emotional and social hardships, like their non-honors peers, despite their display of desirable characteristics that set them apart (Cuevas et al., 2017). An academically successful student can be characterized as having a high GPA, positive interactions, being socially connected, and a seemingly well-engaged academic learner. However, a psychological portrayal of an academically successful student may indicate a different scenario.

The Center for Collegiate Mental Health (The Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018) released an annual report from Penn State University and partnering institutions in regards to the mental health of collegians in the United States. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health's (2018) findings indicated an increased demand for counseling services for the 2017-2018 academic year, compared to previous years. Social anxiety and academic distress have been on the rise since the 2010-2011 academic year. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health's Clinician Index of Client Concerns captured the concerns of collegians attending counseling services. This index has 54 "concerns" that clinicians identify based on the dialogue with students who visit counseling centers. Some of these indicators include: anxiety, depression, stress, family, academic performance, relationships, interpersonal functioning, and self-esteem. Stress and anxiety were reported in 61% and 45% of cases, respectively. Concerns pertaining to academic performance, relationship problems, interpersonal functioning, and self-esteem and confidence follow as other concerns that students are laden with. It should be acknowledged that these reports are considered an estimate of the number of students

impacted by these burdens, as the report only recognizes the number of students who voluntarily sought counseling.

The social and emotional well-being of college honors students is another area that is researched. Clark et al. (2018) examined eight college adjustment factors impacting honors students and concluded that honors students expressed less self-confidence academically than their non-honors peers despite having realistic expectations of their academic progress. Of the 197 honors students involved in the study, the next variable that impacted honors students was personal and academic concerns. Students enter the higher educational context with unrealistically high assumptions of their academic abilities, only to discover at the post-secondary level, they might not be enough. Addressing these areas through experiences, Clark et al. concluded that honors college students need new interpersonal-societal experiences as well as academic experiences to manage their psychological health.

Psychological health includes emotional and social components for students. In a quantitative study, Parker et al. (2019) examines high-achieving students and their emotional and social competency as an indicator of postsecondary success. Utilizing data from 171 high-achieving students, and tracking their progress over 6 years, Parker et al. (2019) reported that emotional intelligence and degree completion are related. Students with lower emotional indexes are less likely than their peers to graduate within 6 years as compared to high emotional index students. In fact, those students with low emotional intelligence scores were more likely to withdraw from school after the first year.

Knowing that emotional intelligence is closely related to autonomy and self-authorship, emotional indexes are important to consider in my study.

Experiences for college students translate to the possible development of their emotional and social well-being. Young et al. (2016) utilized a phenomenological approach, which explored the experiences of students within the honors college environment (three distinct groups of honors students) through focus group interactions (traditional honors students, senior honors students, and honors college ambassadors). Of these targeted groups, 15 students participated in the study. Three themes emerged: connectedness, community, and opportunity. Participants stated that the honors college brought them together as a student body with the staff, faculty, and student-to-student interactions. This communal experience enriched the existing educational experience and led to professional growth. Opportunity includes extracurricular activities and making connections with others involved in them. Opportunity is of importance to my study as how it is outlined in the Young et al.'s (2016) study in enriching the educational experience, leading to potential growth.

The educational experience including cocurricular opportunities, making connections with others, and academic success is tied to life satisfaction for college students. Holinka (2015) examined three possible correlations: stress and life satisfaction, emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, and stress and emotional intelligence affecting life satisfaction. A total of 135 participants completed three scales to self-report their experiences: Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale, The Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Emotional Quotient Inventory (short). Holinka (2015) found a negative correlation

between stress and life satisfaction for college students involved in the study. Further analysis did not show a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction for the second correlation. Lastly, the third correlation of stress and emotional intelligence on predicting life satisfaction was not significant. Ultimately, Holinka (2015) determined that there was a significant negative correlation between stress and life satisfaction for college students.

The psychological well-being of honors and non-honors undergraduate students was described by Plominski and Burns (2016). Plominski and Burns surveyed 641 undergraduate honors college students and 386 undergraduate non-honors students within a large Midwestern university with a battery of measures assessing psychological adjustment. Plominski and Burns found significant differences in the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior class standings. Sophomore non-honors students reported the lowest levels of general life satisfaction and lower levels of academic self-efficacy than their like honors peers. Honors juniors report significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and academic self-efficacy. Lastly, honors seniors described lower levels of a depressed affect, anxiety, and perceived stress than their peers. Concurrently, these honor seniors described higher levels of life satisfaction and satisfaction with self and academic self-efficacy. Overall, in comparison to their non-honors peers, honors students reported higher levels of wellbeing on the majority of scale and across all four grade levels.

Cocurricular Involvement in Higher Education

I did not find any research specifically about honors college students and cocurricular activities. I only located research on cocurricular and honors college

students, respectively. Cocurricular activities are important aspects of learning opportunities outside the classroom and students reported placing high levels of importance on these opportunities and students with higher GPAs were more likely to report cocurricular experiences (Kwon, Brint, Curwin, & Cantwell, 2020). In a study examining the relationship between cocurricular activities and academic performance, Fox and Sease (2019) reported that involvement in cocurricular activities supported deep learning and improved academic. Fox and Sease grouped 1137 participants into average, average, and below average involvement in cocurricular activities: above. Students at the above average range of cocurricular participation had an average GPA of 3.38, students at the average cocurricular participation range had an average GPA of 3.23, and students at the below average cocurricular participation range had an average of 3.14.

Wong and Leung (2018) examined the cocurricular activities of 435 associate degree or higher diploma college students. Respondents showed interest in participating in cocurricular activities, 68% and 75% respectively. Both groups reported participation in one to two activities at one time, 80% and 86.5% respectively. Associate's degree students expected the cocurricular activities to help them further their studies and potentially further job opportunities for them while over half of the degree respondents expected the cocurricular activities to help them further their studies and potentially further job opportunities for them. Both groups of respondents viewed cocurricular opportunities as useful and as an enhancement to the academic process.

Advisors' Role in Higher Education

Advisors can observe students and opportunities that are afforded them. Sometimes, this includes the ability to take a chance to make risks to further their development within the classroom. Academic advisors help to guide students to understand the paths they can undergo to achieve their aspirations and gauge their progress (Hamed & Hussin, 2015). In a qualitative study, Ravert and Schneller (2019) conducted a questionnaire in a purposeful sampling detailing the perceptions of 50 professional academic advisors regarding the risks students should take more often. The first theme to emerge was for students to take psychological risks, or being willing to challenge one's personal beliefs. Advisors reported the need of students to take psychological risks. Advisors perceived that psychological risks allow students to mentally, not behaviorally, experience uncertainty and make choices based upon this discomfort.

The second theme to emerge (Ravert & Schneller, 2019), self-assertion, includes demonstrating autonomy and reflecting one's self. Self-assertion is demonstrative of advocating for one's self and taking on adult responsibilities. The last two themes involved exploration and interpersonal relations and were demonstrated by students seeking out new experiences actively and becoming engaged with others around them. Ravert and Schneller described these themes as potential areas for faculty and staff to promote for positive risk taking by students at higher education institutions. These themes are also closely aligned to Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship, which

advocates the student to self-reflect to demonstrate autonomy to become engaged with the world around them.

Advisors' perceptions regarding high-achieving students have been found to be different regarding honors and non-honors students. Johnson, Walther, and Medley (2018) explored the perceptions of academic advisors in regards to high achieving students specifically. Twenty-two honors college advisors and non-honors advisors participated in the semistructured interview. Five themes emerged from the interview data (providing a one-stop-shop, building connections and referral networks, indulging a future orientation, cultivating a support system, and making explicit distinctions between honors and non-honors advising). Participants with experiences in both honors college advising and non-honors advising commented that the amount of time that was reserved for honors college advising sessions was lengthier than those of their non-honors peers. Time allotted was viewed, as an asset to advisors and respondents believed that the amount of time had an effect on retention rates. Honors college advisors were able to focus on the personal connections and building the educational community of the institution. Johnson et al. (2018) found that advising as teaching is a holistic approach that puts the advisor as the partner in the student learning process, to develop meaningful connections.

Advisors also manage complications within their institutions. Meeting the needs of the students they serve is not the only constraint they face. In a systematic review of advising, McGill (2018) explored the perspectives of 17 National Academic Advising Association leaders in regards to their academic advising experiences. McGill (2018)

reported that advisors struggle with resource depletion, complications of 21st century higher education, and concerns that are not adequately addressed by institutional leaders. Advisors reported they were struggling to meet the demands of their role, while meeting the needs of the students they serve. McGill reports that despite advising being a required portion of higher education, the advising role is still emerging in its definition, as well as the expectation for what role the advisors play in higher education.

Students' Perceptions of Advising

Several researchers have explored students' perceptions of academic advising. Quality advising from institutionally designated entities is a facet of college students are concerned with (Sheldon et al., 2015). Sheldon et al. (2015) conducted a survey of 527 students and found that highest quality of academic advising was perceived to involve the mentoring and encouraging of students to develop their autonomy to aid in the reduction of stress and anxiety. The results of the study indicated that advisors were indeed knowledgeable in their students' education pathway; however, available and supportive items scored lower for these categories. Taking this survey further, Sheldon et al. (2015) used three *advisor quality survey* subscales and determined that advisor support was positive for the students' GPA, whilst available was negatively associated with GPA. Continuing further, an advisor's knowledge ability was unrelated to student GPA, yet advisor supportiveness played a significant role in students' GPA. Academic performance of the students involved in this study was directly related to the perceived quality of the advisors.

