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LOWER-INCOME AND WORKING-CLASS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

April Townson
Rowan University

LOWER-INCOME AND WORKING-CLASS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY

by

April Townson

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Thesis Chair: Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D., Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies

Committee Members:
Andrew Tinnin, Ed.D., Associate Vice President, Student Life
Tyrone McCombs, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Educational Services and Leadership

Dedication

Dedicated to those who paved the way before me.

Acknowledgments

Thank you Brady, for giving me the strength I needed.

Thank you to my friends, family, colleagues, and peers who supported me.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Stephanie Lezotte, Dr. Raquel Wright-Mair, Dr. Rihab Saadeddine, and the many other faculty members, mentors, and advisors who have supported me on my academic journey. Their support and guidance throughout my time at Rowan has been incredibly valuable.

Abstract

April Townson
LOWER-INCOME AND WORKING-CLASS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING
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Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of lower-income and working-class undergraduate students at Rowan University towards academic advising practices. This study utilized interviews and qualitative data analysis in order provide recommendations for how to advise lower-income students effectively, offer insight into impactful experiences for lower-income college students, as well as what expectations these student populations have of advising experiences. The participants in this study were three lower-income undergraduate students attending Rowan University in the Spring 2022 semester. Participants were interviewed on their past experiences with academic advising, perceptions of advising as a whole, their social class identity, and the intersection of this in their advising experiences, with questions adapted from Auguste et al. (2018). The most significant themes were (a) the need for advisors to share quality information and resources, (b) the need for a caring advisor-advisee relationship, (c) the role other students played in shaping participants' perceptions of academic advising. The findings also reveal the roles participants ascribe to academic advisors, as well as how social class identities were rarely involved in the advising process. Recommendations include suggestions for academic advising practice in addition to further exploration of lower-income students and academic advising.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Social class and socioeconomic status (SES) can make a considerable impact on college students' experiences at and perceptions of their institution. Previous research has shown that lower-income and working-class college students experience unwelcoming campus environments, class-based microaggressions, and stereotypes about their intellectual capabilities (Locke & Trolian, 2018; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Spencer & Castano, 2007). Despite increasing levels of social class diversity on college campuses, these negative experiences are rarely addressed by higher education institutions (Tablante & Fiske, 2015). Research on social class in higher education and student affairs is sporadic, especially in the fields of student support services and academic advising. While there is evidence to support the belief that quality advising can benefit marginalized students of various backgrounds (Auguste et al., 2018; Bahr, 2008), there exists little empirical research on how academic advisors can best support lower-income students.

Statement of the Problem

For several decades, higher education institutions have seen a steady increase in the number of lower-income and working-class students. Between 2006 and 2016, the percentage of high school graduates from the 20th percentile of family income who attended college rose from 50.9% to 65.4% (NCES, 2017). Enrollment figures, however, do not reveal the full story. In a national longitudinal study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), only 14% of lower-income students attained a bachelor's degree within eight years of graduating high school, compared to 29% of

middle-income students and 60% of higher-income students. In a review of NCES data from 1975-2017, the Pell Institute and PennAHEAD (2018) also found a 26% disparity between the highest and lowest income quartiles for college student continuation rates.

The financial costs of college attendance and completion are only one aspect of this disparity gap. As Locke and Trolian (2018) argue, lower-income students face marginalization and isolation on college campuses. Previous research suggests that if students are alienated or disconnected from their institution and the student body at large, then their chances of persistence are lower (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Addressing this connection between the student and their institution is one of the roles of academic advisors, as Vianden and Barlow (2015) argue. Frequent advising sessions have been demonstrated to improve retention rates for first-generation students (Swecker et al., 2013), and yet few researchers have attempted to focus specifically on lower-income students' perceptions of their academic advising experiences in order to ascertain what, precisely, these students perceive as quality academic advising. Having a more thorough understanding of the specific advising needs of lower-income students could be a potential means of increasing their persistence rates and improving their experiences on campus, and yet the data are limited.

Significance of the Problem

Social class is an important, yet understudied aspect of college students' lives and development (Locke & Trolian, 2018; Spencer & Castano, 2007). Classism in higher education and microaggressions towards lower-income and working-class students can lead to psychological and social stress (Locke & Trolian, 2018; Solórzano et al., 2000). Further research on social class and student identity is needed to better understand the

experiences and perceptions of lower-income and working-class students. Academic advising is one particular area of student life that has been shown to have powerful impacts on the persistence of underserved student populations (Auguste et al., 2018; Bahr, 2008), and yet there has been little research into how academic advisors impact lower-income students in terms of their social class.

Since academic advisors play a key role in major and career planning, an area influenced by one's social class and SES (Aries & Seider, 2007), there is a need for further exploration of lower-income and working-class student perceptions of and experiences with academic advising. Furthermore, if, as some researchers have argued, lower-income students perceive their academic spaces representative of middle-class values (Bloom, 2007; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Stephens et al., 2012), and academic advisors' key role is to teach the university's policies and philosophies to their advisees (Hagen & Jordan, 2008), then understanding how institutional values might conflict with their students because of their social class background is necessary to best serve the needs of this student population. Much of the empirical research that has been done on lower-income students' academic experiences and perceptions of support services at higher education institutions has been largely quantitative in nature (e.g., Harrison et al., 2006; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Spencer & Castano, 2007). Therefore, there is space for a qualitative exploration of student experiences and perceptions to better understand how students interact with academic advising, and vice versa, in terms of their SES and social class identity.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of lower-income undergraduate students at Rowan University towards academic advising. Since this is an under-researched aspect of academic advising, it also provides implications for further research into advising practices for lower-income and working-class students. This study's goal was to utilize qualitative data obtained through interviews in order to provide recommendations for how to serve lower-income students effectively as well as to provide a greater understanding of impactful experiences for lower-income college students.

Limitations

Because the participants of this study all attended Rowan University, there is no guarantee that their experiences and perceptions of academic advising align with all low-income students at all higher education institutions. While qualitative studies are inherently not meant to be generalizable, as a measure of validity (McMillan, 2016), it is worth recognizing that this study only illuminates the experiences of a specific group of low-income students at one university. Their experiences might reflect those of other low-income students at other institutions, but this study does not necessarily reflect all possible perceptions of academic advising that lower-income students might hold. In addition, this study used qualitative interviews. For low-income research participants, their social class identity might not be as salient to them as other aspects of their identity, making it more difficult for them to speak on it explicitly (Aries & Seider, 2007). This study is also centered on student perceptions and memories of their academic advising

experiences, not objective events, and this study does not reflect all advising practices by Rowan University advisors.

Operational Definitions

1. Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to objective measures that reflect one's present socioeconomic situation. This includes measures such as annual income, parental income, and wages, and can be represented by terms such as "lower-income" and "higher-income."
2. Social class refers to one's subjective "sociocultural background," which generally remains stable over one's lifetime and can be informed by a variety of cultural factors in one's life. Examples of social class categories include working class, middle class, and upper class (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 196).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study, inspired by Auguste et al.'s (2018) study on the academic advising experiences of nontraditional women students, are as follows:

1. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of negative advising experiences?
2. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of positive advising experiences?
3. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of their perceptions of academic advising as a whole?

Overview of Study

Chapter II of this research proposal presents an overview of the literature on two subjects relevant to this study: the experiences of lower-income and working-class students in higher education as well as the impacts of academic advising on marginalized student populations. This chapter reviews the research on how college students understand their social class identity, how lower-income students experience higher education as well as challenges to their identity, such as class-based microaggressions and stereotype threat. The second part of this chapter reviews research on the role of academic advisors on student experiences and persistence as well as the current literature on advising practices for marginalized student populations and lower-income students. Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology of this study, including its purpose, the guiding research questions, the context and population, the research design, the sample and sampling procedure, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis used in this study. Chapter IV explores the individual participants, their interview responses, and the themes that arose from the data. Chapter V provides an analysis of the interview data in light of the research questions and previous literature, as well as recommendations for practice and research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This literature review provides an overview of the known impacts of social class on college students' academic performance as well as working-class college student experiences. These issues range from broad institutional and cultural value differences to specific class-based microaggressions. SES- and class-related stereotype threat is explored as a useful, yet underutilized, lens for exploring student experiences and perceptions as it relates to their social class. The role of academic advisors in supporting other underserved student populations is then considered, followed by a review of the literature written by academic advisors and other related scholar-practitioners on methods of supporting marginalized, at-risk, and underserved students, including lower-income and working-class students. There exists little qualitative research on lower-income students' perceptions of academic advising in this literature, which this study seeks to address.

