

Understanding complexity in doctoral lifeworlds and impacts of advising ancestries

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Abstract

This paper shares findings from an interview study designed to open up critical conversations on complexity in advising. Using a narrative inquiry approach to centre storytelling and personal experience as valuable knowledge, I interview advisors (both academic and unofficial) who were central to my own doctoral research journey, as well as former doctoral students of mine. The interview results are put in relation with my own critical reflection on my advising practices as an ethos, as opposed to a set of tasks or functions, and put into context with larger social concepts such as positionality. This new perspective is suggested as a supplement to complexify and expand earlier research on advising styles. Advising is characterised as deeply entangled with mentoring as well as teaching at large, and the paper concludes with identification of larger ethea, reflecting how advising practices are co-constituted in relation with a range of other factors, such as positionality, institutional and disciplinary context, the larger student lifeworld, and perspectives on teaching and learning.

Keywords: doctoral advising; intergenerational dialogue; mentorship; narrative inquiry

Received 2 May 2022; revised version received 13 October 2022; accepted 17 October 2022. Corresponding author: Rebecca Rouse, University of Skövde, Sweden (rebecca.rouse@his.se).

Introduction

In some disciplines, such as the humanities in particular, the doctoral experience is often thought of as a solitary endeavour, punctuated by conversations with a wise advisor. In reality, doctoral work takes place embedded in complex social structures, with influences from many, not only the advisor. The entangled, social nature of the doctoral milieu can be described as the doctoral *lifeworld* (or in German, *lebenswelt*), as theorised by phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. Seeking to understand the complexity of the doctoral lifeworld beyond the student–advisor

dyad is important for multiple reasons. First, this broader understanding can help mitigate against egoistic notions that exaggerate the influence of the advisor. And secondly, a broader understanding of the wider lifeworld influences on the doctoral journey can also help illuminate how strategies, techniques and approaches are passed on and innovated through multiple generations. By taking this broader view, it is possible to both arrive at a more modest understanding of the advisor's impact, but also observe how advisors (and others) may incite impacts that persist over time, across multiple generations of doctoral students.

Evidence of the embedded social nature of the doctoral experience can be found in one of the most overlooked texts in the dissertation: the acknowledgements. Hyland's research on doctoral acknowledgements (2003) has concluded that '[a]cknowledgements are sophisticated and complex textual constructs which bridge the personal and the public, the social and the professional, and the academic and the lay' (Hyland, 2003, p. 265). The acknowledgement of influences, other than the advisor, forms no small part of these texts: Indeed, 40 percent of the texts examined in Hyland's corpus of 240 focus on thanking family and friends, a large percent on thanking other academics who are not the advisor (such as teachers and committee members), and with a further smaller percent focused on acknowledging other organisations outside academia, and even non-human entities such as pets and God (Hyland, 2003, p. 253–264). Taking this complexity into account, it is clear the advisor operates not only in relation to the doctoral student, but in entanglement with a wide range of people and entities, both academic and not, who make up the student's lifeworld.

While discussion of "non-official" or extra-academic influences on the doctoral process is not common, Wisker and colleagues (2017) have studied examples of this and have made a call for more research into what they term doctoral *borderlands*, or less-examined influences on doctoral research, inviting other researchers 'to further study and where appropriate legitimate and support the personal and learning-oriented work of the supportive "lightside" others who enable doctoral students to achieve their potential and write well' (Wisker et al., 2017, p. 535). They conclude that further research is needed 'into the PhD as a joint, collective and life-world based academic production' (Wisker et al., 2017, p. 536). This paper responds to that call to take the larger lifeworld influences of the doctoral journey seriously, and presents findings from an interview study dedicated to the exploration of complexity in doctoral experience and advising practices.

In contrast with other research that seeks to provide a set of generalizable advising styles or best practices, and focuses only on the student-advisor dyad, this study centers storytelling and personal experience in the larger lifeworld. This

broader experience is seen here as valuable data for developing an understanding of advising as a set of complex, entangled practices that are difficult to abstract and difficult to separate from related practices of teaching and mentorship, and larger concepts such as positionality. Reflecting on these terms as well as the terms of advising and supervision, this study makes use of multiple terms and concepts because this diversity of terminology is necessary to more comprehensively map the doctoral experience. Because it is not only the advisor who influences the student, but also teachers, mentors, and others outside academia, it is important for all these terms to remain in play. Because my own experience and those I interview are in the American context, the terms *advising* and *doctoral student* are used (as opposed to the more common European terms, *supervision* and *doctoral researcher*). While the term *advising* is used throughout, there are significant overlaps with the concepts of both mentoring¹ as well as teaching at large (as acknowledged in the usage of *doctoral student*, as opposed to *researcher*). Instead of seeking to disentangle these practices and concepts, I wish to acknowledge advising as a pedagogical practice, and embrace its close relation to teaching and learning in particular. Pushing back against modes that imagine a uni-directional flow of knowledge from advisor to advisee, this study instead reveals a more complex set of flows of knowledge across a rhizomatic network.

The interview study presented here investigates the branching relations stemming from my own advising ancestry, opening up conversations with four individuals who powerfully shaped my doctoral research journey in different ways, along with discussions with five of my former doctoral students. The aim of the study is to examine how multi-directional flows of practice and perspectives resonate back and forth across generations—both inside and beyond academia—within a connected advising ancestry web. Why work to reflect and re-frame the discussion of doctoral advising styles, focused on honoring the complexity? As articulated by Lindén, even though advising may seem to be a footnote to the faculty trinity of teaching, research, and service, reflection on advising practice is of utmost importance. Lindén cautions: ‘Activities involving far too many unreflected-on actions governed by tradition and relating to know-how may end up in difficulties’ (Lindén, 2016, p. 16). Taking Lindén’s words to heart, it is wise for those of us even

¹ Mentoring as a frame for doctoral supervision has been critiqued by Manathunga (2007), who points out that while some may claim a mentoring approach resolves power differences in the student—advisor dyad, these power differences remain, just in a more obscured fashion when the relationship is characterised by mentorship. Manathunga ultimately finds utility in the mentorship approach, but calls for ‘coming clean on these complexities’ surrounding flows of power (p. 221). This paper’s work to complexify understandings of doctoral lifeworlds and advising ancestries can contribute to Manathunga’s project.

outside the discipline of pedagogy to pause, reflect, and study the activities of advising in all their complexity and regard the work we do as advisors as a multifaceted skill with value in its own right. As with any skill, even though we may not be formally taught, we learn through example and enculturation via our own experiences.