Students' perception of advising continues to impact the advising process, including the effectiveness. A study conducted by Walker, Zelin, Behrman, and Strnad (2017) explored the perception of 162 college students on the perceived effectiveness of advising. Three themes are of particular importance for my study (advisor communication, student desire for a relationship, and advisor accessibility). First, advisor communication was centered on accurate and understandable information. This information was perceived as personal and caring and resulted in the perception of better student – advisor communication. The second theme, student desire for an advisee-advisor relationship, Walker et al (2017) reported that 24% of respondents expected a close relationship to develop with their advisor. Students also reported a preference in the consistency of interacting with the same advisor, which they perceived helped develop the relationship they desire and build rapport. Lastly, advisor accessibility reported by 20% of respondents, which created problems when students were not able to meet with their preferred advisor or they felt rushed when they were scheduled for an appointment. Students responded that advisors should ensure that ample time is set aside as their interactions were important aspects for students.

The perceived quality and support of advisors helps to meet the needs of students in higher education. Teasley and Buchanan (2016) conducted a survey of over 300 music majors and reported on which perceived honors college advisor support and basic psychological needs were being met. Teasley and Buchanan found a high level of dissatisfaction in regards to advisor support as well as honors student burnout due to the stress of deadlines, exams, term papers, and the overall anxiety of transitioning to

college. Students reported that the quality advising that they received had the potential to prevent burnout and advisor dissatisfaction by providing positive interactions between honors college students and honors advisors. The interpersonal relationship of advisor-advisee and the rapport between the two, affects the psychological well-being of the student.

Academic advising may also impact the academic gain students' experience. In a quantitative study, Mu and Fosnacht (2019) utilized survey data from 156 institutions granting Bachelor's degrees explored the relationship between students' perceived gains, grades, and academic advising services. The multivariate model utilized, suggests that there is a reported gain in the perception of the student self-perceived gains post advising session at institutions that have a highly effective advising strategy. Highly effective advising strategies include the number of interactions that students report as well as qualitative aspects of advising including being available, listening to concerns, assistance when academic difficulties arise, and discussion of career interests. Mu and Fosnacht (2019) also noted that magnitude of advising services plays a crucial role in learning outcomes for college students.

Assessing Self-Authorship in the Higher Education Context

In higher education, highly effective advising practices may lead to increased development of self-authorship for students. The construct of self-authorship, through nurturing the development of it, has the potential to affect academic outcomes and psychological well-being of students. In a study examining 214 college students, Bowman, Linley, and Weaver (2019) explored the relationship between the capacity for

self-authorship of entering first-year students and their higher education outcomes. The qualitative portion of this study involved six institutions where 193 participants were interviewed in the Fall semester, for 4 consecutive years. Students who engaged in the qualitative portion, also completed the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Assessment Survey at the beginning of year one and end of year four, 133 students completed all three aspects of the study. Bowman et al. (2019) created summary profiles of 10 positions to indicate cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains based on external meaning making, or making meaning through external factors such as authority. Student responses were coded on a 10-point scale, one being the least complex, in regards to the capacity of their self-authorship. None of the responses of the first-year students reached the top three highest potentials in regard to internal meaning making, or moving from utilizing external authority to determine one's perspective. Between years one and two, a positive change in self-authorship was found.

The quantitative aspect of the study utilized the Wabash National Study to examine four outcome measures and psychological well-being utilized Ryff's scales of psychological well-being. Utilization of a structural equation modeling analysis yielded results that indicated that self-authorship is related to academic challenge and experiences early in year one and faculty/staff interactions in both the first and fourth years (Bowman et al., 2019). Academic challenge, as assessed by Bowman et al. included, high order thinking, high expectations, integration of material, and effortful academic work. While results indicated that self-authorship capacity of college students did not necessarily predict their college outcome, three experiences in particular (academic challenge,

diversity experiences, and faculty/staff interactions) were directly associated with self-authorship capacity. Self-authorship capacity and college outcome, which were indirectly related, also predicted psychological well-being of students in year four, which was linked to academic challenge driving this result. A link between higher levels of beginning self-authorship capacity and a positive relationship with academic challenge were found.

Addressing psychological well-being of minority students, Perez (2019) examined paradigmatic perspectives that have utilized in higher education regarding self-authorship in a systematic review of 22 articles. Perez (2019) found that only two authors addressed both race and racism when examining the progression towards the self-authorship of students. Specifically, Perez found that the minority perspective of college students and the impact of race and racism have an influence on how minorities make meaning in regards to the concept of self-authorship. Race and racism of the individual experiences, Perez (2019) found, has the potential to affect how students make meaning of their experiences and realities in the development of autonomy and self-authorship. To inform student development theory equitably, Perez (2019) suggested that race and racism is a consideration to evaluate to ensure the reflection of minority voices is heard when assessing the self-authorship of students.

Similarly, evaluating development through the lens of self-authorship, du Toit and Naudé (2020) thematically analyzed individual pathways instrumental in the development of the self-authorship of graduate students. Participants completed in-depth interviews, in which a recurring theme (academic experience) emerged. Participants'

search for self was supported through their graduate level honors coursework, specifically assignments that required them to support their arguments through personal experience to enhance their self-knowledge. The epistemological growth in the intrapersonal dimension defined the meaning-making process, which is supported by Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

Summary

Current literature has explored high-achieving students as desirable candidates for honors colleges across institutions. The Center for Collegiate Mental Health has examined the occurrence of mental health issues in this population of students in regards to stress, anxiety and depression (The Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018). Considering the emotional and social well-being of these students, looking at cocurricular opportunities such as clubs, volunteering, or other events to increase the autonomy and self-authorship of high-achieving college students is an avenue that may help to extend the knowledge in the discipline from the perspective of the advisor. In this study, I seek to fill this gap within the literature to determine the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how honors program advisors perceive the honors program and the effectiveness of cocurricular opportunities afforded honors program students in the reduction of stress and anxiety levels and advisors' perceptions of how this may affect the students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship. In the following chapter, I will address the research design, the rationale for the design, the role of the researcher, the methodological approach for the study, the issues of trustworthiness for the study, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this basic qualitative study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship?

RQ2: What additional strategies do honors program advisors recommend could be used to assist in developing honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship and reducing their stress and anxiety?

For this study, I used a basic qualitative research approach using interviews. This approach helped me to focus specifically on how honors college advisors perceive their role and interprets their experiences with honors college students (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that the basic qualitative approach enables the researcher to understand and makes sense of participants' experiences.

A phenomenological approach was considered as the design for this study. Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as a commonality of an experience of a particular group of people in order to gain understanding of a specific phenomenon. Rather than try to link each experience of honors college advisors or assume commonalities, I sought the honors college advisors' perceptions of the effectiveness of cocurricular opportunities afforded honors program students in the reduction of stress and anxiety levels and advisors' perceptions of how this may affect the students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship.

A second potential design was a case study model, the findings of which might allow advisors and other stakeholders the ability to better understand the students' experiences within the context of the institution. Patton (2015) also indicated that a substantial amount of time is required in the setting, either at the institution or in the community, and this was not an option for my study.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, I served as the sole researcher. I am an educator in the south central part of the United States at an early college high school program, and I have a background in gifted education. I have worked with the gifted population for 10 years in the middle-school and high-school settings as a science educator, as a mentor teacher to new educators, as a department head, and as a science coordinator. In this study, my role as a researcher was as an interviewer and as a data analyst. My intentions were to reach out to members of educational honors programs Pi Lambda Theta Honor Society and Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society through the social media website LinkedIn and

professional organizations, such as National Collegiate Honors Council and National Academic Advising Association, to post recruitment invitations. I chose this approach to avoid any potential conflicts with IRB approval and allow me to collect my data without infringing on the welfare of any protected groups. Based on the response I received from the listservs, this was not necessary. I also kept a researcher's journal to catch any inclinations toward subjectivity to remain unbiased in my data analysis.

Methodology

In this section, I will describe the methodology for this study, which includes the participant selection logic, data collection instrument and interview protocol, and the procedures for participant recruitment, participation, and the data collection. Lastly, I will discuss how I planned to analyze the data.

Participant Selection Logic

For this study's participants, I selected honors college advisors who are members of listservs and professional organizations in a higher education institution in the United States. These participants were required to meet the criteria of (a) being a current honors college advisor and (b) having more than 1 year of experience with honors college students. My recruitment poster highlighted the qualifications for participants in the study, study compensation ($25.00), and my contact information. This same information was shared via LinkedIn to gain participants. Patton (2015) suggested that in qualitative research, saturation could be reached from one to 10 participants. To ensure saturation was met, my target goal was between eight and 10 participants. The first 8-10

respondents who met the qualifications of the study and submitted informed consent forms constituted my study.

Data Collection

The data collection period began after I had received my IRB approval from Walden University (#06-01-20-0729379). I allotted 45-60 minutes for each interview, knowing that this was an estimation of time and my participant may have chosen to stop the interview at any given time. Once I posted the invitation by listservs, I responded by email and include the informed consent, established a date and time for the interview, and conducted the interview. As suggested by Saldana (2016), I was not afraid to ask participants *why* they believe something to enhance the understanding of my study. All interviews were recorded via Zoom audio recording. Participants had the option to conduct the interview face-to-face or audio only, however, only the audio was recorded. The data was then professionally transcribed by a transcription service to remain unbiased in the processing of collected information. The transcription service signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcribing the interviews. Information was kept confidential and files were deleted once they were transcribed by the service. Once transcriptions were returned to me, I emailed each participant their transcribed interview for review. Participants had 5 days to request changes; after this 5-day window, if no response or edits were suggested, I assumed that they agreed with the transcription. Following this 5-day window, I sent each participant an email of appreciation, a copy of their transcription, and their $25.00 electronic gift card as compensation for their time in my study.