Social Class and the University

While social class and SES are not often explicitly discussed in higher education settings (Tablante & Fiske, 2015), they still impact the lives of students, as demonstrated in Aries and Seider's (2007) analysis of the impacts of social class on identity development for students at different types of institutions. These researchers found that higher-income participants attending a private college tended to be more aware of the role of social class in their lives, as seen in their awareness of the opportunities available to them, while lower-class students attending a state college did not view their social class as having highly impacted their lives, values, or decisions (Aries & Sieder, 2007).

Despite this, all participants' occupational goals and political values aligned with their self-identified social class and SES, suggesting that their social position did in fact influence their life goals and program selection at college (Aries & Seider, 2007). In contrast, lower-income participants attending the private college were acutely aware of their social class, due to being surrounded by other students of a higher social class than them (Aries & Seider, 2007). These results suggest that social class can powerfully impact the decisions and experiences of college students, and that the saliency of social class difference at a particular college or university can change how students understand the impacts of this aspect of their identity.

Soria and Bultmann's (2014) research provides further insight into the specific experiences lower-income and working-class students have in relation to their social class. Using data from the longitudinal survey Student Experience in the Research University, Soria and Bultmann (2014) analyzed the responses of 869 respondents to understand how working-class students perceive their college campuses. In this survey, working-class students tended to report feeling lower degrees of belonging, perceived their campuses as less welcoming, and reported that they were less socially involved than middle- and higher-income students at the same campus (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Soria and Bultmann (2014) argued, based on the survey data, that the overarching institutional and cultural values of academic institutions tend to align more with the views of middle-class students than working-class ones, explaining their lower levels of campus engagement. This analysis is supported by the work of Stephen et al. (2012), who found that one factor affecting first-generation students negatively is a cultural mismatch between their working-class values and the institutions' middle-class ones. Bloom (2007)

also found that lower-income graduating high school seniors tended to view higher education as being a distinctly middle-class cultural space, causing many to second-guess their attendance. Soria and Bultmann's (2014) study, however, does not fully explore specific instances that arise from this institutional context, such as microaggressions.

Microaggressions are "subtle insults" that target marginalized and minoritized people in everyday conversations and situations, and they are often said or done "automatically or unconsciously" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 60). Microaggressions, however seemingly insignificant in the moment, spread negative stereotypes and send implicit messages denigrating those of a given marginalized community, the effects of which cumulate over time. Solórzano et al.'s (2000) research on how racial microaggressions impact Black students' perceptions of their classrooms and campuses illustrates these effects. In a series of focus groups, participants in this study revealed that microaggressions led to shared feelings of self-doubt, frustration, isolation, exhaustion, and pressure to switch majors or institutions (Solórzano et al., 2000). For lower-income and working-class students, examples of microaggressions might include negative remarks about their intellectual capabilities as well as insults regarding clothing, word choice, parental occupations, types of housing, and clubs and organizations associated with lower-income and working-class people. Other examples include judgment towards student workers on campus and negative treatment towards students who cannot afford unpaid internships (Locke & Trolian, 2018). These microaggressions can culminate in feelings of isolation, a decreased enthusiasm for academics, and stereotype threat (Auguste et al., 2018; Locke & Trolian, 2018; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is a phenomenon that occurs when an individual fears conforming to negative stereotypes about their group, and it is useful for exploring the impacts and perceptions of marginalized students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In their pioneering research on the subject, Steele and Aronson (1995) found that Black participants were more likely to perform worse on a standardized test if they believed they were being tested as a representative of their racial identity or if their race was made salient prior to taking the test. While these initial studies focused on racial stereotype threat, the researchers defined stereotype threat as capable of happening for any group that is negatively stereotyped. Since then, there have been a plethora of studies analyzing the presence, impacts, and mitigation of stereotype threat in terms of race (Massey & Fischer, 2005), gender (McGlone & Aronson, 2007), SES (Croizet & Claire, 1998), and against student athletes (English & Kruger, 2016). Other researchers have explored the mechanisms underlying stereotype threat, including Shapiro and Neuberg's (2007) delineation of different types of stereotype threat through their Multithreat Framework. In this model, stereotype threat can be categorized into six different groups determined by the target of the threat (the individual or their group) and the source of the threat (the self, ingroup others, or outgroup others) (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). This framework is particularly useful for its addition of nuance to the field of stereotype threat research.

In higher education and student affairs research, stereotype threat has received particular attention as a means of explaining achievement gaps between marginalized and majoritized students, including between lower-income and higher-income students. Class-related stereotype threat is a verified phenomenon among college students.

Harrison et al. (2006) and Spencer and Castano (2007), both inspired by Steele and Aronson's (1995) methodology, found that negative stereotypes about lower-income students' academic capabilities impacted their performance on standardized tests. In both studies, participants completed a difficult series of questions from either the SAT (Harrison et al., 2006) or the GRE (Spencer & Castano, 2007). Participants in the diagnostic groups believed they were being tested on their performance, while the non-diagnostic groups believed the test was on their perception (Harrison et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007). Spencer and Castano (2007) also studied how social class identity salience impacted performance, asking some participants to answer a question about their SES before taking the test, and others to provide this information after taking it.

In both studies, lower-income participants performed significantly worse in the conditions that activated stereotype threat (Harrison et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007). In Harrison et al.'s (2006) study, higher-income participants performed better in the stereotype threat condition, whereas higher-income participants in Spencer and Castano's (2007) study were not affected by either test type or saliency. This could be due methodological differences. Spencer and Castano (2007) only asked for SES demographic information, arguing that lower-income students would be implicitly reminded of negative stereotypes about their social class before taking the test. Harrison et al. (2006), however, not only asked for SES information but also informed some participants that higher-income students tended to perform better on this test. The resulting differences in their data suggest that subtle communication differences can impact how students experience class-based stereotypes when they are made salient.

Although there has not been much research on class-based stereotype threat's effects beyond the test-taking environment, Massey and Fischer's (2005) work on racial stereotype threat provides some insight into how social class intersects with minoritized students' experiences and might be utilized as a lens of analysis in qualitative research. In their multi-institutional, longitudinal survey of undergraduate students, Massey and Fischer (2005) initially focused on how racial negative stereotypes impacted Black and Latino students in terms of how they internalized negative stereotypes about their race and the extent to which they experienced performance burden. Through data analysis, they found surprising interactions between social class and how participants understood and responded to racial stereotypes. For example, survey results indicated that higher-income minoritized students were more likely to have internalized negative stereotypes about their race, placing them at a greater risk for racial stereotype threat (Massey & Fischer, 2005). Massey and Fischer (2005) hypothesize this could be connected to survey results that indicated higher-income participants tended to report socializing less frequently with other members of their race than other participants (Massey & Fischer, 2005). Further research is needed, however, on this interaction between social class and stereotype threat against racially minoritized students.

Stereotype threat, microaggressions, and the perceptions of higher education institutions as largely middle-class impact lower-income students' academic decisions and academic performance (Bloom, 2007; Harrison et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007; Stephens et al., 2012). As Aries and Seider's (2007) study demonstrated, students' social class identities and SES can impact their vocational goals even when they do not actively consider their social class to be a salient part of their identity. These issues,

combined with the disparity between lower-income students' and higher-income students' retention rates, mean that understanding and addressing the needs of lower-income students is essential for academic advisors working with this student population.