The advisor and advisee relationship is a contested, complex relationship that has been theorised through a range of lenses. One model for understanding this relationship that is both often cited in scholarship on doctoral advising as well as commonly offered in the context of advisor training is the research from Gatfield and Alpert (2002), which describes PhD advising as supervision management styles via a four-part grid: *Laissez-faire* style; *Pastoral* style; *Directorial* style; and *Contractual* style (p. 267–268). Gatfield and Alpert (2002) derived these four styles from a literature review of doctoral supervision scholarship and verified via a set of 12 interviews with qualified supervisors, and then arranged their findings as a four-quadrant grid, inspired by earlier research from the 1960s on managerial styles. In their analysis verifying the quadrant of styles with 12 experienced supervisors, they found that 9 of the 12 employed the contractual style most often, which Gatfield and Alpert discuss as ‘the most preferred style’ (2002, p. 270). Their interviews also revealed that a supervisor may shift between styles at different points, when spurred into the pastoral style by a student’s crisis, for example, or at other points of key transition in the student’s research process. This identification of the preferred style leads to a hierarchy in the four styles, meaning the grid becomes a taxonomy.

Gatfield and Alpert’s work presents a valuable turn of the kaleidoscope in the examination of doctoral advising. However, it represents just one turn. Their work is grounded in management science, and focused in the Australian context. Indeed, they acknowledge the limitations of the research, and suggest it should be broadened, as it has been by Green (2005), Deuchar (2008), and others. Nevertheless, the apparent simplicity of Gatfield and Alpert’s 4-part grid offers a tantalizing model to those seeking to better understand the complexity of advising. When the model was brought into the advising course I took part in at University of Borås, Sweden, I was initially interested to think how the grid might be used to inform my practice as an advisor. After considering this, and in conversation with my fellow students, it seemed rather unclear how to move from the four-part taxonomy that seemed to so completely map the field (the grid is completely filled, after all), to the realities of doctoral advising based on my prior experiences. I was not able to map myself into the grid in a satisfactory way, and became curious to examine my own practices through the lens of experience, and interconnection with others, with the goal of complexification (as opposed to simplification) of my own

understanding of advising style. The result is not a generalizable taxonomy that claims completeness, but rather an *un*-taxonomy of non-hierarchical, specific, entangled practices as co-constituted between a certain network of people, incomplete, but expressive of particularity and nuance. This multi-generational study can help complicate understandings of how advising practices, and perspectives on research and teaching at large, circulate between connected actors across multiple contexts and time periods, to better reflect the multi-layered and intersectional nature of the experiences of being advised and advising.

Feminist technoscience and complexity

As a researcher outside the field of pedagogy, it is important to briefly share some of my disciplinary positioning. My work in this study is grounded in perspectives from queer feminist thought, and in particular feminist technoscience. As Suchman (2007) has explained, a core tenet of feminist technoscience is the questioning of binary or other simplistic, naturalized divisions between entities that appear common-sensical (i.e., divisions between subject/object, mind/body, human/nonhuman, nature/culture, us/them). Suchman relates: ‘Feminist scholars most directly have illuminated the politics of ordering within such divisions, particularly with respect to identifications of sex and gender. A starting observation is that in these pairings the first term typically acts as the privileged referent against which the second is defined and judged’ (Suchman, 2007, p. 140). Here we can add to Suchman’s list, the advisor/advisee relationship, also often constructed as a binary, with the advisor listed first, as acting *upon* the advisee, imparting wisdom and skill, in the so-called banking model of education (Freire, 1970).

In contrast, in my approach to understanding the relationships between advisors and advisees in this study, I seek to develop threads across multiple generations of advisors and advisees, drawing out the circular flows between and across these relationships as a rarely acknowledged but powerful network. Returning to the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, my presentation here is one more turn of the lens—one possibility among many—one assemblage. By focusing on assemblage, or interconnection, which are both core concepts in feminist technoscience, I work to keep the relationships between people as the focus of the research, rather than individuals themselves. This pushes back against notions of the lone genius and differs from Gatfield and Alpert’s approach, in which they interviewed 12 advisors who they identified as individual experts, but chose not to interview these experts’ former advisors, or these experts’ own students.

A lack of taking interconnection seriously, which is also a way of discounting positionality, has also led to critiques of taxonomy from within scientific research both old and new (Barad, 2007; Raven et al., 1971). This research highlights how systems designed for measurement or categorization are themselves productive of knowledge. So too, we can imagine how taxonomies of advising styles can function to instantiate advising styles in their own image, as advisors in training may seek to form their own practices such that they fit the grid.

Given these critiques, we can revisit Gatfield's and Alpert's work to see that their taxonomy leaves out questions of positionality, including inheritance, not only from other advisors but also disciplinary and institutional inheritances. Turning the kaleidoscope in this manner, we might understand the "preference" for contractual advising less as an intentionally crafted expert approach created by individually gifted advisors, but rather as a reflection of the dominant Capitalist ethos of higher education, in which the faculty member is the purveyor of an expensive qualification, for which the student pays. Feminist perspectives teach us to question what seems natural, and work to disturb dominant epistemologies, so that we can see the ways in which those whose practices, voices, and knowledge may not have been highlighted have already been doing liberatory work, often in agonistic relations with power structures. Shifting away from the focus on the advisor as an individual, to instead focus on advisors and advisees in relationship, a network can be constructed that resembles a family tree.

The frame of ancestry or parentage comes up in more vernacular discussions of advising relationships². While the concept of an advising ancestry could be critiqued as patronising or infantilising the doctoral student and overstates the advisor's influence, framed differently through methods of feminist narrative inquiry, the concept of ancestry can be a powerful lens for articulating the interconnectedness of multiple actors in the entangled web of relations that surround the advisor–advisee dyad.

In contrast with positivist approaches to research, my project's deeply personal approach is based on feminist scholarship, which values the personal and experiential as generative of knowledge. This valuation of the personal has to do with feminism's acknowledgement of the deeply entangled ways in which identity and experience influence knowledge-making (Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 2018). Engaging questions of positionality can allow the researcher to dig deeper into reflection on their own knowledge formation, looking not only into *what* they think,

² For example, see the academic family tree website: <https://academictree.org/>

but *why* it is they think the way they do³. Of particular relevance to the topic of this study, issues of identity have long been acknowledged as central to understanding the doctoral research experience and doctoral student-advisor relationships, given the long-term, multifaceted, and interpersonal nature of these relationships (Green, 2005; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Lee & Boud, 2003; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011).