Instrumentation

I used an open-ended, semistructured interview approach that enabled interviewees' flexibility in their responses, although I asked all participants the same questions for each interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) addressed the role of the researcher and the level of control a semistructured interview allows the researcher in focusing on the research question and not controlling the response. Utilization of this method allowed each interview to be compared and resulting themes and patterns to emerge for coding to take place during analysis.

For this study, I developed interview questions that were centered on the conceptual framework and the research questions (see Appendix). I began my interview with an opening statement, which provides a brief background on myself as the researcher, the study, and the purpose of my study. From here I transitioned into asking my interview questions, which were developed through the advanced research course. These questions remained constant for each of my interviews.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis began as I look through the transcripts provided by the transcription service to gain greater understanding of the data generated from the perceptions of honors college advisors on how they perceive this may affect the students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship. I looked through each transcript and begin coding as outlined by Saldana (2016), and code the interview without narrowing too focused or oversimplifying which hampers the process. I looked for key words to enable the codes to be grouped together into similar concepts or categories. These concepts were then be put into similar

categories or themes that are related, paying close attention to any words that were repeated or experiences that were alike. I reviewed these transcripts several times over to ensure I have not overlooked or mis-categorized an idea. Any new words or phrases were also be categorized and any changes were edited to ensure proper reflection takes place.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Data gathered from this study will be regarded as trustworthy, in order to establish trustworthiness in this study, I focused on the four key components that establish trustworthiness in my study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As the researcher, it is important to the integrity of my research to ensure that all aspects of trustworthiness are met.

Credibility

To establish credibility, I wrote brief notes in a journal and key phrases during each of my interviews as they were happening as well as reflected post-interview as suggested by Saldana (2016). Establishing particular processes and maintaining consistency in the data collection steps can ensure credibility. Processes included ensuring the qualification of participants, maintaining consistent controllable variables in each interview, and journaling throughout the process. This enabled me to potentially capture words, phrases, and body language that can assist in the coding later. This process also limited bias as data was collected and interpreted, ensuring verity. Lastly, the participants had the ability to review the transcripts to ensure that their experiences were captured with accuracy to ensure credibility was established.

Transferability

To establish transferability in this study, I created categories of categories as described by Saldana (2016). This categorization transcends the particulars of a specific study into potentially comparable contexts (Saldana, 2016). This process helped to look at the bigger picture of the experiences reflected and potentially enabled a refined categorization, this presentation of minutiae allows readers of my study to understand the process and negate bias in the results. Through the processing of experiences the advisors shared with me in the study, I was able to understand their perceptions and communicate their experiences.

Dependability

To establish dependability, my data set needed to be thick and rich descriptions as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I reviewed my data to ensure participant's words were captured accurately and dependability was met. My chair also reviewed my data to ensure dependability was met. My participants also had the opportunity to review their transcribed data to ensure I captured their experiences accurately.

Confirmability

Lastly, to ensure confirmability, this study was enhanced by the utilization of a journal to ensure my results can be confirmed by others reviewing the data. By reviewing my data continually and objectively, I prevented biases from entering my study and distorting the process. Confirmability was ensured through keeping my data gathered, in storage, for 5 years, hence thereafter, it will be destroyed.

Ethical Procedures

Once IRB approval was attained (#06-01-20-0729379), I began recruiting participants and conducting interviews. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study through the utilization of the informed consent agreement shared with each participant. Prior to volunteering to participate in the study, participants could (a) read the informed consent letter, (b) ask questions pertaining to the requirements of the study, and (c) are able to withdraw from participation at any time. The informed consent followed the guidelines of Walden University.

Recordings and transcripts of the interviews are secured within my home office to ensure confidentiality of the records. Computerized and audio recordings of the transcripts and interviews were likewise secured to a password-protected laptop within the home office, whose sole purpose was research. All collected data for this study will be secured for a period of 5 years, and after this period destroyed for all ethical considerations.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I outlined the research method for my basic qualitative study on the perceptions of honors college advisors on how they perceive this may affect the students' sense of autonomy and self-authorship. I conducted interviews once Walden University granted me IRB approval, through participants acquired through listserv inquiries. Lastly, after data collection, I adhered to the plan outlined in Chapter 3 to address data collection, analysis, and the secured storage of transcripts and recordings, the trustworthiness of the study was addressed to ensure all ethical considerations were met.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship. In this chapter, I will address the research question and explain how each helped to guide this study. I will then describe the setting, participant selection, and explain the processes for data collection, analysis, and establishing trustworthiness. Finally, I present the results of the research.

Research Question

The research questions for this basic qualitative study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship?

RQ2: What additional strategies do honors program advisors recommend could be used to assist in developing honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship and reducing their stress and anxiety?

Setting

As outlined in Chapter 3, participants interviewed were given the option to participate in the interview via either Zoom audio or video, and I recorded only the audio portion of the interview. I interviewed nine participants who met the qualifications parameters of my target population, honors college advisors with a minimum of 18 months experience in honors college advising. All nine participants were interviewed in

their home office; three of the participants agreed to enable the video conferencing capability of Zoom, recording only the audio portion. The other five chose to participate by audio only. I did conduct a nationwide search for participants; participants were representative of eight different states, primarily from the eastern portion of the United States: Ohio, North Carolina, New York, South Dakota, Alabama, Texas, Florida, and Kentucky. Of these eight states represented, two participants were from Ohio. Three of the nine participants were male and six were female.

Prior to data collection, negative circumstances potentially affected the personal and professional lives of each participant. A worldwide pandemic shut the United States down and most public and private higher education institutions transitioned to remote learning. Being aware of this situation, participation was wholly voluntary and interested participants initiated contact with me. Participants freely shared their perceptions and experiences regarding their honors college students and opportunities offered for their student population at their institution.

Demographics

Participants were invited to participate in the study if they were honors college advisors with a minimum of 18 months' experience in honors college advising. All nine participants were involved full time in advising with their institution working remotely in their capacity due to the pandemic. Table 1 provides the pseudonym created for each participant, their title at their institution, their years of experience, and their highest education degree earned.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Title	Experience	Degree
Jen	Director	>15 years	Ph.D.
Sam	Student success coach	>10 years	MBA
Kirk	Director	>15 years	M.Ed.
Bess	Interim director	>5 years	MA English
Len	Academic advisor	< 5years	M.Ed.
Laurelle	Dean	>15 years	Ph.D.
Lola	Director	>10 years	M.Ed.
Etta	Assistant director	>5 years	M.Ed.
Reba	Associate director	>5 years	MBA

Data Collection

After IRB approval was received (#06-01-20-0729379) from Walden University, I immediately began recruiting for my target of eight to 10 honors college advisor participants. Saturation in qualitative research can be reached in one to 10 participants, according to Patton (2015). To ensure saturation was met, my target goal was between eight and 10 participants. I accepted the first 10 participants and set up interviews. Prior to one interview, a participant reached out to me and canceled the interview the morning of our agreed-upon time. I reached out to her again and never received a response. Based on the rich information gathered in the prior interviews, I was satisfied that saturation had been met and left my participant number at nine. The interviews were semistructured and

allowed for participants to reflect on their experience in honors college advising and their perceptions of cocurricular opportunities of honors college students. I probed in situations where I needed more information regarding the experiences of honors college advisors until I felt their responses answered the questions.

The data collection process flowed smoothly and no issues arose, other than the one participant who was not able to complete the interview. For data collection I posted a recruitment email on a listserv, Facebook, and LinkedIn. I accepted the first 10 participants who met the qualification parameters of my study. I began collecting data at the beginning of June, 2020, and completed collection 3 weeks later. I initially designated 45–60 minutes for each interview; the majority of interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Three of the interviews lasted over an hour. After completing the interviews, the recordings were sent to a transcription service, which signed a confidentiality agreement prior to transcription. Participants were given a pseudonym prior to submission to the transcription service to assure the confidentiality of their information. Once transcriptions were received from the service, I sent the transcribed interviews to the participants to check for accuracy and reply to me with any edits. If no response was received within 5 days, it was assumed there were no issues. Response occurred in two of the interviews. After the 5 days, I sent each participant a thank-you email and included the $25 electronic gift card as compensation for their time, as indicated in the consent form signed prior to participation. Only one of the participants indicated any changes were necessary in the transcripts; I edited those to her suggestions and she approved those changes. There was

no deviation from my planned data collection procedures, and I was able to maintain consistency in all nine of my interviews.

Qualifications for participation in the study were (a) being an honors college advisor and (b) having a minimum of 18 months' experience working with honors college students. While all nine participants met these parameters, upon initiation of the interview process, I learned that two of the nine participants involved in the study were in a director or dean role and oversaw honors college academic advising and were not directly involved with students on a day-to-day basis. However, both participants had been honors college advisors in their recent career and knew the nuisances of the job. I continued to interview these participants to address my interview questions and how it might affect the trustworthiness of my data. Data collected from these two participants mirrored what the other participants articulated in their interviews, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of honors college advising perceptions.

Data Analysis

In my approach to analyzing the data I collected for this study, I used Patton's (2015) guidelines for thematic analysis of data. First, I kept a journal of my reflections while collecting and analyzing the interviews. I replayed the audio recording of the interviews while reading the transcript to ensure accuracy of the data captured, adding notes or marking key words that resonated with me. After each interview, I organized the responses to each interview question in a linear fashion. I noted the frequency of words and phrases to assist in the identification of potential themes, which are reflected with each research question. I documented these key words in a document and highlighted

these words across each of the interviews, looking for repetition. Following this documenting, I began the process of identifying themes for each research question. To identify these themes, for each interview question, I outlined the perceptions the interviewees discussed in their responses to how they answered my question/probe. This outline of perceptions was their overall responses to the question. I noted this outline in the margins and noted these words to each transcript, trying not to just summarize but to analyze the data.