The Role of Academic Advisors

Several studies support the notion that academic advising, if done properly, has a positive impact on the success of marginalized, underprepared, and at-risk students. For example, Bahr (2008), in a review of student data from all 112 California community colleges from the Fall 1995 cohort, found that academic advisors had a statistically significant positive impact on student success over their time attending college. Students in remedial courses benefited the most from advisor interactions (Bahr, 2008). Bahr (2008) used these results to argue that the cooling out phenomenon, a theory describing advisor-advisee interactions that lead to decreased levels of student ambition and success, was unfounded. Similarly, in a quantitative study of the relationship between retention rates and advisor-advisee interactions for first-generation students at a four-year research institution, Swecker et al. (2013) found that the odds of a student persisting at the institution increased by 13% for every meeting they had with an academic advisor.

Auguste et al. (2018) expanded on the effects of academic advisors on marginalized students through interviews with nontraditional women students on their history with academic advising. Participants with positive advising experiences cited their advisors as sources of guidance, recognition, and advocacy for specific issues related to their status as nontraditional women students (Auguste et al., 2018). While most participants fell under this category, not all had positive advisor interactions. Some participants stated that they had experienced indifference, marginalization, and

gatekeeping in some advising sessions because their advisors characterized them as less capable students (Auguste et al., 2018).

While Bahr's (2008) and Swecker et al.'s (2013) research revealed an overwhelming amount of positive advising influences, Auguste et al.'s (2018) work illustrates how advisors might harm student success. Student perceptions of advising services, however, can be influenced by their social class background before they even enter an advising session. In one survey of first-generation and underrepresented student use of student services, many students had a "self-stigma for academic help-seeking," creating a barrier between these students and academic affairs and support services offices based on their negative perceptions of how they would be viewed if they sought help (Winograd & Rust, 2014, p. 22). There exists, however, little research specifically on lower-income students' perceptions of academic advising, although the literature on stereotype threat mitigation by advisors offers some suggestions for practice.

Research on Academic Advising Practices

In recent years, academic advisors have utilized stereotype threat as a lens of analysis to understand their students' experiences and how to mitigate this threat. The effects of these techniques, however, have yet to be fully explored. The literature on appreciative advising and stereotype threat exemplifies this phenomenon. English and Kruger (2016), for example, have argued that the six-phase model used in appreciative advising, an advising approach founded in positive psychology and dream-building (Bloom et al., 2013), aligns with known stereotype threat mitigation strategies. Following a similar argument, Pulcini (2016) outlined how appreciative advising techniques could improve degree attainment levels for Appalachian women students by combatting

stereotype threat. These reports argue in favor of appreciative advising based on comparisons with the stereotype threat literature, although there is no empirical research on the relationship between this advising approach and stereotype threat mitigation. Kyte et al.'s (2020) study comparing how students responded to appreciative advising-inspired e-mail versus a growth-oriented e-mail points to the importance of this kind of research. Kyte et al. (2020) found that, while students appreciated the supportive messages in the former e-mail, the students interviewed claimed that the growth-oriented one was more likely to motivate them. Although not a study of stereotype threat mitigation, this research highlights the importance of checking advising approaches against student experiences.

Few researchers of advising have used social class as a strong analytical lens; Soria and Bultmann's (2014) study is one of few examples of research aimed at answering how advisors can better meet the needs of lower-income students. Using survey data from a national, longitudinal study, they found that working-class and lower-income students interacted with their institutions less often than their higher-income peers and often perceived their campuses as less welcoming due to experiences related to their social class (Soria and Bultmann, 2014). Based on these results, they suggest that academic advisors pay careful attention to their advisees' social class backgrounds and how their institution might be inaccessible or unwelcoming for lower-income students (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Furthermore, they advise that advisors should be capable of discussing classism, class privilege, and social class identity with their advisees to bring awareness to the ways their social class impacts their experiences and development (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). This survey data, however, only featured responses to questions

about campus perceptions in general, not specific advising-related experiences or perceptions, and the implications for practice were not tested to find the prevalence of these practices in the advising community (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Conclusion

Social class is a significant, yet understudied, aspect of college student life and development (Locke & Trolian, 2018; Spencer & Castano, 2007). Negative stereotypes against lower-income and working-class students can lead to academic stereotype threat, harming students' performance and experiences if left unmitigated (Harrison et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007). These studies on SES-related stereotype threat, however, often follow the quantitative, experimental methodology of Steele and Aronson (1995), centering standardized test-taking environments over student perceptions and past experiences based on their social class.

Further research on social class and student identity is needed to better understand the experiences and perceptions of lower-income and working-class students. Research in accordance with Massey and Fischer's (2005) survey and interview methodology analyzing how students internalize and externalize stereotypes, Solórzano et al.'s (2000) focus group-based exploration of racism through the lens of microaggressions and stereotype threat, and Auguste et al.'s (2018) review students' experiences of marginalization and identity development in advising environements, would be beneficial for exploring lower-income students' perceptions. In particular, academic advising is a specific area of student support that has been shown to have powerful impacts on the persistence of underserved student populations (Auguste et al., 2018; Bahr, 2008), and

yet there has been little research into how academic advisors impact lower-income students in terms of their social class.

Since academic advisors play a key role in academic program choice and career planning, an area influenced by one's social class and SES (Aries & Seider, 2007), there is a need for further exploration of lower-income and working-class student perceptions of and experiences with academic advising. Furthermore, if lower-income students perceive their academic spaces representative of middle-class values (Bloom, 2007; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Stephens et al., 2012), and academic advisors' key role is to teach the university's policies and philosophies to their advisees (Hagen & Jordan, 2008), then understanding how institutional values might conflict with their students because of their social class background is necessary to best serve the needs of this student population. The work of Soria and Bultmann (2014) uses student perceptions to guide academic advising practice for working-class students, but there is room for more a qualitative exploration of student experiences and perceptions to better understand how students interact with academic advising, and vice versa, in terms of their SES and social class identity.

Chapter III

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of lower-income undergraduate students at Rowan University towards academic advising. As this is an under-researched aspect of academic advising, the goal of this study was also to provide implications for further research and advising practices for lower-income and working-class students. Phenomenological one-on-one interviews were used to identify common elements and themes lower-income students featured in their descriptions of their experiences with and general perceptions of academic advising.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows, and were inspired by Auguste et al.'s (2018) study on nontraditional women students' experiences with academic advising:

1. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of negative advising experiences?
2. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of positive advising experiences?
3. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of their perceptions of academic advising as a whole?

Auguste et al.'s (2018) study was chosen as it was a qualitative study of students' perceptions of and experiences with their academic advisors, while also focusing on a

specific, often overlooked, student population. Based on their data, the researchers also recommended that further research be conducted using social class as a salient point.

Context and Population

Rowan University is a public research institution located in southern New Jersey. This study centers on the undergraduate students at the main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. In the 2020-2021 school year, the university had a total of 15,963 undergraduates enrolled in at least one of their 90 bachelor's programs (Rowan University, 2020b). Rowan also offers the opportunity for students at two local community colleges – Rowan College at Burlington County and Rowan College of South Jersey – to attend classes through the university at a reduced cost in the 3+1 Program (Rowan College of South Jersey, n.d.). As of 2019, 64.8% of the total student populace identified as White, 11% as Hispanic or Latino, 9.9% as Black or African American, 7.39% as Asian, 3.32% as multiracial, 0.112% as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, and 0.112% as American Indian or Alaskan Native (Data USA, 2019). In 2019, Rowan University accepted 74.3% of all applicants, and had an average net price, after financial aid, of $22,805 for the year (Data USA, 2019).

Rowan University uses a split model of academic advising for its undergraduate student programs (King, 2009), meaning that there is a central University Advising Office, staffed by professional advisors, that oversees all advising practices. Students are assigned advisors in this office if they have not chosen a major, are switching majors, or are transfer students. Once they declare a major, a student is assigned an advisor housed within their college, who could be either a professional or faculty advisor (Rowan

University, 2020a). There are no specific programs within the University Advising Office that target low-income and working-class students specifically.