Moving beyond the conceptualisation of identity as categorised and discrete components attributed to individuals such as race, gender, or sexuality, the framing of identity as positionality within political, social, and cultural structures provides a more integrative understanding of the ways in which the individual exists in relation to communities, institutions, and systems. Positionality is both complex and shifting, and has been notably theorised as intersectional at core by scholars such as Crenshaw (1991) and Carastathis (2013). Crenshaw's theory pushes back against the notion of identity components as separable, instead conceptualising intersectionality as relational entanglement. The way we experience positionality is certainly not through discrete categories, but rather through an integrated whole. Some aspects of identity may indeed be more keenly felt or openly expressed dependent on context, but these aspects are nevertheless inextricably integrated, and cannot be disentangled. Given this background, it makes sense to utilise the frame of experience as a way to approach inquiry. Focusing on specificity of experience opens up possibility for examining complexity. As Collins and Bilge (2018) have noted, the core of an intersectional approach is a focus on relationality, and this must be grounded in specificity. One outcome of this approach is a necessary level of complexity, which they discuss as follows: 'Attending to how intersecting power relations shape identities, social practices, institutional arrangement, and cultural representations and ideologies in ways that are contextualised and historicised introduces a level of complexity into everything' (Collins & Bilge, 2018, p. 63). This interview study is one contribution to the complexification of our understanding of advising, via investigation of the questions above and the complex, intersectional responses they elicit.

Study design

This study takes a critical feminist approach and combines reference to published scholarship with personal storytelling. As bell hooks has explained, personal

³ Takács (2003) has discussed the profound ways in which positionality influences epistemology yet is often overlooked by researchers in practice.

storytelling is a valuable feminist knowledge-making and sharing tool in several respects. Storytelling can act as an accessible invitation for the reader into potentially paradigm-shifting material, can facilitate the development of a dialogic learning community, and has the power to create worlds in ways that are distinct from the worldbuilding possibilities associated with ‘basic facts’ (hooks, 2010, p. 49–53). In terms of pedagogies that seek to facilitate communication and learning across difference, hooks describes storytelling as uniquely potent, when used in combination with critical research: ‘A powerful way we connect with a diverse world is by listening to the different stories we are told. These stories are a way of knowing. Therefore, they contain both power and the art of possibility’ (hooks, 2010, p. 53).

With the value of specificity and stories in mind, my interview data will be presented as a set of stories, along with critical reflection on the complex, intersectional ways in which these stories resonate with each other and through my own experiences as well. There is already a tradition of storytelling in research methodologies in studies of doctoral supervision. Indeed, many studies in this area take a narrative inquiry approach. Taylor (2011) explains the relevance of a narrative approach for research in this field as follows: ‘Narrative understandings of the doctoral journey [...] facilitate greater attention to the affective, emotional, cultural and social dimensions of the journey; provide a means to consider how these personal dimensions intersect with institutional contexts; and make a claim for a better understanding of the relations between narrative, biography, academic identity, and the university’ (Taylor, 2011, p. 443). Given my critical feminist perspective, the use of a narrative methodology makes sense due to the facility of this method to explicitly include and acknowledge impacts of positionality—both individual and social—on the teaching and learning experience.

Cotterall (2011) also discusses the suitability of narrative inquiry in examining the doctoral experience, citing the ‘[...] sensitivity to a focus on the individual and the role of experience in their construction of knowledge’ (Cotterall, 2011, p. 95). As Bruner (1990) has theorised, narrative, or storytelling, is key to the way humans make meaning of lived experience⁴. As noted by Taylor above, storytelling can provide access to examine the ways in which emotion and affect impact experience and meaning-making.

Another strength of a storytelling approach in research is that in the case of difficult or even painful experiences, storytelling can be valuable due to the ways

⁴ This perspective has provided a foundation for the field of narrative inquiry at large, as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Riessman (2008), for example.

in which the teller is afforded agency to re-frame their experiences so that the act of telling can be a healing one, as opposed to re-inscriptive of trauma. This healing capacity of storytelling along with its utility as a reflexive tool has been described by hooks as follows: ‘Rather than assuming, “I think therefore I am,” I like to think I am because the story is. The stories I tell about how I am constitute the me of me-as-I-see-it as I tell it’ (hooks, 2010, p. 50).

In the particular context of sharing stories of personal experiences in doctoral advising, this study takes the unusual approach of putting three generations of advisors and advisees into conversation. This approach is not common, likely due at least in part to the power imbalances between the role of advisor and advisee. No matter how collaborative or supportive the advisor may be, they do hold a certain power over the advisee’s journey—or at least have the *potential* to hold such power. Whether or not it is wielded, this power potential is certainly perceived and informs the nature of the relationship (see Angervall, this issue). Even after graduation, this power difference may persist, given the gap in seniority and position in the field. It is important to note this particular atmosphere of power imbalance as a voice in these conversations.

In addition, while valuing the specificity and truth expressed in stories of lived experience, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of any one individual’s perspective, as well as the shifting nature of the self and social contexts. As McCormack has noted, research based in narrative inquiry must also highlight ‘that a story is merely a snapshot in time—the person is not statically and permanently defined by the discourses of the story’ (McCormack, 2009, p. 149).

With these limitations in mind, and the long history of the use of narrative methods as a tool for both feminist research and research into the doctoral experience, I designed a focused interview study centred on the stories of four individuals who most impacted my own experience as a doctoral student, as well as stories from five of my former doctoral students. The nine participants have agreed to be named, and have reviewed drafts of this article at each iteration. These participants were:

- Sandra, my mother; independent artist, poet, and writer, and writing teacher in adult education and ready-for-work community programs
- William, my father; research professor in Public Policy and Professor Emeritus in Industrial Systems Engineering
- Jay, chair of my doctoral committee; professor of New Media
- Laura, member of my doctoral committee; associate professor in Architecture

- Jason, whose doctoral committee I participated in as chair; Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs
- Diana, whose doctoral committee I participated in as a member; singer-songwriter, poet, composer, filmmaker, scholar and educator
- Robb, whose doctoral committee I participated in as a member; postdoctoral researcher in Communication and Media
- Van, whose doctoral committee I participated in as a member; assistant professor in Theatre Scholarship and Performance Studies
- Carolyn, whose doctoral committee I participated in as chair; curator, filmmaker, archivist, interdisciplinary artist, and scholar.

To provide some context for my own positioning within this group, I am a decade into my career, having graduated from a doctoral program in 2013, and I have had the good fortune to participate in supervising eighteen doctoral students to date. I have graduated three students as dissertation chair (main advisor) in US programs in Communication and Rhetoric, and in Interactive Arts (a practice-based digital media arts PhD in which students produce both traditional written scholarship as well as research creation via arts practice). I've participated as a co-advisor, committee member, outside reader, evaluator, or opponent for fifteen doctoral students in countries including the US, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Hungary, Australia, and Sweden.