From here I began to develop a coding scheme of these potential themes, listing these key phrases by clustering codes together. The next step was to code the data by applying these codes that emerged from the individual interview questions, looking for reoccurring codes across all the interviews. With the data coded, I created a graphic organizer with codes for each research question with the codes identified to locate patterns across the coded data. I combined codes that were similar, and I grouped them with specific words or phrases to align them to the two research questions of my study.

In summary, my analysis suggested that advisors perceive that honors college students' experiences in cocurricular opportunities reduce the effects of stress and anxiety. Furthermore, cocurricular experiences have the potential to aid in the development of honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship based on advisors' experiences and perceptions. Table 2 outlines the three themes related to RQ1 and the three themes related to RQ2. I will present the themes with examples from the data in the findings section.

Table 2

Overview of Thematic Structure

RQ	Themes
RQ1	Experiential learning through cocurricular engagements
RQ1	Providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities
RQ1	Student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship
RQ2	Permission to try
RQ2	Need to balance stress
RQ2	Student growth through reflection

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For this basic qualitative study, specific parameters were in place pertaining to the processes involved in participant recruitment, data collection, data organization, and data analysis to establish my trustworthiness as a researcher. I painstakingly adhered to the guidelines set forth to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of data collected in my study.

Credibility

The issue of credibility was addressed in this study beginning with journaling and consistency in setting from the perspective of the interviewer. All participants were asked the prescribed interview questions; some interviews included probing questions that were approved prior to the study. This consistency existed in the participants all having honors college advising experience for at least 18 months and in the questions that I asked each

participant. Furthermore, participants were given a copy of their transcript to verify the accuracy of responses.

Transferability

Transferability was increased in the study through the wide range of honors college advisors participating. Of the nine participants, eight states were represented in the study: Ohio, North Carolina, New York, South Dakota, Alabama, Texas, Florida, and Kentucky. Of these eight states represented, two participants were from Ohio. Due to the broad swath of participants' demographics, results may be more generalizable. However, the size of an institution, funding, and private versus public may be important demographic features as well.

Dependability

To ensure that dependability was attained in my study, I kept a journal, had interviews transcribed, then reread transcriptions several times, created graphic organizers with each interview response, and returned the transcriptions to participants to check for accuracy. Recordings, journaling, transcriptions, graphic organizer, and posters used to create themes and codes are maintained aspects of the records I will keep. My committee chair also reviewed the first three transcripts for potential codes and themes to ensure subtle details were not overlooked and to guide my future coding actions.

Confirmability

For confirmability, journals were kept and documented with key ideas or concepts directly from the interviews while they were taking place. I also recorded the interviews so that I could playback any areas that needed further clarification or if I had questions.

Once transcripts were returned to me from the transcription service, I listened to the recorded interviews and checked transcripts for accuracy. These procedures were followed to avoid my own bias from being transferred into the process or the transcriber potentially missing any key points in the interview.

Results

The results are a culmination of the data analysis of my interviews of all participants regarding their perceptions. There were six themes in total that emerged from the two research questions, three themes for each research question. Descriptions of the themes were captured in thick, detailed responses of the participants regarding their perceptions of honors college students. In general, participants felt that honors college students oftentimes are self-motivated, high-achieving, members of the student body. Several noted that honors college students many times begin honors college with college credits under their belt and can follow the expectation of professors in the classroom when given explicit direction as outlined by the instructor and course syllabus. Sam stated that, in his experience, honors students are "such a highly-motivated population of the student body and they see things from a different perspective." Laurelle noted in her experience "we have students that come in with so many community college credits they are juniors when they start their first semester of college."

RQ1: Influence of Cocurricular Opportunities

Three themes emerged in relationship to RQ1, which was "what are the perceptions of honor program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in

autonomy and self-authorship?" All three themes emerged in each of the nine interviews. The themes were *experiential learning through cocurricular engagement*, *providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities*, and *student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship.* All participants agreed that cocurricular engagement has a positive effect on the well-being of honors college students and provides opportunities to support students' well-being. What varied was how they described cocurricular opportunities are presented to students at each of the institutions. The origins of the cocurricular opportunities they discussed included those opportunities that were institutional-selected such as, learning community-centered, student-selected, student-led, reflection-based, student-proposed, and service-based. More traditional opportunities such as intramurals, Frisbee, and Japanese anime clubs were also available options for students.

All the honors college advisors viewed cocurricular opportunities as positive additions to honors college curriculum. During advising sessions, advisors and students focused on exploring a healthy balance of academic curriculum and cocurricular opportunities in part to reduce the stress and anxiety of honors college students. Reflective opportunities are given for students to enhance their experiences. These reflective opportunities can be applied to students and their knowledge to help build self-authorship as Reba stated:

> Cocurricular activities help to strengthen self-authorship because it gives students those opportunities to learn that new knowledge, while applying it to themselves, also while having those discussions with others. Bringing all three of those pieces into one experience, helps to build that self-authorship.

Experiential learning through cocurricular engagement. The first theme related to the first research question reflects the *experiential learning through cocurricular engagement* that advisors perceived students experienced that reduced their stress. These learning opportunities were non-academic and the advisors noted the outcomes included finding what they are passionate about, expanding their sense of the world around them, exposing them to others' view of the world, and increasing their sense of belonging, economic influence, interests, challenges, opportunities, and employability. All nine of the participants viewed cocurricular opportunities as enhancing the experiential learning experience of honors college students. Specifically, Lola stressed the sense of belonging as an opportunity for experiential learning:

> I think that the sense of belonging, one of the sole reasons we do these things and why we have opportunities that are cocurricular and why we engage the communities, why we provide the chances for students to get involved, [ultimately] is [the] goal of autonomy. The goal is to get students to form their beliefs and see how they fit and get a sense of their place in this world. That to me is the whole reason why we do it. You take 40 courses, okay great, and you get your degree. I think that within our own honors college, within our institution, because of the way our guiding principles are set up around service and getting engaged in our community and engaged in your world, whether that is the natural world through sustainability or the economic reaches of that, there is a whole different aspect of sustainability…those two things are so central to our institution, it causes students to really think about what is important to them and

> have an impact on others and the world. That in turn creates graduates who are better prepared to interface with the world; they feel like they're in control of their situation.

Lola continued describing some of the experiential learning students gained through cocurricular opportunities.

> We get a lot of feedback from employers that our graduates are better prepared to engage in their full-time job or their profession because they are exposed to these types of experiences. To me, that is the whole reason why we do it [cocurricular opportunities]; education is happening to them and they are engaging in something that is meaningful to them. Honors, again, is just another piece of that, a way for students to connect to what they want to do.

Laurelle reflected on how a cocurricular experience opens opportunities for students and helps to build their confidence when exposed to opinions different than their own.

> I think it creates more possibilities and opportunities for them, I think it also challenges them. It exposed them to people that have different opinions of them; they have to learn how to defend themselves if they do decide to stay on that single-minded track they were on. They learn how to defend themselves and justify and bolster determination and a commitment to that field that they want to go in.

Laurelle also noted that "the rapport that is created in the community" [helps] determine the opportunities that specific cohorts add to their school communities, as some of the institutions allow students to create their own cocurricular opportunities.

These opportunities are also chances for students to make choices about things that interest them or are curious to be a part of. Jen stated:

> I feel like cocurricular[s], whether it's the activities we do through the learning communities, whether it's student organizations that they get involved in, the community that they get involved in aren't necessarily transcript-able, …they are this great opportunity for the student to make choices. So much of what goes on a student's transcript is stuff that they didn't have a choice in. You had this as a major, you had this as a minor, you might to decide that you want to study literature before 1800 or after 1800; it's still a literature class. The cocurricular[s] are things that really reveal a student's interests and values in a really profound way [sic]. Typically these students are always tired, they're always studying, and they're always doing stuff. Cocurricular[s] are things that they have to make an intentional choice to be a part of. They didn't need to do any, but that they do speaks volumes about what are priorities for them.

Jen discussed the selections that students get to make. She felt their choices reflect their values.

> They get to choose the amount of those [cocurricular opportunities], they get to choose the content, the "what – what am I doing?" They get to choose the frequency. I feel like because it is so much of their own personal choice embedded in all those decisions, [it] reflects strongly on their values. That's part of what we are pressing them on as well.

Etta also discussed how a portfolio approach could increase the benefits of cocurricular opportunities.

> I think the programs in colleges I see that do a portfolio approach can really get at that overall, well-rounded aspect of coming out of college. I also think [the portfolio] leaves less of an emphasis on just the academics and so I think having that, "hey you're not just your grades in class, but you're also these other things that you're working on during your time in college," can again lessen that stress, lessen that anxiety, over just feeling the need to hit 4.0 every semester.

Kirk indicated that he frequently addresses the benefits of experiential learning through cocurricular opportunities during his interactions with advisees, particularly the enhancement to employability.

> I tell the students that you are going to graduate from a great university with a very good degree, probably a very high GPA; that's step 1. Your resume is on somebody's desk for grad school, for med school, for a job and they are going to say, "You have a 3.8 in aerospace engineering …That's great. Guess what, these other 75 resumes have the exact same GPA and the exact same major, some of them from the same school, some of them from some other very prestigious schools. So, what makes you different? What makes you so special? Why should I hire you or why should I admit you?" I tell the students that, that is where these honors experiences come into play.

Providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities. The second theme related to the first research question was providing exposure to initial cocurricular

opportunities as a means to reduce stress for honors college students. Advisors felt that assisting students by providing an initial cocurricular experience gives students exposure to options available. Students can then branch off and start to seek their own opportunities as they gain a level of comfort in exploring their options. Benefits to providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities include building confidence, willingness to try other experiences, building a support system, facilitating the learning, opening further opportunities, making connections, and creating learning experiences. Bess noted:

> Honors students are sometimes afraid to try stuff because they are afraid they aren't going to be the best at it. Our idea of making them get out and do these cocurricular experiences, make them get out of the classroom a little, which is their comfort zone, is really, really important. Once they do it and get past the stress of doing it the first time, I think they will be much more willing to do it again and they seem a little bit less stressed.