On a broader scale, Rowan University does not publicly report student SES or social-class data. A 2017 study by the Opportunity Insights Foundation reported that the median family income Rowan students that year was $110,200. Forty-nine percent of the student body placed in the top 20th percentile of family income – over $110,000 – while 4.5% of students represented the bottom fifth family income bracket, with family incomes $20,000 per year and less (The Upshot, 2017). Per Rowan's Information Resources and Technology (IRT) internally-facing Strategic Analytics board, 42.73% of all undergraduates enrolled in the Spring 2022 semester were not eligible for a Pell grant, 32.35% were Pell-eligible, and 24.92% of students' Pell eligibility status was unknown. The university does offer some assistance programs for its lower-income students. For example, the Educational Opportunity Fund program (EOF) is a financial assistance grant offered by the State of New Jersey to lower-income students showing great financial need (Rowan University Admissions, n.d.). Eligibility for EOF depends on family household size and income level (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2020). Rowan's EOF program falls under the Achieving Success through Collaboration, Engagement, and Determination (ASCEND) office, which also has programs for first-generation students (Rowan University, n.d). In a recent equity audit performed by the university, some students reported they felt "separation based on socioeconomic status that left participants feeling marginalized" in residential spaces (Zion et al., 2020, p. 79). Although SES was not a focus of the report, this finding suggests social class and SES

might be a salient issue among the student body that has not been addressed by previous interventions.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of low-income undergraduate students at Rowan. While there is quantitative research on the perceptions of academic advising by low-income students (Soria & Bultmann, 2014) and the help-seeking behaviors of first-generation students (Winograd & Rust, 2014), there remains a need to explore these perceptions in the words of the students themselves. To achieve this goal, this study followed a phenomenological framework. Phenomenological studies "describe, clarify, and interpret the everyday life experiences," or "lived experiences," "of participants to understand the 'essence'" of these experiences (McMillan, 2016, p. 318). This framework emphasizes participants' perception of the world and how that is expressed through their language and culture, therefore allowing the participants to discuss their experiences with their social class identities in a personal manner (McLeod, 2001). A limitation to this approach, however, is its tendency towards in-depth analyses of individual participant responses without consideration of the broader social or historical context (Mcleod, 2001). In addition, the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data is, by its nature, subjective, and therefore subject to participant and researcher bias (McMillan, 2016).

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Qualitative research requires purposive sampling, meaning participants are chosen based on specified criteria, in this case SES and social class status (McMillan, 2016). For the purposes of this study, low-income students were defined by their eligibility for the

New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2020). Participants self-reported their perceived social class identities. Participants qualified for this study by identifying as lower- and/or working- class, and/or being qualified for the EOF program. Participants were recruited via Rowan's Daily Announcer email, the ASCEND weekly newsletter, and the 3+1 student listserv. All e-mail messages were approved via the university IRB and ASCEND's office. Once participants responded stating their interest in participation, they were sent a short Qualtrics questionnaire to schedule their interview. In this questionnaire, participants also reported their perceived social class and race/ethnicity. In total, eight interested students responded to the Qualtrics survey. Of those, four scheduled one-on-one interviews, and one of those four participants did not attend their interview. One-on-one interviews were chosen instead of a single focus group for the remaining three participants due to scheduling concerns as well as offering the opportunity for more in-depth discussion with each individual participant in order to obtain "thick descriptions," or understandings of the context, meaning, and personal interpretations of their advising perceptions and social class identities (Ponterotto, 2006).

Data Collection

Interviews lasted 30 minutes on average and were held either virtually and in-person. All participants agreed to audio recording. Recordings were later transcribed by the researcher. The interview process was semi-structured, meaning a list of questions and potential probes were prepared for use in each interview, but the order and wording could change depending on specific circumstances (McMillan, 2016). The prepared questions were inspired by similar interview protocol from Auguste et al.'s (2018) study

of academic advising perceptions and experiences from non-traditional women students. The semi-structured approach allowed for open, in-depth questioning while also letting the participants' responses and experiences to shape the research experience as new information came to light (Usher & Jackson, 2014). The interview protocol was also reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to the sampling and data collection processes. All participants were asked to share their positive and negative experiences with academic advising. Then, participants were asked to discuss their social class identity and how it has influenced their experiences and perceptions both on campus and in their interactions with their advisors. Some interview questions specifically asked participants to consider how class-based microaggressions and stereotype threat impacted their academic choices.

Due to the personal nature of this study, and the fact that participants shared experiences with advisors who they could still be working with, confidentiality was key. All participants were informed of the purposes of this study, its format, what the data would be used for, and how it would be represented both in initial e-mail correspondence and at the beginning of each interview. All participants provided their informed consent to be part of this study and indicated their permission for being audio-recorded (McMillan, 2016). For virtual interviews, participants were not required to turn their cameras on. Participants also chose pseudonyms to use both during and after the interviews that would be associated with their data in the initial questionnaire and in the transcriptions. All recordings, transcripts, and notes were kept password-locked on a secure university cloud drive (McMillan, 2016).

Data Analysis

After completion of the interviews, all recordings were transcribed. Observational notes were also arranged, with additional context on each participant and what had occurred during the interviews added (Emerson et al., 2001). Through qualitative data analysis, sentences or quotes that seem to relate strongly to the participants' experiences and perceptions of academic advising were coded by content (McMillan, 2016). This process aligns with the phenomenological principle of reduction, or the process of analyzing the transcripts of multiple lived experiences in order to ascertain the essential phenomena they describe (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Descriptive and *in vivo* coding were done during the first round of data analysis (Saldana, 2013). After the transcriptions were read through three times and coded, related quotes were categorized into clusters of similar experiences and perceptions, using sub-themes based on the codes and research questions. These clusters were then analyzed and organized together based around shared commonalities or features, which in turn became the themes of the data. After this analytical process, the transcriptions were read over again to verify the validity of these themes as representative of the data.

This process of prolonged engagement with the data served as one method of ensuring credibility (McMillan, 2016; Morrow, 2005). In addition, member checking was used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis and check for veracity in the original observational notes. Participants were invited via e-mail to read over the clusters and themes found by the researcher to reflect on whether they felt this analysis fully reflected their experiences and perceptions (McMillan, 2016). Participants were also asked to verify direct quotes that were used in the analysis. In order to control for the

perceptions and biases of the researcher, who comes from a low-income, first-generation background, extensive reflection on individual perceptions and how they differed from what was actually present in the data were also completed via an analytic and reflexive journal, as per the recommendation of Morrow (2005).

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of Study

This research study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore lower-income and working-class student experiences with and perceptions of academic advising. The data collected from interviews with three lower-income undergraduate students at Rowan University is intended to provide an initial observation of these student populations' potential experiences with advising and inform future research on working-class student needs and academic advising practices. This study was adapted from Auguste et al.'s (2018) study on non-traditional women's experiences with academic advising, and was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of negative advising experiences?
2. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of positive advising experiences?
3. What elements do lower-income and working-class students feature in their descriptions of their perceptions of academic advising as a whole?

Table 1 outlines the demographic and advising information of the three participants: Sara, India, and Brielle. Initially, the goal of this study was to organize focus groups. Due to low participant interest and the scheduling needs of the three participants, I held one-on-one interviews with each participant. Sara and India were interviewed virtually, over Zoom, and Brielle was interviewed in person. All three were lower-income students, however Sara personally identified as closer to middle-class than

working-class. As part of the opening stages of the interview, each participant discussed their past experiences with academic advising. Both Sara and Brielle had, at the time of their interviews, attended Rowan for four semesters and met with their academic advisors once per semester. These two participants also only discussed their experience with meeting one primary, professional advisor at Rowan. India, in contrast, had transferred from another institution, and also discussed her experiences with multiple academic advisors. She also met with and spoke with her advisors on a more frequent basis than once a semester.