Regarding the makeup of the nine participants, while it may seem unusually personal to include family members in the study, there is research that focuses on the significant impact family and friend networks play in the doctoral experience (Jazvac-Martek et al., 2011). This research discusses a differentiation between the influence of the doctoral advisor as 'formal' support for the doctoral student, and the influence of those in personal networks as 'informal' support, as in providing the encouragement but not the literal academic tools or techniques to the student. In my case, both parents are educators, so they each contributed to my journey in both informal and more formal ways. Although I was never formally a student of theirs, they were able to share formal knowledge and practices with me. This notion of a deeply personal and extended web of mentorship was also echoed in the stories shared by my former students, who brought up a diverse range of influences beyond higher education including parents, elementary teachers, and other community members.

My approach was to first reach out to participants via email, and ask if they could respond to an initial set of questions via writing, which was followed by a 45- to 90-minute Zoom video call or further email correspondence, depending on

participant availability, so that we could discuss their responses and further questions that arose from what they had written. Each participant was asked some version of the following set of initial questions, which implicitly frame advising in overlap with mentoring, and both as pedagogical practices:

- Can you describe your approach to advising PhD students/mentoring?
- Who most influenced the way you approach doctoral advising/mentoring? (Can be more than one person)
- How connected is your doctoral advising approach to your approach to teaching/mentoring in general?
- Has your approach to doctoral advising/teaching/mentoring changed over the years? If yes, how so and why?

As mentioned above, all participants reviewed this article prior to publication, and shared that they valued the opportunity to reflect on these questions, as this experience was not common for them, given none are in pedagogy as a field. The conversations were impactful for me not only as a knowledge-gathering exercise, but as a reflective, thoughtful connection with family members, close colleagues, and former students who have had significant impacts in my own journey. In this way, the act of attention to and reflection on the multi-directional flows of knowledge each shared with me was also a way of acknowledging and honoring the gift each has given me. That being said, these conversations have also opened up opportunities to be constructively critical about my advisors' approaches and practices, and by extension, my own.

Toward an un-taxonomy of advising styles

These nine conversations have led to the identification of an interesting, incomplete, and overlapping set of eleven advising styles (Collaborative; Collegial; Demystifying; Professional; Literary; Editorial; Inspirational; Co-learning; Flexible; Reflective; and Radical) as well as an overarching foundational condition: positionality (See Table 1 for more detailed descriptions of each style). As this collection is not hierarchical, and is not complete, it is not a taxonomy. The eleven styles outlined in Table 1 were derived from my thematic analysis of the nine conversations, via a process of transcription in the case of those which were video recorded, followed by close reading to search for threads of continuity and distinction. Where these threads emerged, I proceeded by re-reading and re-

watching these parts of the conversations, to see if where I perceived some resonance there might be sufficient material to identify it as a theme, or style. In the section that follows, each style is discussed with supporting quotations from the conversations, along with my own reflections, so you will see how my analytic thinking process worked, as I also work to weave my experiences into the text.

Positionality emerged from analysis of the interview data as a foundational condition underlying all styles. Positionality refers to the intersectional social identities a person holds, which may be perceived and experienced differently in different situations or when among different groups, but cannot be disentangled from the way a person moves through, acts on, or interprets the world. Positionality can also not be disentangled from the ways in which a person is moved, acted on or interpreted by others including social and political structures and systems. In terms of advising styles, positionality is a foundational condition that influences both which styles may “work” for advisors who hold certain identities, as well as which styles of advising may be most effective for which students. For example, to take one of the styles from the Gatfield and Alpert taxonomy (2002), a female-identified faculty member who works in a male dominated field or environment may find less success using the directorial style of advising, since in contexts in which women are in the minority, misogynistic views may prevail which frame directorial action by a women as overstepping, overbearing, or negatively aggressive.

However, holding an outsider or minority positionality is not necessarily negative in the context of advising. This positioning may in fact open the faculty member up to possibility for innovation in ways that others seated more comfortably within the norm may not feel free to pursue. As Diana describes:

As an independent artist and adjunct professor, I am already outside institutional practice in some ways. On some level, I have more permission to say things that are counter to what is expected of us. It shouldn't feel taboo, but it does feel taboo to even mention spirituality with regard to teaching. When it is a very personal activity—we are bringing our knowledge and trying to engage with others, and engage with their knowledge practices. [...] I think there is more to teaching than the surface level of the course work and the assignments. We don't necessarily document the spiritual aspects, and they are not to be quantified. But I know my students feel it. I have had students come out multiple times to me as queer or trans, I share a song with them and they cry, it is cathartic not uncomfortable. There is a lot of community and connection that comes

about in my classes. I can see it. It is not a statistical measure, but it is my experience.

Diana also draws the connection here between advisor identity and student identity, noting how her classroom developed a sense of community through students sharing with her about their own queer identities, something they would have been likely less comfortable to do had that identity not been shared with the teacher. Positionality also plays a role in the relationship between advisor and advisee, meaning that some students may seek out advisors based on alignment of positionality with their own. Van articulates some of the meaningful reasons behind this practice:

Often, I chose/am drawn to mentors that have different positionalities that were not heteronormative, because my positionality is different I needed someone to understand that on a personal level. I often felt uncomfortable if I needed to do too much work to inform my mentor that my journey was difficult in a myriad of ways.

Reflecting on what Diana and Van have shared, I can see the power of positionality as threaded throughout all discussions of advising and advising styles. As a queer woman in Games, I can identify with their perspectives, as a kind of outside-insider myself. In the first position I held after graduation, I was a faculty member at a predominantly white, male STEM polytechnic institute. This demographic was shared by the majority of both faculty and students alike, and meant that even though my own whiteness reflected a dominant characteristic of the institution, due to my gender and sexuality I stood out as an anomaly in the Games faculty and classroom. As Diana identifies, it was both through the freedoms and frustrations with this outside-insider status that perhaps unsurprisingly, drew me to pursue research into critical feminist pedagogy in Games. As a new graduate, I never imagined taking an interest in pedagogical research, but the reality of conditions in the classroom changed my perspective over time.

The specificity of these stories shared below have the power to take us beyond the generalisable in understanding practices and perspectives in advising to complexify the taxonomy described by Gatfield and Alpert (2002). The value in their widely-cited four-part taxonomy of pastoral/contractual/laissez-faire/directorial styles of doctoral advising is in its incompleteness, as a frame to push against, providing the necessary 'friction' (as described by Laura below) to get ideas moving.