Sam explained that students must overcome their own personal anxiety about new experiences:

> It's more of expounding upon the "why" piece, of why it's important and getting students to understand that, trying to put together various activities explaining that and really helping students find their own personal why and purpose for why they certain things that they do and what their goals are, and tying that back into the bigger picture. I think explaining the "why" behind it; I think that's very valuable in helping students overcome their anxiety about the particular class.

All nine participants described cocurricular opportunities embedded in the honors college for students to select from that best fit their areas of interest. Etta stated "Building that support, making sure students have the opportunities to get where they need to go, facilitating that learning; those types of things are helpful for us [to initiate cocurricular opportunities]." All nine advisors described that their institutions facilitate this initial cocurricular interaction through their available cocurricular opportunity selections that students must participate in to gain honors credits to graduate with honors. Students then make connections through these opportunities with other students or like-minded individuals, and then have the ability to build and create their own cocurricular opportunities and experiences at those institutions that allow students this cocurricular opportunity seven advisors discussed.

Laurelle stated how this initial exposure then opens up further opportunities for students: "The cocurricular space kind of forces them to interact with people, interact with people that are not like themselves and they realize maybe there's another class, maybe there's another discipline, maybe there's another major I could be in." Laurelle continued to elaborate on these opportunities, noting that the camaraderie that a cohort experiences influences the cocurricular choices of that particular cohort. This cohort has the potential to influence the students and direct them towards further cocurricular opportunities.

> We have had support groups that come up over creating communities to support their research, we have had book clubs, we've definitely have had those that are of the same religion that kind of do their own thing and create their own little

> clique; …it really just depends on the camaraderie that is founded in each successive wave of students that comes through. We definitely plan some of that for students [to help broaden their perspectives].

Bess noted how these experiences are different than what students learn in the classroom, they are able to explore deeper into experiences outside the classrooms:

> I think the cocurricular opportunities are a way to break that mold a little bit. They are not getting grades, they can explore a little more in depth, and they are being faced with situations in the real world, hands-on where they have to make decisions. They have to apply what they've learned in the classroom, someone is not just standing over them asking them to parrot back what they have learned. It helps them think about and apply what they've learned and then stretch their own knowledge and their own experiences with the world.

Len discussed how this learning experience allows students to make connections to the reasoning behind cocurricular opportunities and to build on confidence to continue trying new experiences beyond the initial exposure.

> It goes back to that kind of experiential learning and showing them why they're learning what they're learning. It's giving them a foundational reason and when you can internalize, oh, this is why I'm doing it, okay, if I can do it this way, maybe I can take that and translate it to something else, or maybe I did this I didn't think I could do this before, but now I can and I know I can, maybe that means I can do this. It encourages transference and it encourages the idea of going beyond themselves and leaving their comfort zone.

Student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship. The third theme related to the first research question was *student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship* to reduce students' level of stress and anxiety. All nine participants described experiences through which they perceived students are able to develop autonomy and self-authorship which might reduce students' stress and anxiety. Jen stated that as students claim their space through cocurricular opportunities, their agency develops leading to autonomy and self-authorship:

> I think from the perspective that as students try to claim that space, as they move from an independent student making a few choices about "I'm going to take a Tuesday section of this class versus the Monday section of this class" [to] moving towards real agency and they're really charting their future. They're not making just an either or choice. This isn't a lunchroom buffet. They're now making choices about who they are, what they value, and those things coming together.

Kirk elaborated on how autonomy and self-authorship potentially develop for honors college students through their cocurricular selections. He explained:

> I think these extracurricular activities, dealing with people, with interpersonal relationships are messy. It's not a straight line to be the highest achiever, or get the A, [there's] not even a grade affiliated with it. What is success? How do you measure success? So, I think that's been awesome for students to know that, you don't always win, you don't always fail, sometimes there's a real messy place in the middle and that's life. I think for our students that are just driven for these 'A' pluses, when they have to go in and deal with a faculty member doing research, or

> they have to go and do a community service project and there's not a syllabus. You do this and you do that, you get an 'A' plus, they struggle with that. That's good. I love that struggle. I love that uncomfortable and seeing them shaking a little bit. That's where you can have some growth with these students versus if it was just an academic outfit, these kids would be making themselves crazy trying to get the 'A' pluses and the 4.0.

The nine advisors all reflected understanding that it is a method that students must go through in order to get to the desired autonomy and self-authorship outcomes. Jen stated that they are asking them questions to build their autonomy and self-authorship "because we believe that asking them these questions about their values and their worldview will ultimately help them eventually get to ideas related to self-authorship." Jen further stated that as an advisor, building agency in students,

> We reveal that to them, it's not like their senior year they are like now I've arrived; I'm now self-authored person – they struggle with it because I feel like they are trying to develop that voice. They are trying to separate. Self-authorship in my mind almost always naturally [instills] more confidence in students, they don't fear making the wrong choice anymore. They're not fretting, it's like the matrix, they can just see that all of their choices are leading and reinforcing this future version of themselves they are moving towards. There is a peace, there's a confidence, that you see come together when they're at that stage; naturally has a positive affect on their mental health.

Reba noted that reflection can lead to sense of accomplishment for students which lessens their stress when building their agency:

> I can see as part of our program, students have to do a year in review every year, which is a yearly reflection, over a specific topic that we have listed or they can kind of free-form reflect on the year as a whole. Students often write in that year in review reflection that just the process of thinking about what they've accomplished throughout the year, has really made them feel more accomplished and given them a sense of, okay I can get through hard times, I can overcome obstacles, which I think ultimately helps them when dealing with stress and uncertainty as they move into their future endeavors.

Lola noted that how a student gets to developing their well-being, through agency, is unique to them and their journey:

> Self-authorship is an individual thing; everyone's is different; how students get there is different. [It] helps students to see the why. Students aren't kids anymore, if you give them the why, they'll get it. If [advisors are] more proactive in asking students what they need we can help them and help them get there. Getting invested in their well-being and feeling cared for, …just because we genuinely care for your well-being.

RQ2: Additional Strategies

RQ2 was "what additional strategies do honors program advisors recommend could be used to assist in developing honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship and reducing their stress and anxiety?" Themes that emerged from this

question were: *permission to try*, *need to balance stress*, and *student growth through reflection.* While the research question originally asked about additional strategies honors college advisors would suggest, the participants all talked about strategies that they are already using, but which seemed distinct enough from their descriptions of what they did to support growth, as it is included in the themes related to research question 1 and the importance of cocurricular opportunities reducing the stress and anxiety of honors college students.

Permission to try. The first theme related to the research question 2 to emerge was *permission to try* as a supportive method to assist in developing the autonomy and self-authorship of students. All nine honors college advisors spoke about student situations where a student was afraid to try something different than what they came in, that they needed permission to stray from their original course or major selections. Many of the participants discussed family dynamics as a reason behind the need for permission to try. Laurelle noted that:

> Really giving them the support and exposure to other ideas, the support when they have to have the courage to go and tell her family that they're not going to be a doctor, that they are going to be a musician instead; even if it means damaging that relationship with their parents temporarily. I think that situation in assisting the students to stand up and find their own voice….

Len addressed this phenomenon giving permission to try other cocurricular opportunities through the lens of identity:

> So my favorite part of my job is when I get to sit down with students, and I have done it with many students. That's why I keep a box of tissues in my office, to discuss, "why are you doing this? You hate math. Why are you going to be an engineer?" So, working with students to deconstruct previously held views and identities that are not wholly theirs and move forward in developing an identity that is theirs I think falls in line very neatly with the idea of authorship and autonomy. Them being told, "you're going to do this", to the point where the voice is telling them that they're going to do this became their own, to realizing, "uhh oh, okay, what do I do now"? Those are some of the most rewarding experiences for me as an advisor is helping a student realize that they're in control, that they're the ones that get to choose, they're the ones that have to go to work every day and if they do that with something that they hate, or something that they're not interested in, or something they don't connect with, it's going to lead to a much more difficult existence, not even talking about money, just existing, then doing something that you actually like, you actually enjoy.

Etta expanded upon the importance of exploring cocurricular opportunities for students in her experience as well:

> I think it's really hard to do [cocurricular] in a structured cocurricular way, I think [cocurricular experiences] are almost things that have to be done in individual settings just because they're going to be so unique to the student and giving them that time and space just to sit and think and process without somebody telling them what they need to or have to do.

Etta elaborated that: “just giving them a space [in the role of the advisor] to say those words out loud and being a non-biased participant in those conversations,” has the ability to allow them to know it is okay to try something new or different from what they think is not specific to their degree.

Need to balance stress. The second theme related to the Research Question 2 to emerge was *need to balance stress* as an attentive strategy to assist in developing the autonomy and self-authorship of students. Seven of the nine participants stated that honors college students tend to be involved in many activities, oftentimes, thinking this will help their overall portfolio for beyond their first 4 years in college. All participants addressed the issue of honors college students having stress and anxiety. Bess stated that:

> I think honors students in general are really stressed. They are under a lot of stress, and I think I said this earlier; they are high-performing students who have been told, often all their lives that they are high-performing students. Some of them have never gotten a ‘B’ before.

Bess continued to elaborate on how she supported students in balancing the stress of honors college students:

> Convincing those students that it is okay to fail every now and then. They are not going to win every contest they enter in, they are not going to win every scholarship they apply for, they aren’t going to get an ‘A’ in every class. Helping them understand that that is okay and alleviating that stress can make a huge difference to their mental well-being.