Table 1

Profile of Participants

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	SES	Social Class	Advising Frequency
Sara	African American/Black	Lower-Income	Middle-Class	Once a semester
India	African American/Black, Asian/Asian American	Lower-Income	Working-Class	Multiple times
Brielle	White	Lower-Income	Working-Class	Once a semester

Three categories of information arose from the data. The first relates to the participants' social class identities, how these identities matter to them, and how they believe they are perceived as others. Outlining the participants' understanding of social class first is necessary to contextualizing their advising experiences in relation to their social class. Each participant was also asked to discuss experiences where academic

advising and their social class identity overlapped, which was, for many of the participants, related to course affordability. None of the participants reported their academic advisor going into any further depth regarding their social class or SES, and none of the participants reported any experiences with class-based microaggressions from their academic advisors. In terms of their general academic advising experiences and perceptions, several themes arose from the data. In the three interviews, each participant expressed what they believe academic advisors should do in their role, the necessity of advisors providing them with thorough information and connection with campus resources, the importance of a strong advisor-advisee relationship, and how their interactions with other students shaped their perceptions of academic advising.

Social Class Identity

While all three participants were lower-income students, only two participants self-identified as working-class. These responses reflect the nuances with which individuals develop their social class identity as more than just family income (Rubin et al., 2014). In addition, each participant had a different perspective on the extent to which their social class identity mattered to them in their daily lives; in other words, they each had a different level of social class or SES identity salience. As a whole, however, participant responses generally reflected lower levels of social class salience.

All three participants noted that they did not believe others perceived them as in any way othered by their social class background, especially based on surface-level appearances. For example, when asked to describe her social class identity, Brielle responded “I just exist.” While she identified herself as working-class, and made note of

how she does perceive a difference between herself and other college students by commenting that:

> I see a lot of students who, you know, are not, like, necessarily working-class who, you know, just come in and they're like "Okay well, I can take whatever classes that I want, because somebody else pays for it." And I know people that are similar to me who are like "Okay, I've got to make sure, like, I graduate in four years to three years, because I'm paying for this."

At the same time, she reports that because she does not "wear anything crazy fancy" or "come off as…I have the world" while also not coming across as though "ice was my favorite meal as a kid," that others only perceive her as being vaguely middle-class. For Brielle, her social class identity has a greater impact on her student status and academic planning, as she is also an out-of-state student who is attempting to graduate one year early and wants to save money for graduate school. During her interview, she reported that "one credit for a course" at Rowan "is about how much it costs at a community college to take a whole class," which weighs heavily in her academic planning. Brielle did not disclose any other SES or social-class-related concerns.

India, in contrast, stated that she viewed social class as an important, impactful area of one's life. She stated that "you as an individual should totally be aware of [your social class] because it's how you base your life choices, how you navigate things, how you financially plan, and so forth." She also stated that this identity can be both a "healthy thing" or an "unhealthy thing" depending on the individual. She chose to interpret her social class positively, reflecting on the "many advantages" she has had

access to in terms of "different scholarships and grants…to even the scale for individuals who may be able to easily afford, you know, a college education." Like Brielle, she also commented on how, in terms of perceptions from other people, she did not perceive ever being read a particular way based on her social class because "it's not a visual thing," since "we could perceive someone who may be dressed poorly, with poor hygiene, as someone who is lower-class and…in many cases that I have personally seen, that's not necessarily the case." She also notes that, outside of financial aid conversations, her social class and SES have rarely come up in advising sessions.

Sara, in contrast to the other participants in this study, self-identified as middle-class in her initial survey response. During the interview, however, she qualified that by stating:

> I often get confused where to place myself, because…I do live in a house. There's other people who can't ever afford to pay enough to buy a house…but at the same time, we do fall behind in some [mortgage] payments. But there's also people who are more– like, they're homeless…so I don't know where I stand. Food-wise, sometimes it's a little hard for me to get food, but other days we can go out to eat or order pizza.

Sara, then, feels that her personal social class identity shifts depending on her and her family's situation, although home ownership appears to be the primary signifier she used to define middle-class identification. Sara also does not identify strongly with her social class or SES in her daily life, because "I feel like I would almost be looking for pity or want somebody to feel bad for me," in contrast with India. At the same time, if other

people knew about her SES specifically, she says that "I wouldn't mind because I'm not embarrassed with the situation or anything like that. I feel like a lot of people can relate to me."

While all three participants differ slightly in their understanding of their social class and SES and in the salience of these identities in their daily lives, all three report that others do not regularly perceive them, to their knowledge, as being working-class. Brielle and Sara specifically mentioned that they believe others probably perceive them as middle-class. Bearing this participant context in mind, all three did share similar descriptions of their advising experiences and perceptions, particularly in their desire for thorough information, meaningful advisor-advisee relationships, and the impacts of other students on their advising perceptions and needs. These themes of the data, however, are not necessarily related to their social class, at least not without further research. The participants did discuss how their social class and academic advising experiences intersected, particularly in terms of the cost of their education.

Social Class and Academic Advising

Overwhelmingly, the participants shared that they did not perceive their academic advising interactions to have been shaped by their social class or SES. In Brielle's case, "my advisor doesn't really know as much [about her SES], we don't really get into specifics." When she has needed to discuss SES and social class, it mainly involves paying for classes, and from her perspective "it wasn't a huge thing with [her advisor]" to navigate this process with her. In addition, neither of the other participants experienced any negative interactions or microaggressions based on their social class either; as India stated, "I don't believe so, so far as, like, changing their reaction or behavior," and, for

Sara, “that doesn’t really ever come up in conversation.” Sara also stated that she “would be really shocked” if her advisor, or any advisor, were to employ class-based microaggressions towards their advisee.

All three participants noted that the only time their social class played a role in their advising sessions was in relation to the affordability of their education. India summarized this point when she said, “Anything that was discussed regarding socioeconomic class, it may have been things that, you know, can paint a realistic picture for what my needs might be and how we can meet those needs.” Sara’s experiences matched India’s, in that when her advisor suggested winter classes she replied, “I thought that would just cost too much in the moment,” and her advisor worked with her to identify alternative course plans. Brielle, in contrast, also had her advisor recommend taking a summer course. This, however, led to a “misunderstanding” that she would be able to take this course for free. She was able to avoid the extra cost – which would be especially burdensome for her as an out-of-state student – by calling in time herself and cancelling it. In Brielle’s situation, then, a lack of clarity on university policy could have negatively impacted her financial situation. This issue of affordability was not the only commonality across the interviews, although the following major themes might not necessarily be directly related to social class.

What Advisors (Should) Do

All three participants emphasized the importance, to them, of an advisor’s role in providing them clear, accurate information about their academic path. When asked why she visited her academic advisor each semester, for example, Brielle commented that, while she schedules her own classes independently, she stills visits her academic advisor

"to ensure that I'm on the right path." Sara also sees her advising meetings in a similar way; she visits her advisor to "go over my classes for the next semester." However, Sara defines the role of an academic advisor as someone who should also "[look] out for your grades" and communicate more proactively when a student's GPA falls, stating "if a student is falling behind" academically, "your advisor should be guiding you, giving tips of how to bring it up." India believes that "advisors are to advise on your particular situation," bearing in mind that "they'll never know the full picture of what they're advising on, which is essentially the rest of your life." Because of this, India believes that advisors should provide "as much information to whomever they're advising as possible, because you don't know what questions may not have popped into that individual's head." In other words, she asks that advisors "tell me everything."

To some extent, all three participants highlight areas that advisors should focus on more when working with students. While Brielle makes regular semesterly meetings with her advisor, she questions the efficacy of her advising meetings, noting that her advisor has often told her to take certain classes when she had already taken them. India stated that all of her positive experiences with her several advisors were a reflection of how they were "easy to talk to," "approachable," and "interested in what a student may be inquiring about." Her advisors have made her feel as though "they want to get up and go and help" her in every situation. Sara described how her advisor connected her with tutoring resources and gave helpful guidance on choosing which courses to take over the summer, both of which made her feel supported. Brielle, in contrast, reports that her advisor has provided little helpful guidance. Instead, she says "I don't think they, you know, always benefit each specific person, I think, as a whole, like I feel like they could."