Table 1: An un-taxonomy of advising styles derived from conversations with nine interview study participants

Foundational condition	Description
Positionality	Positionality can be understood as a red thread throughout all advising styles, influencing which styles may “work” for some faculty but not others, as well as which styles function for some students and not others, as well as a core component of the relationship between advisor and student.
Style	Description
Collaborative	The advisor is not the only game in town, and actively works to bring other mentors into the student’s sphere, as committee members or otherwise. The ‘village’ of mentors is selected not only based on disciplinary expertise but also in recognition of different advising styles and strengths.
Collegial	The advisor views the student as an agential, independent thinker and colleague or soon-to-be colleague.
Demystifying	The advisor provides clear, detailed, and transparent information to the student from the beginning of the advising relationship. This can include information about doctoral program processes, rules, and norms, as well as disciplinary culture. The information is provided as a way to invite the student into knowing, and not as a policing of students who may have creative and valuable ways of doing things differently.
Professional	The advisor is careful not to trespass into friend, parent, or pastoral roles with the student, as this may have harmful impacts for the relationship particularly when the advisor holds an identity in which such care-taking may be wrongly assumed to be available, thus overstepping boundaries and resulting in exploitive emotional labor. This may most often be the case for faculty who identify as women. With a professional style, the advisor focuses instead on modeling a more distanced and work-focused relationship.
Literary	The advisor emphasises engaging relevant literatures, reading deeply, broadly or even outside the bounds of conventional scholarly reading practices to more effectively ground and inform the student’s research. The student’s own production of text is also foregrounded as the core process for generating the central medium of the student-advisor relationship: the draft.
Editorial	The advisor focuses on fostering the creative thinking of the student through careful engagement with their writing, giving valuable and specific feedback but not overly directing the student. The advisor is careful to understand the student’s own voice and approach, and work to strengthen that but not change it.
Inspirational	The advisor works to communicate their genuine fascination and excitement for the research at hand to the student, and this ‘spark’ is infectious.

Co-learning	The advisor uses an explicit learning-with style, by inviting the student into their own work in progress, and responding with a “let’s go and see” or “let’s find out” approach to student curiosity that extends beyond their own research focus or experience. The advisor is also careful not to extend this style into letting go of the responsibility the advisor holds in the relationship. This style models research as life-long learning.
Flexible	The advisor frames many possible strategies for the student to achieve the same outcomes or goals, working to help the student identify their own strengths and interests as a guiding force in designing research methods or approaches.
Reflective	The advisor works to actively and critically reflect on their own practices, examining both their successes and shortcomings as an advisor, as well as reflecting back to the student or witnessing the students’ own strengths and capabilities, and areas of possibility for growth.
Radical	The advisor introduces perspectives and practices that are outside the norm of dominant institutional or disciplinary values to broaden and enrich the students’ process of research generation and overall growth. These might include embodied practices such as deep listening or sensory ethnography, and frameworks centred in values like empathy, compassion, and justice.

Collaborative advising

In the collaborative style of advising, a group of advisors work together in a complementary fashion to provide the student with access to their multiple strengths and skills. This means the single chair or lead advisor is not expected to provide everything the student needs, but rather acts as a connection point for the student. Sandra discussed this type of balance in advising based on her experience as an MFA student in Creative Writing:

In particular, Michael and Hester had a talent for seeing where my writing needed to head and they were astute in recommending particular writers for my reading. [...] They were different [from each other] in style. Michael was more insightful about pointing me to different writers I had never read before—teaching by example was his style, and he’d highlight areas he liked in my writing. Hester was more instructional, more technical about elements of craft. Writing is a moving target in each person’s life. The instructional may be more effective for a more novice writer. Michael’s approach was more about being a critical reader. But it’s a fine line—you can kill a young writer prescribing tools of the trade.

Others discussed a similar balancing of advising strengths from multiple faculty as important and beneficial. William recounted the regular meetings he had with all

members of his committee, and Laura reflected on the ways one of her advisors helped to balance another. This is an advising strategy that I often draw on myself. Where I feel I have a shortcoming or missing perspective the student may find beneficial, I work to connect the student with colleagues from my larger network who can provide the needed additional expertise. This style can also cross over into the next, Collegial advising, as a way of bringing the student into a collegial network even prior to graduation.

Collegial advising

In reflecting on my own experience of being advised as a doctoral student by Jay, I felt a collegial frame best captured my perception of his style, which for me was very effective. This advising style is marked by the characterisation of the student as a colleague, or soon-to-be colleague. In Jay's advising practice with me, this showed up in invitations to collaborate on his research in digital heritage, which was adjacent to my own in media theater. Having the opportunity to work together in his lab in practice, and write and publish together separately from my own dissertation research provided an effective acclimation to the rhythms and practices of academic work across both theory and practice. In addition, Jay also introduced me to academic conferences, by sending me in his stead to deliver a report on his lab when he was double-booked for an event. He also spent time discussing the differences between various conferences, and related publication outlets, in a way that bridges the collegial style and the demystifying style discussed below.

In my experience, Jay was a wonderful advisor, based on his strategies of collegial framing, active listening, and co-learning. So I was surprised to learn in our interview that he considered himself relatively inexperienced as an advisor, and that I was his third doctoral student. William also shared thoughts on the collegial style of advising; in particular, reflections on the potential for long-term relationships between advisor and students, long after graduation:

I still interact frequently with Tom [William's own doctoral advisor]. With any student, you enter a relationship, not just as a gatekeeper for them getting the credential they want. Your intellectual leverage is magnified by working with smart young people. I have published with each of my doctoral students, exploring new topics led by them. I see this as the good stuff, frosting on the cake, because I never made my own research dependent on these collaborations with my students.

William identifies here a potential pitfall of the collegial style, implying that if an advisor *does* make their own career success dependent on collaborations with their students, this may lead to difficulties. He approaches his research collaborations with students as something extra, an added benefit, and not the main goal or needed outcome from these relationships. This seems to say the collegial advising style does not position the student in *exactly* the same fashion as a colleague; to do so would be disingenuous. Instead, the collegial advising style extends some aspects of collegial relations to the student, but in a way that maintains the advisor's responsibility for some developmental aims of the doctoral process.

Demystifying advising

Related to a collegial style, a demystifying advising style has a focus on providing clear, detailed, and transparent information to the student. This can include information about doctoral program processes, rules, and norms, as well as disciplinary culture. The information is provided as a way to invite the student into knowing, and not as a policing of students who may have creative and valuable ways of doing things differently.