Stress can stem from grades, over committing their time, and other relationships. Kirk explained:

> The students are very stressed with everything happening on the campus, they are coming to us; I call them frequent fliers. The students who have emailed me 15 times already and they haven't even set foot on campus. Some of these kids, they are just so tightly wrapped up about academics. They want to be done with college before they are even there. "How can I get as many credits towards my college degree right now?" I say, "Is it a financial thing? Do you want to get it done quickly because of a financial thing?" They say, "No, they've just always been brought up that way to excel and take the highest-level courses." They don't even know why they are doing it at times. I have to tell them, "Back off a little bit, what's the end goal. Is the end goal to get a job someday? Let's figure out how we are going to get you there as opposed to, is the end goal getting done as quickly as possible."

Kirk continued to explain the stress an honors college students puts on themselves.

> One student emailed me and he wanted to know what would look better: "a transcript that says I have a 3.8 GPA or one that said I had a 4.0 GPA, but I took two classes that were pass/fail?" I said, "in what context? Is this to hang in the room on your wall? Is this to get a job or go to med school?" He didn't even know. He didn't even know why he asked the question. He was just so consumed, "well, was a 3.8 or 4.0 better?" He wasn't even able to step back and think why it was important.

Lola stated that students needed to see the importance of quality and not quantity in their experiences when managing stressors.

> [In the role of an advisor] I think that getting them to see quality, not quantity conversation at college is different. They are so used to being involved so much in high school at such a superficial level. Getting them to flip that switch, you can get more out of being deeply involved in one thing, or two things, then being the president of everything but you never really get there. So as long as the balance is okay, then yes, activities and self-authorship have a benefit to a students' well-being because you have a connection to what you are doing. It helps build confidence for students; it helps them be more comfortable with themselves too.

Etta elaborated on the ways that students can decrease their stress and anxiety levels.

> One of the things we really try to do and some of our programming is just act like real humans. We're not just the professor at the front of the classroom or the assistant director sending emails, but really trying to show our students, "hey, we're real people that have also made mistakes, that have also had to persist through some things". I think showing those examples and showing them that you can take some ownership and not necessarily get it right every time [make mistakes] and still get to a successful place. They can see those examples and I think that can decrease some of that stress and anxiety levels that our high-achieving students can have.

These additional commitments add to the level of stress, students must learn to manage all the external pressures as they can comprehension of autonomy and self-authorship.

Student growth through reflection. The third theme related to the Research Question 2 to emerge was *student growth through reflection* as a deliberative strategy to balance stress. These opportunities potentially address students to try out their own beliefs, values, and ideas in the experiential learning development as well. Eight of the nine honors college advisors interviewed addressed the reflective piece being a tool for honors college students to utilize. Len stated, "Giving students that ability, and that opportunity, and telling them, "hey, it's okay, you can make your own choices, you can do what you want to do, is extremely powerful". Etta also noted that the power of reflection for honors students is a strategy to balance stress. She stated: "I can think of several instances where we've had that conversation in my office, "okay this is what you are doing, but you're not enjoying it and you want to do this so, what can we do about that?" Giving them the reins to sit there and struggle with it a little bit, those I think are some of the best opportunities for growth. Reba noted:

> I think [cocurricular opportunities] do make an impact because I think the more that students understand who they are, what's important to them, and how they grow and develop, the better it is that they can then grapple with uncertainty, mental health concerns, and some of those other pieces. One of the pieces that we have seen that we continually push is that overall reflection piece. Helping students understand the importance of reflection and how to reflect in a way that resonates with them would help.

The reflective piece gives the students the potential to look back at their experiences and visualize all the growth and experiences that they successfully or

unsuccessfully endeavored to get them to where they are currently. Reba stated: "I would say activities and strategies that focus on that self-reflection, so that students get comfortable thinking about who they are, what they know, how that impacts others would be one of those strategies [that demonstrate growth]."

Etta stated that reflective essays are a portion of honors students' assessment.

> We have some program specific goals that are part of our assessment. Our hope for our students is that they are being successful academically, but that they are also being engaged in our campus and our communities. I was actually working on an assessment right before we hopped on here, things that we assess are a reflective essay that our students do you on their goals, professional and personal, their campus involvement and leadership and their community involvement. Those are things that programmatically we are looking to help our students achieve.

Jen noted that in her institution, advisors use the reflective piece as a tool to broadly shape their college track.

> One of the things that we're doing this year, it's honestly based on some of the work that we have already been doing in honors and the institution is adapting it and trying to use it on a much larger scale. Through the advising process we try to help students think about their future through a design-thinking lens so that they are intentionally moving forward on decisions that affect their future. We are having them answer questions in a way that isn't just, which five classes do you want to take this semester? It's to help them think through more broadly than just

> a check sheet. Why does a future educator need to take a communication class? We're trying to get them to think through some of those decisions. Why do you want to be a doctor? You told me why your family wants you to be a doctor, but you've never told me why you want to be a doctor. We're trying to help them deconstruct the problem that is higher education. So many of them just think that college is the next step. I said when I was 12; I wanted to be a doctor, so I guess I'm going to be a doctor. They've always gone to school, so they just keep going to school.

Jen stated that drilling down to the *5 Whys* helps students to get to that reflective understanding leading to student growth.

> What we are trying to get them to do is just stop and be very, very reflective about that answer. We use a process called the 5 Whys. We ask them that question five times. Each time they answer it, they have to get deeper and deeper. When they say I want to be a doctor and help people, okay, well, why do you want to help people? Well, because I am a pretty compassionate person and it seems a great way for me to use my love of science to help people. We keep drilling down that question series five times and usually when you get to the fifth why, you get to a core value. You get to a place where what you find is what originally motivated them to want to do that thing. What you find at that point is that maybe being a doctor is a great option for you, but maybe we can also broaden it a little. Maybe you can do these kinds of things; maybe you can help people in different kinds of

ways. I think that the reason that that is important is so many jobs change all the time.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the setting of the study, the demographics surrounding my participants, data collection analysis. I further went on to discuss the evidence of trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Through data analysis three themes for each question emerged. RQ1 themes were: (a) experiential learning through cocurricular activities, (b) providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities, and (c) Student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship. RQ2 themes were: (a) permission to try, (b) need to balance stress, and (c) student growth through reflection.

The findings of the data analysis for research question 1 were related to the perceptions of the honors college advisors and their perceptions of cocurricular opportunities reducing stress and anxiety. Participants responded that cocurricular experiences offered to honors college students through approaches that met their students' needs with opportunities to expand and grow the cocurricular offerings as face-to-face interactions change to a more virtual format.

The findings for RQ2 were related to balancing the additional stress that students experience. Balancing this stress may come in the form of cocurricular opportunities that students feel connected to and have potential to reflect and grow from the experience. These interactions have the potential to lead to the development of autonomy and self-authorship of students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and the increase in autonomy and self-authorship. The research questions for this basic qualitative study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of honors program advisors regarding the influence of cocurricular college opportunities and supports in the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase in autonomy and self-authorship?

RQ2: What additional strategies do honors program advisors recommend could be used to assist in developing honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship and reducing their stress and anxiety?

The key findings of this study emerged from six themes post-data analysis, three for each research question. Themes for RQ1 were (a) experiential learning through cocurricular engagement, (b) providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities, and (c) student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship. The themes from RQ2 were (a) permission to try, (b) need to balance stress, and (c) student growth through reflection. In this chapter, I report my interpretation of the findings, describe the limitations of the study, discuss recommendations for future research, and present the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the six themes that emerged in the findings of this study are organized by theme, with interpretation via the framework and the empirical literature in the field addressed in each section. My findings align with the conceptual framework of Baxter Magolda's (1994/2007) concepts of autonomy and self-authorship and Ryff's (1989) scales of psychological well-being to examine the perceptions of honors college advisors regarding how cocurricular opportunities influence the reduction of students' stress and anxiety and increase their autonomy and self-authorship. I also interpret the themes in the context of key empirical articles included in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Experiential Learning Through Cocurricular Engagement

All the participants described experiential learning through cocurricular opportunities as a method to reduce the stress and anxiety and increase the engagement of honors college students. For instance, Lola addressed a student's sense of belonging fostered by participating in cocurricular opportunities, which she perceived contributes to reduction in stress and anxiety. In Lola's observations, students experience higher levels of stress and anxiety when they have not made a personal connection within their peer group. Furthermore, Laurelle, Jen, and Kirk discussed the exposure and involvement of student participation outside the traditional classroom to enhance the learning experience. As suggested by Baxter Magolda's (1994/2007) self-authorship model, students separate from the guidance of external authorities and begin to impart their understandings from their own lived experiences. These experiences took the form of cocurricular

opportunities in this study, as the advisors described how students begin to select the activities they are interested in pursuing, then later engaging with the activities. This act of deciding and choosing involvement and engaging in the activity and their peers were perceived by the advisors as contributing to the reduction of stress, as well as self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda (2014) addressed the importance of the interdependence of support systems that universities can provide, such as cocurricular opportunities, in developing the self-authorship of students. Support systems can include those emotional, academic, and external systems in place for students to lean on. A learner's ability to develop self-authorship to navigate their learning environment can impact their academic experience and eventually their adult life. The participants have perceived that cocurricular opportunities give students the ability to be interdependent with the support systems the institutions provide. Participants suggested that these support systems are initiated through the cocurricular opportunities, such as campus work settings and leadership opportunities that have the potential to develop the self-authorship of these students.