Both Sara and India stated their advisors had given overall encouraging support and positive feedback when needed, while Brielle shared that her advisor has not given her any feedback, positive or negative.

From these participant descriptions, several commonalities arose across their experiences and perceptions of their academic advisors. Specifically, areas that each participant highlighted as shaping their positive and negative descriptions of academic advising were sharing resources and university information, developing a strong advisor-advisee relationship, and the information they learned from their peers.

Advisor Knowledge: Sharing Information and Resources

For all three participants, sharing adequate information and connecting students with institutional resources was paramount in their positive or negative feelings towards their advising history. Brielle summarized this when she stated, "I think unhelpful advising is just omission." For example, Brielle found it unhelpful that her advisor never showed her how to use DegreeWorks, a service that allows students to see what credits they have already taken and which university and major requirements they still need to fulfill to graduate. Brielle was also frustrated that her advisor did not explain how Rowan University requirements were categorized by class:

> My advisor didn't tell me…how different classes were categorized as, like a writing intensive, or, you know, this could count as this. Like, this [course] could count as a, you know, global literacy [course] or a, you know, an elective.

While these are examples of unhelpful advising, Sara and India both highlighted how the information and resources their advisors shared with them were incredibly

helpful to them and positively impacted their academic success. Sara, for example, appreciated that when her advisor noticed her struggling in a class:

> She just told me if I do good on the final then I'll end with a really good grade, so she suggested that I do a tutoring session from early on, before finals, because it would fill up towards the end…And when it came down to it, they were really all filled up and everything, and I was glad that she gave me that advice, because I was able to still get a tutoring session before my final.

Sara also highlighted this kind of insider knowledge about not only the existence of university resources, but also how to utilize them most efficiently, when she described the second most helpful way her advisor impacted her:

> For one of my classes, I wanted to take a language class…and then I was going to take…one of my classes during the summer, and she told me that I should actually switch it around because summer courses are a lot of work and way much harder than they would be during the semester. So, she was like "take your language class over the summer, it'll be much lighter work."

This also aligns with what the other participants desired from their advisors. India, for instance, stated that she appreciates it when advisors work with students with an "understanding [of] what their needs are" instead of providing standardized answers to student questions. In other words, for India, her advisors "knowing the reason" behind why she needed to reach out to them or meet with them had the greatest impact on her experiences.

The Advisor-Advisee Relationship: Care and Connections

In addition to wanting quality information, all three participants shared their ideal advisor-advisee relationship, although they did not always experience this in reality. Brielle, for example, described "really good advising" as "getting to know, or, like, taking notes on your student" and understanding them well enough to discuss "here's a major, here are things that they might want to minor, and here's, you know, where they're at academically." India described how she felt her advisors understood her like this, and often remembered her specific questions in later meetings; this made her feel supported. In contrast, Sara, describing how her advising sessions generally go, notes that "it's not really [about] following along and how I'm doing or anything like that." Sara's advisor, from her perspective, has historically focused more on registering for the following semester's classes, but has not worked with her to explore her interests, career goals, or future plans. Sara says she would appreciate this kind of relationship because she sees her advisor as "somebody who has more experience in my field…so I feel like she knows exactly what to do and what internships I should apply for" and would know "more about the classes than I do." At the same time, she did state that her advisor "made me feel as if somebody cared about my education." This sense of "care" underscores the primary image portrayed by all three participants about their ideal advisor-advisee relationship.

Sara's point about connection is important, and a similar desire appeared in the other interviews. For the participants, developing a strong advisor-advisee relationship was not solely about their advisor individually, but also about their advisor's potential to connect them with other people at the institution. India specifically mentioned the

importance of "creating that network" of support across financial aid, advising, and faculty members for students. For her, one of the benefits of meeting with her advisor has been having someone who "[knows] who to direct me to" other departments to answer her questions if they were not able to do so. In contrast, Brielle states that her advisor has not been too helpful in setting up this kind of support network for her. She does, however, realize the utility of such an arrangement. When asked what she would recommend advisors try doing, she stated that "I think [advisors] need to get back into their department…I think they need to talk to the professors and figure out, you know, what these classes are actually about…figure out what students want and what students need from them." This also connects with all three participants' need for deeper information about courses and university resources, which they all depict as the central role of an academic advisor.

Peer Influence

During the interviews, it was apparent that the participants' own experiences with academic advisors was not the only influencing factor on their perceptions of advising as a whole. In both Brielle's and Sara's interviews, the influence of their peers stood out as an important factor in shaping their advising perceptions. India did not mention her peers as frequently, only stating that she believes she probably meets with her advisor more frequently than other students, which could explain why she focused more on her own experiences during her interview. Peer influence describes two categories of interaction: what students hear from their peers about advising, and the presence of informal peer advising networks. Both Sara and Brielle discussed the former topic extensively, however only Brielle touched on peer advising.

Brielle and Sara both described times that they heard other students discuss unhelpful advising. Brielle mentions that students from her department, who share the same advisor as her, "have come up" to her and shared that they experienced "the same type of issues" as her. Brielle also works in an on-campus position that places her in regular contact with other undergraduate students. In this role, she interacts with students "from different disciplines, different colleges" leading to in-depth conversations:

> We'll just kind of discuss what's going on with their lives and everything, and many of them have said that their advisors don't make things very clear for them – That they don't know about, you know, things like how to work Section Tally…but I think, you know, an advising appointment should be, you know, how to use DegreeWorks, and things like that. And then, with things like classes, they don't know that they can, like, you know, request…an online class. They don't know they can do that kind of stuff

Brielle, then, finds that many of the students with whom she discusses advising have had negative experiences, and these negative experiences largely center on poor communication and poor sharing of resources. These have contributed to Brielle's beliefs surrounding the efficacy of advising in general, in that "sometimes our advisors kind of fall short" of their students' expectations. Sara has heard similar stories from other students, "saying that their advisor doesn't really help them that much with which classes that they should take at which time. So they'd be, like, credits behind when it's time to graduate." She has also heard from her relatives "that advisors can be a little not helpful at first," from their experiences. Hearing this from her family and peers made her

"nervous" to meet with her advisor at first because she "didn't know what to expect from them." After meeting with her advisor, however, Sara now says that she has been one of "the most helpful" people she has interacted with at college, demonstrating the power of helpful advising.

Brielle, however, stated that in her experience it has not been her advisor that has helped her most with navigating her academic life, but instead her peers: "I think I've seen more peer advising than anything," she says, saying that she has heard, and told other students, things like:

> "Oh, well, this teacher does this class, and this class, and this class, and I know they're doing it next semester, because I checked Section Tally,"
>
> "Here are the things you should do because I'm in your major," I think peer advising has become really important.

Brielle even recommends that advising departments explore setting up peer advising programs, where "students from each major…talking to some of these advisors and being like 'Hey, you know, this is what I'm seeing from other students," because, from her perspective, advisors are disconnected from both their departments and from the lives of their students, leading to the issues in knowledge-sharing and relationship-building she has personally experienced.

Chapter V

Discussion

Summary of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of lower-income and working-class students, an underexplored area. I collected data from three semi-structured interviews with lower-income undergraduate students at Rowan University in the Spring 2021 semester. All three participants were lower-income. Two participants identified as working-class and one participant identified as middle-class, although the latter participant noted that she is not sure how to properly define her social class identity. Using descriptive and *in vivo* coding, I analyzed the data in terms of how participants defined their social class identity, the commonalities participants mentioned regarding positive and negative experiences of academic advising, and the extent to which their social class impacted their academic advising experiences, if at all.

The overall findings were that all three participants defined quality academic advising in similar ways – in terms of sharing information and in developing a caring, strong relationship with the advisee and other departments in the institution – while also noting how their peers have shaped their perceptions of academic advising as a whole. None of the participants stated that they felt their social class or SES impacted their academic advising experiences, except when the costs of certain classes were being discussed with their advisor. This does follow the findings of Aries and Seider (2007), in that for many college students, depending on their environment, social class and SES are

not salient factors of their identity. While this research study had limited participation, preliminary answers to the research questions can be addressed.