Here I can draw on my own experiences with William, who is my dad, to share examples of this demystifying style. At the end of our conversation for this study, we were discussing the privilege of access I have had to the university environment since I was a small child, since he worked as a faculty member from that time. This access went far beyond mere entry to his lab, (although I do have happy memories of riding in a flight simulator as a kid) and expanded to include incorporation in the research process myself. As an undergraduate theater student, he invited me to develop a study of teamwork in the performing arts with him one summer⁵.

This was a complicated experience. While extremely valuable in introducing me to research practice at a young age, I can also remember my inner conflict at encountering this approach to interacting with and seeing the world. As a theatre student focused on playwrighting and directing, I remember feeling that I 'just wanted to make my art!' That frustration did give way, through the process of collaborating on the study, to fascination at viewing my passion 'under the hood,' from a different angle. I had somehow worried that examination would spoil my delight in theatre practice. Thankfully it did not. I also remember I had chafed at William's engineering approach, which I had felt was incommensurable with my artistic focus. In the end, our perspectives were put in conversation with interesting

⁵ See W. B. Rouse and R. K. Rouse (2004).

results, also working to demystify my understanding of what collaborative interdisciplinary research can look like, and influential in my trajectory towards a interdisciplinary field (Digital Media and Games) which bridges STEM, the arts, and the humanities.

Looking back nearly twenty years later, I see the immense privilege of this aspect of my advising ancestry, in contrast with the hurdles some students face who do not have support from their families, and do not have the benefit of this demystification of the academic culture and process prior to beginning their studies (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Wofford et al., 2021; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Offerman, 2011). Demystification is a key and conscious component of my own advising style, meaning that I work to be clear and specific about expectations, timelines, and norms, both within the doctoral program and in the larger academic community, job market, and more—although I do not position myself as an enforcer of these norms, but rather a resource for the student to become aware of them and then make more informed decisions about how and if to participate in them.

Professional advising

The concept of professionalism came up in several conversations, notably only with women, however. In this advising style, the advisor is careful not to trespass into friend, parent, or pastoral roles with the student, as this may have harmful impacts for the relationship particularly when the advisor holds an identity in which such care-taking may be wrongly assumed to be available, thus overstepping boundaries and resulting in exploitive emotional labor. This may most often be the case for faculty who identify as women. With a professional style, the advisor focuses instead on modelling a more distanced and work-focused relationship. Laura discussed this professionalism as follows:

Age can project authority, but you can also get perceived as students' parents. But I never felt maternal toward my students. I kept my school and home life separate. I tried not to let work things invade my mind when with my own children. In my teaching I structure things quite firmly, which may be a function of teaching big survey classes. I set up very clearly how the class operates and that has helped me to exert authority as an introvert. I am not the 'pal' instructor. But in smaller, advanced classes I am a little more lowkey and informal. [...] Unlike other female colleagues I would never bring cookies etc. to students. One time I did bring doughnuts to an 8am session, and then a consistently sexist colleague said, 'You're trying to butter them up for course evaluations.' In other settings, I have invited

graduate students to our home for dinner, but in a manner that treated them as emergent peers, not as surrogate children.

It is interesting that Laura characterises this professional style both as a way to avoid misogynist traps in academic culture, but also as a way to protect her home life from work, noting this style as beneficial in terms of work-life balance, and as helpful in encouraging her to be more present for her children when home.

Carolyn also reflected on professionalism as a style, in her ongoing work to navigate the tension between the pull to intervene and the need to preserve student autonomy:

As a graduate student TA, I wrongly assumed that it was my duty to intervene in the lives of the students—to save them from the mistakes I had made as an undergraduate. This, of course, was not my responsibility. And even worse, such efforts intrude on invaluable ‘real world’ learning experiences. Nevertheless, years later I still find it necessary to thwart my paternalistic impulses, and to recognise that a student's missteps are an expression of their autonomy. [...]

There is an interesting difference in the framing of professionalism across Laura's and Carolyn's reflections. Laura implements structure within the classroom as a tool to achieve professionalism, while Carolyn is working to loosen structure to allow her to step back from ‘paternalistic impulses’ and toward professionalism. This points to the ways in which this style of professionalism may differ quite a bit from person to person. Diana also discussed professionalism in her reflections on how her teaching had changed over the years, moving away from a people-pleasing approach to one that is more honest and direct:

I am very clear with my students, I don't care if you like me, I don't care if we like each other, but my goal is for you to grow as an individual. We probably will enjoy each others' presence and that's great, but that's not the point of the classroom. I want to create a space where a student can understand themselves and come to new understandings of the world around them.

Across all three of these stories, there is a notion of need for balance between the formal goals of advising and teaching, and the friendliness and fun that can naturally arise in such close interpersonal interaction.

Literary advising

Discussions of the ways advisors handle texts are threaded across many of the stories that were shared, which is not surprising given the doctoral research journey commonly includes writing as at least one of the primary outputs. Interestingly, both William and Robb reflected on the ways advisors had shaped and shifted their approaches to reading. This was notable given the difference in time period when each was studying for their PhD (William in the 1960s, Robb in the 2010s) and their disciplinary differences, with William's PhD in Mechanical Engineering and Robb's PhD in Communication and Rhetoric. William described the literary advising style of his advisor as follows:

Tom, my PhD advisor, would meet with me weekly. We would have a conversation about my progress and formulate plans for next steps. For each significant accomplishment, I would provide Tom and the whole committee a written description of what I did and the resulting findings. These notes greatly expedited the writing of the dissertation. I also regularly met, one on one, with my committee members, Devendra and Ralph. I did not want to surprise them at my dissertation proposal defence, or at my actual dissertation defence. They were very supportive and helpful. These conversations were more concerned with problem formulation and interpretation than with skills and techniques—they assumed I would learn these in classes. The conversations stayed on a higher level they [the faculty] were fascinated with themselves, so the conversation was on the level of interaction with a colleague [as opposed to student]. [...] Tom always wanted to make sure I'd read the relevant papers, really emphasising doing the homework, the importance of reading, gathering evidence, and knowing all the points of view. This led me to approach most problems by reading broadly.

William describes this flow of ideas as anchored in texts shared between the advisory committee and student, both texts produced by the student and through reading of other relevant work. There is overlap in what he reflects on and the collegial style discussed above, in the ways he characterises the quality of these conversations as on a 'higher level' and connecting to the interests of the faculty themselves as well. The insistence from Tom, his advisor, that he read widely to be able to deeply understand the problem area and a range of perspectives has

developed into a key part of William's approach to both scholarship and life in general, which is significant.