Students have the discretion to engage in what cocurricular opportunities fit their interests and participate in activities geared towards those pursuits. Three of the participants described how, in interactions with students, they challenged the student to involve him or herself in an activity that they normally wouldn't select. Using Baxter Magolda's (2014) theory to interpret the results, the findings that cocurricular opportunities are perceived by academic advisors to have the potential to increase

students' autonomy and self-authorship, may suggest students then build and maintain positive relations with others, but also gain more self-acceptance to know that there are others like themselves who are looking to grow and develop as well. Baxter Magolda's (2014) theory requires the learning paradigm to move away from the traditional role in the classroom and encourage a participatory role. This participatory role, or engagement, actively draws students into the learning process and is part of the engaged learning university model (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Experiential growth through cocurricular opportunities as described by the advisors aligns with Ryff's (1989) key dimension of positive relations with others and intersects with Ryff's dimension of self-acceptance. The other four dimensions of Ryff's scales of psychological well-being incorporate the dimensions of personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy are present in the remaining five themes.

All the academic advisors described examples where students experiencing personal growth, environmental mastery, as well as experiential growth after being involved in their cocurricular opportunities. Participants elaborated that these experiences changed students in a positive way to grow holistically. The experiential learning described by the advisors as occurring through these cocurricular opportunities aligns with the first two dimensions of Ryff's (1989) scales of psychological well-being: self-acceptance and personal growth. Advisors claimed that students accepted who they are as a person, engage in experiential learning through these cocurricular opportunities, and

through that process, experienced personal growth as they reached towards the sixth dimension, autonomy.

The first theme also aligns strongly with one of the studies I reviewed in Chapter 2. Stories of students meeting the crossroads of their experiences occurred when students made choices against what their friends and family anticipated them making were present in all nine of the participants' responses. In Pizzolato's (2006) study regarding the self-authoring ability of high-risk college students, when students reached the crossroads of their experiences, moderate levels of disequilibrium persuade students to rethink their goals or potentially commit to new goals. In my study, perhaps this is similar to the disequilibrium advisors described of students being hesitant to explore options if they don't fit into their current schema. These new experiences challenge their current knowledge base and disequilibrium of their ideology begins, advisors claimed. When students opened their minds, tried new opportunities, and challenged current assumptions of knowledge, they allowed themselves to learn from these experiences, as described by both the participants and Pizzolato (2006).

In a phenomenological study, Young et al. (2016) described students' opportunities for more personalized education, research, and opportunities as a significant strength of honors programming. These opportunities, including extracurricular activities, as described by Young et al. (2016), allowed for social networking and making connections with others to enhance the learning experience. Similarly, in my study, the academic advisors suggested students were able to participate in self-selected

extracurricular opportunities that allowed them to expand not only their worldview, but also their social networking and connecting with others.

Providing Exposure to Initial Cocurricular Opportunities

All participants discussed the initial exposure to cocurricular opportunities as provided by the honors colleges. Their students are given the opportunity to participate in activities that interest them at events hosted by the honors college, allowing them to interact with other students in a setting outside the classroom and build relationships and connections with others. Effective implementation of the principles of the learning partnership model in a cocurricular setting may require mentors who can expose students to an environment to advance learning and improvement (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Bess and Sam noted that students need to overcome their own anxiety and fear interacting with others and this initial opportunity gives them that exposure. Etta, Laurelle, and Len discussed how this learning experience allows students to make connections to others and to the reasoning behind cocurricular opportunities. These opportunities build on students' confidence to promote trying new experiences beyond the initial exposure and expand their horizons on the opportunities available to them. By providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities, advisors essentially encourage students to become involved or exposed to opportunities outside the four walls of the classroom. One of the results is a relational framework between the advisor and advisee that allows and promotes continuous learning and self-authorship, as suggested by Baxter Magolda & King (2004).

A result of Baxter Magolda and King's (2004) learning partnership model is for honors students to start to see expanded relational complexity. In my study, advisors discussed how they played a role in encouraging those relationships, and shared their perceptions of honors college students seeing the vantage purpose of others after they had initial exposure through engagement in an extracurricular activity, often through activities initially planned by the honors program. Building rapport is a fundamental aspect of advisors making associations with honors students who were anxious about taking the initial cocurricular opportunity.

Providing such exposure to initial cocurricular activities is also aligned with Ryff's (1989) key dimension of positive relations with others and intersects with the dimension of self-acceptance. Students must make the initial effort to participate in these cocurricular opportunities to master the positive relations dimension to get to the end goal of autonomy. Through Ryff's lens, exposure to cocurricular opportunities motivates students into the positive relations dimension to move towards that autonomy in a safe, controlled environment.

The second theme of providing exposure to initial cocurricular opportunities also aligns with the findings of Yamashita (2015) who studied scaffolding learners in socially mediated environments to assist learners in becoming consciously aware. Yamashita found supportive interpersonal processes foster the development of autonomy through cognitive-affective processes. Specifically, the relationship between advisor and advisee played a role in the development of autonomy. Yamashita concluded that a learner's

learning experience and autonomy are increased when examining the learners' meaning-making processes.

Student Agency to Develop Autonomy and Self-Authorship

The third theme regarding RQ1 to emerge was student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship. "Agency gives students the ability to have a direct influence on their own learning and independence through experiences" as explained by Len. All nine participants described experiences through which they perceived students can develop autonomy and self-authorship, which might reduce students' stress and anxiety. Jen, Kirk, Reba, and Lola described building their students' agency to help them navigate through their courses and support their overall development. This intersection of seeking approval and making choices for themselves is bridged through the development of autonomy and self-authorship, as explained by Baxter Magolda and King (2012). Jen stated: "whenever they're ready to learn those things, [autonomy and self-authorship promote] that personalization, that accountability it gives them the agency to learn it when they are ready to learn it, not when we are ready to teach it." Len stated: "I think helping those students realize their agency and their power is incredibly powerful, and I have done it many times." This point in their learning process is pivotal and brings them to the crossroads of their learning, according to Baxter Magolda (2008).

The challenging of viewpoints or existing understanding is similar to how students challenge their current worldviews, as well as their peers, in the classroom through discussion and experiential learning. This deeper understanding propels students towards developing autonomy and self-authorship. Looking through the lens of Ryff's

(1989) scales of psychological well-being, student agency to develop autonomy and self-authorship falls into the key aspect of personal growth and purpose in life. Ryff's scales suggest students must have enough personal growth to be impacting their own learning through their choices and reaching closer to the development of their autonomy.

The third theme also aligns with Ravert and Schneller's (2019) study, based on a questionnaire sent to academic advisors. Advisors perceived that psychological risks allow students to mentally experience uncertainty and make choices based upon their experiences. Ravert and Schneller (2019) noted self-assertion includes demonstrating autonomy and reflecting one's self, and is demonstrative of advocating for one's self.

Permission to Try

A theme prevalent in the interview process, which addressed RQ2 was the need for students to elicit permission from their family members to try something new. All nine honors college advisors described student conversations where a student was hesitant to try something different due to expectations of family members and perceived fear of disappointment in straying from their original course of study. They felt that they needed permission to stray from their plans to try something new. Baxter Magolda (2008) discussed the evolution of self-authorship as a gradual development that evolves from the extraction of oneself from external authority to listening to the internal authority. Listening to the family, the external authority, Baxter Magolda claimed, is a starting point in the exploration of emerging from this dependence on external authority.

Three dimensions of Ryff's (1989) scale of psychological well-being address this need for permission to try: self-acceptance, personal growth, and purpose in life.

Permission to try heightens the demands of the student to not only have personal self-acceptance, personal growth to try something new, but also purpose in life. This is an intersection of several stressful factors in an honors students' life, and addressing these three dimensions may be a developmental step towards autonomy.

The fourth theme also aligns with the findings of Huguenel and Conley's (2020) study regarding the identity of students transitioning into higher education and how their development in adulthood is associated with well-being in general. This area of growth and change during this transition, from the home to the university setting, involves a shift in relationships for the student. This adjustment is also present in the findings of Clark et al. (2018) regarding eight college adjustment factors, including pre-college relationships that affected students' psychological and physical health. In my study, permission to try and pre-college relationships affected the choices that some students made, both positive and negative. Students were hesitant to change their majors and felt like they needed permission to try something new or different. Allowing them to take control and try new things increases their well-being and builds autonomy and self-authorship affecting overall positive mental health.

Need to Balance Stress

Participants described their perceptions regarding the support honors college students need to balance stress in their academic lives. Seven of the nine participants stated that honors college students have a tendency to be involved in many activities, adding to the already burgeoning stress that exists for college students. Bess, Kirk, Lola, and Etta all discussed how honors college students are coming into their programs,

already stressed and worried about every little detail of the program. Baxter Magolda (2001) asserted that all learners need to develop a strong sense of self to guide future decision-making and to attain their self-authorship. Assisting in the development of building autonomy and self-authorship for college students is an area of opportunity for institutions. Developing self-authorship capability for students may allow them the mental fortitude to handle these stressors and make the positive transition to master the last phase of to developing internal foundations.

Ryff's (1989) scales of psychological well-being incorporate the dimensions of environmental mastery and positive relations with others which pertain to the need to balance stress. Students must have control of their environment and have the wherewithal to control the stressors in their environment to ensure that the balance is healthy and choices that are made are mutually beneficial to the students and their end goals. Through balancing their stressors and managing their lives, students may be more able to affect positive relations with others and experience positive effects on their well-being.

The fifth theme also aligns with Opoku-Acheampong et al.'s (2017) study of the stress among pharmacy students and how stress affected their learning activities and general well-being. The study reported that there was a significant correlation between stress and the quality of life for students. Opoku-Acheampong et al. noted the need to balance personal, academic, and extra-curricular activities is important for honors college students. This balance was an example of growth mentioned by all participants in the study.