Discussion

Since academic advising is an area of student support that has been shown to have powerful impacts on the persistence of underserved student populations (Auguste et al., 2018; Bahr, 2008), and lower-income and working-class students have historically been left out of previous literature on college student's experiences and development (Locke & Trolian, 2018; Spencer & Castano, 2007), this research study focused primarily on exploring, from a phenomenological perspective (McMillan, 2016), these students' experiences and perceptions in regards to academic advising, in part to expand on the findings made in quantitative studies on working-class and lower-income students (e.g., Harrison et al., 2006; Soria & Bultmann, 2014; Spencer & Castano, 2007). This research study, inspired by Auguste et al.'s (2018) qualitative study of non-traditional women's experiences with academic advising, sought to address the following: the qualities that participants found in negative, or unhelpful advising; the qualities of positive, or helpful, advising; and any other perceptions or experiences that are not as easily categorized in these interviews.

Qualities of Negative Advising Experiences

The two major themes most directly associated with participants' negative advising experiences were Information and Resources and Advisor-Advisee Relationship. For the former, all three participants emphasized how they perceived their advisor's role as someone who should be proactive in providing resources and information. The types of resources and knowledge they desired included course planning for all semesters of

their academic career, registration resources, and academic support. Some participants, namely Sara and Brielle, felt that their advisors were not proactive enough in helping them think more in terms of their future goals. In addition, all three participants discussed how, at times, they felt their advisors did not necessarily tailor their advice about course planning to the individual student. India, for example, often felt that she had to question her advisors further to get the answer for her specific situation, while Brielle had several experiences where her advisor recommended her to do things she had already done. These responses do seem to support the advice of English and Kruger (2016) and Pulcini (2016) of using appreciate advising as a means of connecting with advisees at a deeper level and helping them think towards their future goals (Bloom et al., 2013). This also suggests that, for this student population, a more proactive advising approach might be appreciated as well (e.g., Varney, 2013).

The participants in this study defined unhelpful advising as not only un-informative, but also un-caring. Their responses align with what Auguste et al. (2018) described as indifference on behalf of their advisors. Unlike Auguste et al. (2018), however, the participants in this study did not report marginalization or gatekeeping based on their social class or SES. In addition, the participants all stated that their social class and SES did not play any role in their academic advising relationship, outside of direct consequences involving course payments and financial aid. This contrasts with the recommendations of Soria and Bultmann (2014), who argued advisors should discuss these issues with their advisees. In addition, the participants in this study did not report any activation of stereotype threat or the presence of class-based microaggressions from their advisors. At the same time, all three participants noted that they believed themselves

to be largely perceived by others to be either middle-class or, at the very least, specifically not working-class. Since the perceptions of others plays into how stereotype threat and microaggressions function, this could have impacted the experiences of these specific participants (Bloom, 2007; Harrison et al., 2006; Massey & Fischer, 2005; Spencer & Castano, 2007; Stephens et al., 2012).

Qualities of Positive Advising Experiences

All three participants were able to describe moments where they felt supported or helped by their academic advisors. These situations, on the surface, often related to sharing resources. Sara, for example, appreciated her advisor's suggestion of tutoring and explanation of how and when to set up an appointment, as well as her suggestion of switching her summer course and her language coursed based on the advisor's knowledge of her academic capabilities. Similarly, India appreciated how the advisors she has worked with have been very willing and enthusiastic about answering any questions she brings to them. Brielle, likewise, appreciated her advisor's work to fully explain the transfer credit system and help her transfer credits from her community college.

Using Auguste et al.'s (2018) themes from their sample's experiences with positive academic advising, it appears that these participants overwhelmingly found their advisors to provide good guidance in these situations, but not as much recognition or advocacy based on their respective social class identities. Sara and India, the two participants with the most positive experiences overall with their advisors, also found that it was not just what the advisors guided them on, but how they approached them as students. They both suggested that they felt more supported when their advisors were enthusiastic and engaged in their success as students and took proactive measures to help

them. These features also came up frequently in their responses to what they believed the roles of advisors should be.

Perceptions of Academic Advising in General

Each participant represented a different point on the spectrum of advising experiences. India, overall, had the most positive experiences with her advisors, while Brielle had mostly negative experiences with hers. Sara could be placed somewhere in the middle – she felt her advisor had helped her immensely in some ways, but also suggested that she wanted her advisor to be more proactive in terms of academic outreach and planning for her future. It might be worth noting that, of the three, Brielle and Sara both mentioned how other students had shaped their perceptions of academic advising as a whole. Both participants, for example, described influential moments where they heard other students tell stories of ineffective advising. None of the participants shared peer-learned perceptions of positive advising. This peer-learned perception, combined with the already-present stigma for academic help-seeking behaviors (Winograd & Rust, 2014), could have impacted their overall expectations of academic advising. Brielle, in particular, seemed aware of the difference in academic information available from other resources – whether official Rowan channels, such as the Daily Announcer, or her peers in her major – versus her advisor.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this research study, it is recommended that academic advisors working with lower-income and working-class students should:

1. Ensure that their advisees are properly connected with the resources that the institution provides. This also means that advisors should themselves be

knowledgeable of these resources and inform students directly on how to use them. Resources could include course registration software, university policies, winter/summer courses, financial aid, and academic support services such as tutoring;

2. Avoid siloing themselves from the departments they advise for and other university offices, in order to form a well-informed support network for advisees;
3. "Know the reason" behind why their advisee is coming to them in that moment;
4. Work from an advising framework that emphasizes a future-thinking orientation; and,
5. Communicate proactively with advisees.

While the participants in this study stated that their advisors did not touch on social class and the impacts this has on students, Soria and Boltmann's (2014) research does suggest this should be an area advisors focus on in their conversations with their advisees. Further qualitative research is needed on this area.

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the limited participation in this study, there still remains much room for qualitative studies on lower-income and working-class student perceptions of and experiences with academic advising, particularly at a variety of higher education institutions. As Aries and Seider (2007) found, levels of social class salience can differ drastically depending on an institution's demographics, and a comparative approach may be useful in the future. In addition, future research could utilize focus groups to provide a fruitful source of data and interaction, as the current study demonstrated how students often form their perceptions of academic advising from communication with their peers

and may promote a snowballing effect (Vaughn et al., 1996). In addition, this would allow for the comparison of participants of different social class saliences. Focus groups also offer the additional benefit of the "loosening effect," whereby group dynamics promote "candor and participation" (Vaughn et al., 1996, p. 18-19). Since not all students might be aware of the ways in which their social class identity has impacted their college experience and perceptions of services like academic advising (Aries & Seider, 2007), the opportunity to explore these experiences with others creates the potential for revelations that could, potentially, be absent in individual interviews.

In addition, the data from two of the three participants from the current study on peer influence on academic advising perceptions could be an area to explore in future research studies and program evaluations. In particular, one participant's recommendation of formal peer advising networks may be useful to explore in terms of benefitting not only working-class and lower-income students, but all advisees.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research study was to provide deeper insight into working-class and lower-income students' experiences with academic advising through qualitative data in order to explore the positive and negative advising practices and perceptions potentially specific to this student population. Due to the low sample size and qualitative nature of this study, these findings are not representative, and further research is needed on students who have higher levels of social class salience. In addition, it is unclear if the experiences and perceptions of these three students are shared by students who are not lower-income. Despite these limitations, the findings do suggest, in an exploratory

manner, avenues of advising practice that could be explored further for these student populations.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that lower-income students at Rowan University prefer academic advisors who focus on sharing information and resources about institutional services, future plans for their major and career goals, and creating a support network with faculty and other departments in the university. They also appreciate academic advisors who seem to genuinely care not only about who they are as students, but also seek to understand their individual issues – as one participant, India, stated, advisors should focus on "know[ing] the reason" behind the questions their advisees bring to them. Positive advising experiences, even when just about information and resources, centered on sharing insider knowledge about the university. Negative advising experiences related more to what advisors did not do, rather than what they did.