Robb shared a story reflecting on learning an expanded view with regards to reading as part of his doctoral experience:

Langdon influenced me in terms of how I think of reading. When I got to doctoral study I was very proud of all I had accomplished in my masters, and I was out to dinner with my mother and my father when they came to visit me. And my dad is really into Thomas Friedman and some other popular writers. And at that time there was a meme on the internet making fun of Friedman, and my dad mentioned something he'd read by Friedman, and I kind of put [my dad] down for it. And I felt terrible about it afterwards. [...] I felt like who am I to judge, if he finds value in reading [Thomas Friedman]? It was pretentious of me to judge what he found value in. And after this experience, I took Langdon Winner's class [as a doctoral student] and he assigned us to read *Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, and other popular press books he thought were important for us to read. I remember my classmates making fun of the readings and it reminded me of myself, the person I was running away from at that moment, trying to become more understanding. [...] Langdon helped me to understand that students can gain a great deal from reading what the masses read, showing me that reading doesn't have to be this difficult academic exercise.

Robb's story not only highlights the impact of learning this expanded reading practice, which he also utilises in his own teaching now, but also draws our attention back to the foundational role of positionality, which runs through our whole discussion. Robb is reflecting on the entanglement of class in academic and popular reading practices, and calling out pretension through his own lens as a first generation to college student in his family. Interestingly, William shares this positionality with Robb, as he was also a first generation college student. This is important to note: even something as seemingly innocuous or neutral as reading is of course, socially and politically situated. This is something advisors may not always acknowledge, in spite of the fact that reading and the circulation and production of texts are a core component of doctoral study.

Editorial advising

Related to reading practices, writing is also often central to the doctoral research process. While two men in the study focused on reading practices (above) as central

to their experiences of being advised, it was women who identified writing, and practices of giving feedback on writing, as a key component of the advising process.

In the doctoral process, writing is commonly shared with the advisor as a first point of contact for feedback and mentorship. Some advisors may see providing feedback on text as the main work of their role, but of course within that there are many ways this can be structured. Sandra discussed an editorial style as particularly beneficial for students, and sharing much in common with principles of sound pedagogy:

A great editor is like a great teacher; knows how to keep hands off—not copy editing. Seeing the profound elements in the work, helping them [the writer] shape the work and groom the creativity of the writer. And it’s not about grammar. Not about the MLA style sheet at all. A great editor loves the writer, as a creative person. He doesn’t run the ship, but gives valuable feedback. [...] First, I try to understand the writer’s approach and I try to sink into that. Second, I look for why is this important to write? What else is it connected to and how, in relation to the larger question? I try to strengthen the argumentation that is there, and enhance clarity. [...] The great editor *wants* the story to succeed.

We can also make connections between this editorial style and the professional style of advising, via Carolyn’s framing of her former instinct to intervene too deeply in students’ texts as ‘paternalistic.’ Like Carolyn, Sandra is also characterising good editing as a practice that honours the autonomy and individuality of the student, even to the point of the advisor working to “sink into” the student’s perspective.

Reflecting again on the gendered nature of this discussion of writing and editorial feedback, in my own experience of being advised it has been female advisors who consistently supported my development through careful editing, which I received both from Sandra, and from Laura. In my experience as an advisor, I have often found myself as the only woman on a committee, and often the only member consistently providing editorial writing feedback. While I do think some of this is coincidence or related to particular personalities and skills, I do see how gender politics may also inform who takes on editorial labor in advising, perhaps linked to wrong-headed notions of writing as a “basic” or “foundational” skill, associated with lower education, a field that in the US context is dominated by women educators. In addition, in the context STEM institutions, where I both did my doctoral work and have held faculty positions, it is common for the faculty to be majority male, with female faculty having larger presence in the small

humanities and arts units housed within these schools, including in writing programs, and as adjunct or teaching-only faculty.

Inspirational advising

Inspirational advising centres on the transference of faculty enthusiasm, energy, and curiosity of spirit to the student, mostly through example. Laura describes how being advised in this manner was both energising and difficult, in her experience as a doctoral student in Art History:

My own advisor, Harvey, was a brilliant man and an inspiring teacher who cared deeply about the powerful and poetic interpretation of works of art. Although he had a serious stutter, he could be mesmerising in lecture and I remember the fascinating way in which he unspooled his descriptions of works of art. He put both his heart and his head into it and I think observing him both in the classroom and at home helped me to understand how the best work draws on fundamental aspects of our individual identities and passions. Harvey was the same on campus and at home and understanding that provided for me the revelation that the work of a professor was not just a job but a way of life.

Still, Harvey had trouble completing work that affected his advising of others. I was always fired up by our conversations which seemed to lead in so many exciting directions. However, although I always took careful notes, often I could not tell afterwards what Harvey's actual recommendations were. And they were rarely couched in a way that helped to gauge the true scale of the task. In particular, toward the end of what was already my *very* long time spent on doctoral research, Harvey recommended a whole new task, which would have taken additional years to do. I simply ignored that recommendation, because I had to finish in order to keep a teaching job I'd been offered. It was good at the end to be clear about my own goals and needs and to be able to stave off suggestions that pointed in other directions.

I would also like to mention a second member of my doctoral committee, Virginia, who was a great support and became a good friend and colleague. [...] Virginia provided all the pragmatic tips for dissertation completion and job applications that I did not get from Harvey. [...] She helped me to understand that the dissertation is not a magnum opus, it is your calling card to the world of scholars. That spark of curiosity is what I prized most from

him [*Harvey*] as an advisor—the excitement—I would never have traded this for anything! The spark of curiosity, the free play of ideas, creativity, and the spark of resistance—some friction is desirable for independent thinking. These are the qualities of the most enjoyable students, too.

Laura’s story also connects back to the strategy of collaborative advising, in which a team of advisors work together to offer complementary strengths and skills to the student. Even though the inspirational style of her chair was difficult at times, in that he would seemingly follow inspiration wherever it led (sometimes resulting in a lack of clarity), Laura did find more structured support in the advising she received from Virginia, and was still able to see the unique value in Harvey’s style, which provided her with ‘the spark of curiosity.’

In my own practice as an advisor, I find myself often looking for that ‘spark of curiosity’ as a guiding light for assisting students with decision making about focus, direction, and scope, particularly early in their process. I often ask students what aspects or elements of their project they are deeply curious about, and suggest these components be used to form the core of their research. Since the doctoral project is a long term and sometimes difficult undertaking, I find the ‘fuel’ of that spark can be a helpful propellant.