Student Growth Through Reflection

Eight of the nine honors college advisors interviewed addressed the reflection as a tool for honors college students to utilize. Reflective opportunities potentially address students need to try out their own beliefs, values, and ideas during the experiential learning activities they are participating in. Len, Etta, Reba, and Jen discussed methods of reflection that allow students to connect the how and why of cocurricular experiences that help to foster the development of autonomy and self-authorship of honors college students.

Baxter Magolda and King (2012) discussed that when internal authority moves from the background to the foreground, this process moves the individual into the space of self-authorship. Students who can take their learning from a place of action to a place of meaning and decision-making are moving towards that autonomy and self-authorship, as described by Baxter Magolda (2001). Baxter Magolda (2001) also discussed transitions points or crossroads in the development of students' growth. Noting the theory of self-authorship development, Baxter Magolda (2001) looked for four distinct phases in data analysis. Individuals (a) follow external formulas, (b) enter the crossroads, and (c) becoming the author of one's own life, and (d) to develop internal foundations (Baxter Magolda, 2001). As a student progresses through these phases, growth occurs until the student can make decisions by oneself. Advisors discussed their perceptions of how honors students experienced growth through the honors program as they moved through similar phases that ultimately lead them to developing autonomy and self-authorship. Advisors noted how having students reflect from where they started to where they ended

up demonstrated higher levels of growth for their advisees. The utilization of this tool as supported by Baxter Magolda's transition points allows for student growth and self-authorship development.

This last theme regarding reflection relates to Ryff's (1989) dimensions of environmental mastery and finally autonomy. Students' growth through reflection is the self-assessment of the experiences that a student has undertaken and then reflecting, a bigger picture of accomplishment or understanding can emerge. There is evidence of all six dimensions in the developmental growth that the academic advisors indicated they were trying to promote. Advisors noted that honors college students having these cocurricular resources to guide their own autonomy and self-authorship has the potential to impact their stress, anxiety, and mental well-being.

The sixth theme also aligns with Bowman, Linley and Weaver's (2019) study of the self-authorship capacity with college students' experience and outcomes. The study reported that activities facilitate a students' ability to internal meaning making through reflective practices. Applying mutually constructed meanings to support students in developing and defending their existing understandings.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this qualitative study that merit consideration. My study only involved eight institutions, mostly in the central and eastern half of the United States. The criteria for selecting participants may have served to limit traditional Advisors perceptions of honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship, in that interviewing a different population of participants that might have inconsistent contact

with honors students might have elicited different findings. For instance, I might have included student success coordinators as a potential participant, as they also have direct interactions with students. Also, several participants had director level roles, yet still maintained direct contact working with honors students due to budgetary restraints and programs experiencing high enrollment numbers. COVID-19 further exacerbated these considerations, therefore, a higher number of directors were in direct advising capacities.

Recommendations

Based on the results, it appears that honors college advisors perceived the stress and anxiety that honors college students face may be positively impacted through participation in cocurricular opportunities and opportunities for students to reflect meaningfully on their personal experiences, ultimately fostering the development of their autonomy and self-authorship. Advisors suggested continuing the reflective process that enables students to review their effectiveness in looking inwards to build their emotional intelligence and developing self-awareness in their growth to help honors students answer the 'why' behind their actions. Advisors also suggested the use of a portfolio, linking this recommendation the reflective nature of such a project. The portfolio could also serve to prepare work samples for potential job interviews or when continuing their education.

The questions I asked advisors were focused on their own perceptions, and I did not query honors students regarding their perceptions of academic preparedness and mental health well-being. McGill (2018) examined advising in its ability in offering critical perspectives for students by self-critiquing at their own advising practices. With

advising emerging as a profession and inconsistencies across each university, the impact of advising on students' mental well-being is unknown.

Future research might potentially pursue the perceptions of honors college alumni reflecting on their undergraduate experience and how advisors influenced their development of autonomy and self-authorship. A study regarding honors college students' experiences has the potential to provide further insight to the dynamic relationship between advisor and advisee. Furthermore, considering the stressors of academic year 2020-2021, collecting data in regard to student stress and anxiety and how remote learning plays into these factors in light of the fact that cocurricular activities are harder to plan and implement due to COVID-19.

Implications

The results of the study may have implications in the potential to provide insight into how honors college advising contributes to the growth of honors college students' autonomy and self-authorship through their direct involvement with students. The potential to contribute to increasing effectiveness of honors programs through the work of honors college advisors who can assist students in understanding who they are, what they value, and how they can attain their goals through this advising relationship.

The perceptions of honors college advisors may help to bridge encouraging self-authorship through classroom experiences to the development of self-authorship in cocurricular interactions of honors college students. Positive social change may result in understanding what cocurricular opportunities are offered for students and about the possible importance of students having extracurricular involvement as part of their

college experience, particularly as it might reduce stress and anxiety. Positive social change may result as institutions apply research findings to improve methods to help honors students handle, through academic advising and cocurricular opportunities, their stressors and develop methods to manage them, and in doing so, increase students' psychological well-being, specifically autonomy and self-authorship, and academic success.

Conclusion

In the problem statement of this study I noted that the mental health concerns that many college students face result in students being surrounding stress and anxiety. This stress has potential psychological consequences that can affect their overall achievement in college. One large study indicated that 54% of students from 152 institutions were receiving counseling services for anxiety, depression, and stress in 2018 (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2019). Bowman's (2010) research indicated that there is a link between the amount of stress students reported experiencing and the decrease in personal satisfaction and weaker academic outcomes. With this research, my intention was to explore perceptions of honors college advisors and their perceptions on the stress and anxiety of honors college students. I believed there was a potential link between institutions' emphasis on and support for cocurricular activities and might contribute to reducing the amount of stress and anxiety students' experience.

Based on the study results, it appears that the eight colleges and universities at which the participants worked are facilitating a myriad of cocurricular activities to meet the needs of their honors college students. All participants noted specific implementation

and design in the initial cocurricular experiences of students. With the burdens of stress and anxiety that college students face, these institutions are proactively addressing the need for cocurricular opportunities, partly through the work of academic advisors, to assist in alleviating stress and anxiety to ultimately help shape positive mental well-being of their honors college students. This study can provide insight on the perspectives of honors college advisors and their direct reflections from experience in the field. Honors college advisors discussed the need to continue enhancing cocurricular opportunities for honors college students, providing exposure to opportunities, and ideas to enhance existing opportunities.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Interview Start Time: _____ Interview End Time: _____

Location: _____

Introductory Statement –

The purpose of this research project is to understand the experiences of honors college advisors and their perceptions of autonomy and self-authorship as related to the psychological well-being of honors college students. Stress and anxiety play a large role in the academic outcome of college students and insight into this phenomenon is desired. This interview process is scheduled to last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be recorded via audio whilst notes are taken with your permission. Do you have any questions in regards to the above-mentioned statement?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself and the work you do?

   Possible probes:

   a. How long have you been in advising?

   b. How did you come to work for your current institution in the honors program?

   c. Tell me what a day in the life of an advisor looks like.

   d. In your experience, what have you brought to your role as an advisor?

2. What do you think is the most important aspect of your job?

   Possible probes:

a. What are your goals for your students?

b. What about their mental health? What are your perceptions of students' mental health needs?

c. What recommendations do you make to students?

d. What about academic recommendations? Cocurricular?

3. What have been some differences in the cocurricular opportunities of honors college students versus non-honors college students, if at all?

4. Has your role or work as an advisor changed over the course of the last year? If so, how?

Possible probes:

a. How has their mental health needs changed over the last year, if at all, and how as it changed your advising?

5. How have you perceived the role of honors college opportunities and supports to reduce the stress and anxiety levels of your students?

Possible probes:

a. Are there opportunities you wish you had suggested? Can you elaborate why or why not?

b. What cocurricular opportunities would you suggest now?

6. You've shared with me much of your practice in your work with students. Can we focus on a particular aspect of student development, autonomy? What are your perceptions on how cocurricular opportunities increased students' autonomy to support their overall academic success? (Show autonomy card).

Possible probes:

a. What other opportunities would you suggest to be beneficial to develop the autonomy of students? Any particular curricular and cocurricular activities?

b. How do you perceive these opportunities are making an impact on students' well-being, if at all?

7. What methods or strategies do you recommend could be utilized to assist in developing autonomy for reducing honors college students' perceived stress and anxiety?

Possible probes:

a. What methods or strategies does your institution support?

8. You've shared with me much of your practice in regards to autonomy. Can we focus on another aspect of student development, self-authorship? What are your perceptions on how cocurricular opportunities increased students' self-authorship to support their overall academic success? (Show self-authorship card).

Possible probes:

a. What other opportunities would you suggest to be beneficial to develop the self-authorship of students? Any particular curricular and cocurricular activities?

b. How do you perceive these opportunities are making an impact on students' well-being, if at all?

9. What methods or strategies do you recommend could be utilized to assist in developing self-authorship for reducing honors college students' perceived stress and

anxiety?

Possible probes:

a. What methods or strategies does your institution support in recommending?

b. Can you give me examples of how these strategies reduced stress and anxiety?

10. Tell me about a time you personally assisted an honors college student in the development of their autonomy or self-authorship?

Possible probes:

a. How do you think this impacted the students' well-being?

b. What worked and didn't work for this student and why in your opinion?

c. Reflecting back, how would you assist them differently?

11. Is there anything else you want to share?

12. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank you again for your participation in my study, your dedication and commitment are a valuable aspect of my study and I am grateful for your contribution. Please allow 1 week and I will send you your transcript. This will allow you to comment on the accuracy of the interview and clarify any points. You are not required to read and approve the transcript, however, the option remains open to you to review the transcription. Your confidentiality will remain intact for your participation in this study I appreciate the time you have given to this study.