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Appendix A

Interview Instrument

VERBAL SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Agreement to participate:
Thank you in advance for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we begin, I want to provide you with information about this study and answer any questions you may have.

I am April Townson, from Rowan University's Department of Educational Services and Leadership; I am a current master's student working on my thesis. I am conducting a research study on lower-income and working class students' perceptions of and experiences with academic advising. The research will help me understand how academic advisors, and other student support personnel, can better work with and support these student populations.

Today you will be asked to participate in a focus group [or interview], which should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary. There are minimal risks associated with this focus group, but I will do my best to limit them. Risks of this study may include discomfort with interview questions and discussing past experiences that may bring discomfort. You can skip any question or ask to stop the focus group at any time without any consequences.

Your responses will be anonymous and you will only be identified with your pseudonym, if mentioned at all, during the final write up. With your permission, the focus group [or interview] will be audio recorded. The audio files will be stored in a secure, password-protected Rowan cloud drive that will only be accessible to the researcher.

During the focus groups, I will not be able to guarantee confidentiality because we will be discussing information as a group. Therefore, please do not share anything that you would feel uncomfortable being shared with others in or outside the group.

There are no costs or compensation to participate in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, now, during, or after study participation, please let me know or feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Stephanie Lezotte. If you'd like to speak to someone outside of the research team, you can contact the Rowan University's Office of Research Compliance.
Do you have any questions?

[IF YES: take time to answer all questions.]
[IF NO: proceed.]

Do you agree to participate in this focus group?

[IF YES: proceed.]

[IF NO: thank them for their time.]

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Stephanie Lezotte. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (record sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team

The recording(s) will include the subject's chosen/assigned pseudonym when they are referred to as such.

The recording(s) will be stored in a secure, password-protected Google Drive Cloud provided by Rowan University and will be destroyed upon the completion of the thesis project.

Do I have your permission to audio record this focus group [or interview]?

[IF YES: proceed.]

[IF NO: ask if they would like to continue without being recorded, or thank them for their time.]

Interview:

1. First, I want to check in. How many people here have met with an academic advisor at least once before?
2. Thinking about academic advising in general, what would you consider unhelpful, discouraging, or unsupportive advising?
3. Give me an example of a situation in which you received feedback from an advisor that was unhelpful or discouraging or unsupportive.
    a. What about the *advisor* was unhelpful and unsupportive?
    b. What about their *feedback* was unhelpful and unsupportive?
4. What do you see as the trademarks or characteristics of positive, helpful, or supportive advising?
5. Looking at your own experience, give an example of a situation in which you received feedback from an advisor that was helpful or supportive.
    a. What about the *advisor* was helpful and supportive?
    b. What about the *feedback* was helpful and supportive?
6. I'm interested in learning more about your experience with being a lower-income and/or working-class student. I recognize that you all have many different identities and aspects of yourselves, and you might not always think about your social class or socioeconomic status consciously at all times. I also know that, in many cases, race and class are heavily linked. When you think specifically about

your social class or socioeconomic status, as a college student, what comes to mind?
    a. Any specific experiences you have had?
    b. Any perceptions (either of yourself or from others) you have been aware of?
    c. How do you see this aspect of your identity?
7. In your advising experiences, have there been times where social class identity seemed to be a factor in advising, whether positive or negative?
    a. Can you provide an example?
8. Some people experience or have experienced subtle instances of bias or misunderstanding based on their identities – you might know them as microaggressions. Have there been times when you have experienced this from an academic advisor – specifically related to being working class or low-income?
9. If you have not visited an academic advisor, what has contributed to that?
10. Have there been times when you have received constructive criticism from an advisor? Did you hear this as encouraging or discouraging or unsupportive?
    a. Could you provide an example?
11. Are there any final thoughts you would like to add?

Conclusion:
Is there anything else you would like to share before we conclude the focus group?

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Do you mind if I contact you again if I have any questions or need clarification about the things we have discussed today?

As a reminder, you can reach out to me or the Principal Investigator, Stephanie Lezotte, at any time if you have any additional questions. If you'd like to speak to someone outside of the research team, you can contact the Rowan University's Office of Research Compliance. If you'd like to take down contact information, I can give it to you now:

April Townson (me): townso78@students.rowan.edu

Stephanie Lezotte: lezotte@rowan.edu

Office of Research Compliance: (856) 256-4058

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 08:15:10 Eastern Standard Time

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PRO-2021-578 - Initial: Approval Letter - Expedited (Initial)
Date: Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 9:25:45 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com
To: lezotte@rowan.edu, townso78@students.rowan.edu
Attachments: ATT00001.png

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00007111
IRB Chair Person: Dr. Adarsh Gupta / Dr. Ane Johnson
IRB Director: Eric Gregory
Effective Date: January 5, 2022

Notice of Approval - Initial

Study ID: PRO-2021-578
Title: Lower-Income and Working-Class Student Perceptions of Academic Advising at Rowan University
Principal Investigator: Stephanie Lezotte
Study Coordinator: April Townson
Co-Investigator(s): April Townson
Sponsor: Department Funded

Submission Type: Initial
Submission Status: Approved

Approval Date: January 5, 2022
Expiration Date: January 4, 2023
Approval Cycle: 12 months
Continuation Review Required: Yes
Closure Required: Yes

Review Type: Expedited
Expedited Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes. 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Pregnant Women, Human Fetus, and Neonates Code: N/A
Pediatric/Children Code: N/A
Prisoner(s) – Biomedical or Behavioral: N/A

ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
2a. Continuing Review: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
2b. Progress Report: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses, an annual progress report is required at least 21 days prior to the expiration date.
3a. Expiration of IRB Approval: If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.
3b. Human Subjects Research Training: Proper training in the conduct of human subjects research must be current and not expired. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator and the investigator to complete training when expired. Any modifications and renewals will not be approved until training is not expired and current.
4. Amendments/Modifications/Revisions: If you wish to change any aspect of this study after the approval date mentioned in this letter, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. This policy is also applicable to progress reports.
5. Unanticipated Problems: Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office
(45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html
6. Protocol Deviations and Violations: Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html
7. Consent/Assent: The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. Completion of Study: Notify the IRB when your study has been completed or stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor nor the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application, progress report or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. Research protocol and study documentation and instruments is approved as of the Approval Date on this letter. All final approved versions of the study documentation, including but not limited to the protocol, advertisements and recruitment instruments, pre-screening instruments, surveys, interviews, scripts, data collection documents, all manner of consent forms, and all other documentation attached to this submission are approved for final use by the investigators up to the expiration date listed above (Expiration Date) in this letter.
11. Letter Comments: There are no additional comments.

Appendix C

Recruitment Language

Lower Income Student Perceptions of Academic Advising

Volunteers are needed for a research study on the experiences of lower-income and working-class students with academic advising. This study will consist of focus group interviews, and participants will have the option of meeting in-person or virtually.

Are you 18 or older?
Are you an undergraduate student at Rowan University?
Do you identify as working-class and/or lower-income? If not, are you eligible for EOF?
Are you interested in discussing your experiences with academic advising and providing further insight into how academic advisors, and related student support services, can better support working-class and lower-income students?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, we invite you to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences and perceptions of academic advising directly from lower-income and working-class students, in order to better understand advising practices that would be best suited for these student populations.

This study will include a focus group interview lasting roughly 60 minutes. All participants will have the opportunity to note their preferences for meeting in-person or virtually. In-person groups will meet in a room in James Hall, and virtual groups will meet over Zoom. Further details will be provided upon confirmation.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out the following Qualtrics questionnaire or contact the Co-Investigator (April Townson): https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4YCDHJDNL4L52XY

Contact information:
Principal Investigator: Stephanie Lezotte, lezotte@rowan.edu
Co-Investigator: April Townson, townso78@students.rowan.edu

This study has been approved by Rowan University's IRB (Study # PRO-2021-578)

Version #: 2
Version Date: December 17, 2021