Co-learning advising

A co-learning style to advising frames the student and advisor as both learning together, albeit without shirking the responsibilities of the advisor to act as a guide on the doctoral journey. Jay discussed co-learning in contrast to the mentorship he received as a PhD student in Classics, and the influence today of his own doctoral students in Digital Media:

My students have been the biggest influence on me. They have shown me what advising could be. I try to provide freedom for their academic exploration, and learn from them. The students are imaginative in ways that opened me up to possibilities, to new ways of doing things. [...] The Digital Media field doesn’t lend itself to a dogmatic or canonical approach—it’s not a tightly structured field you can master and impart on new practitioners, unlike my original field, Classics. But I never actually advised Classics PhDs. I try to let students define their approach and scope and then help them to reach that. Because Digital Media is such a varied field I am learning as much as the student, it’s a partnership by necessity, we are constituting the field together.

[...] at its best, PhD advising is a partnership, with both of us learning new things. The students bring in new knowledge. The challenge is to gently direct students to keep them out of danger, to prevent them from going all over the place and bringing in sixteen different disciplines into a stew, which can make the scholarship very weak because the Digital Media field is so broadly defined. You've got to help them keep the scope reasonable, and not go skating over very rich fields they are unaware of. This can be really hard.

Jay's story highlights the impacts of *disciplinary* positionality in advising. He characterises Digital Media as a new field, in which "by necessity" he and his students are 'constituting the field together.' At the same time, he acknowledges the need to "gently direct" students to guide them toward producing strong work. Jay's story also frames co-learning as part of his own journey from Classics, where in his experience as a doctoral student co-learning was not a common advising approach, to a new discipline, sharing that this awareness of his own ongoing learning 'makes for some modesty' in his advising method and led him to co-learning. Diana also shared reflections on co-learning as a style that she learned from one of her own advisors:

My mentor Magdalena is always emphasising that mentorship works in both directions, and I really appreciate this intergenerational approach of knowing that I have a lot to learn, all of the time, and that I am learning from my students, just as they are learning from me. And that doesn't take away from the responsibility I feel in the classroom, to make sure that we are structuring a space that allows for us all to be heard. For me it's very important that I hold myself accountable for facilitating a healthy classroom.

Like Jay, Diana too draws attention to the need to balance co-learning with responsibility, and that acknowledging that a faculty member is learning along with a student and from a student, does not mean that the faculty member is "just like" a student, but rather sharing in some ways, and different in others.

Flexible advising

Flexibility emerged as a thread through many of the conversations, sometimes in terms of learning from negative examples of inflexibility and the ways in which those experiences have resonated long-term. Diana discussed a formative

educational experience of inflexibility, that led her to seek out different methods for her own style:

I was in 10th grade and I had a teacher fail me for writing an essay she said was too complex. Because the words I was using were too complex. She failed me as a lesson so I could write in a more clear way to her. So I revised the paper and did what she said. I have students now that are like me then, who are obsessed with the thesaurus or who want to expand their vocabulary and get all excited about words. So I learned not to shut students down, that minds and hearts are not delicate, but to be cared for. To know that as a teacher it's not our role to put a wall up in front of a student and say: that's not possible. A student may discover a new genre of writing that I have never heard of, so I am not going to say it doesn't exist!

Robb shared two stories, one about witnessing a teacher's flexibility in real-time when challenged, and another from an experience as a young child when his needs were accommodated by teachers in a creative way:

I remember the first time I saw a student revolt against a teacher and say, I don't think the requirements of this project are fair. I was in graduate school and this Phd student stood up and said to the teacher, the project would be better this way, and negotiated with the teacher. I had never seen a student do this in my whole life. [...] The one thing I do remember in terms of flexibility from my whole experience in school, was when I was nine, I was in a bad accident and I was injured and I was in a wheelchair. And my teacher devised a desk for me during outside playtime, since we didn't have good infrastructure for students with mobility issues, so I was wheeled to the office during recess time to sit at a special art space, where I could draw and create. [...]

So now I give my students lots of options for different ways to achieve the same learning outcomes. Some of this comes from my background too, like realizing that the most important things I learned about doing fieldwork was not in an academic setting but from working as a radio DJ, or the things I learned from being a rap artist and producing concerts. Realizing that I had learned things through these different avenues helps me respect the different avenues that my students want to work in. Scholars talk all the time about transformative approaches, multimodal literacies, but in the classroom we

are not walking the walk, when we say a student has to write something [as opposed to creating a video, etc.] Writing a paper is important, but the learning objective will be lost on many students. Not every student is going to see the value. Giving the student an outlet they see as valuable can increase their motivation to find success of their own.

Robb identifies here how both the way in which flexibility was modeled for him by other teachers, as well as coming to realize the value of his skills garnered outside academia, have come together to inspire him to develop a flexible style in which students interests are centered and many options or pathways are made available for achieving the necessary goals. Van shared a similar observation, reflecting on her experiences advising students who do not lean into mentoring relationships, and how she works to be flexible with her style to accommodate this reluctance:

I think my students are not comfortable working with mentorship because they fear failure or taking risks. I think that the liveliness of ideation is not a great model for some, which causes students to freeze or go silent in meetings. A student I had very recently came into my office for a mid-semester check-in (I give them their mid term grades and offer suggestions to how they can improve), she is usually reserved in class but chimes in every now and then, she completely froze and looked at the ground and didn't stop shaking her leg. I think that the person-to-person model does not work for her. She is active in our chats via zoom and writes lengthy emails to me, so I think she is someone who thrives via text. So in our future meetings I sent her information via emails and we've been better off since, but I think that there is pressure to deliver a personal experience which involves discomfort for some. I do think there is a connection [to the valorization of] "figuring it out on your own" and how students do not know how to be mentored. [...] This "do it yourself" model materializes in lack of direction. [...] I think mentorship is collaborative [but] students often see a clear divide between professors and themselves. Students do not think that their interactions with us can be creative and collaborative. I think the expectation is that we tell them what to do and they deliver.

It is interesting that Van identifies flexibility as an advising style that may help to counter cultural and institutional impressions of learning and advising as a banking model, as critiqued by Freire (1970). Van's story also points to the ability to receive mentorship, or participate in the advisor-advisee relationship as a student, as a skill

to be learned. As a skill, this could of course be incorporated into doctoral curriculum, but is most commonly not.

Reflective advising

In the reflective advising style, the advisor is working to continually reflect both on their own work as an advisor, but also working to reflect back to the student their own strengths and capabilities, to share how these resonate beyond the academic frame, and to take in the student as a whole person. Sandra identified this style of advising in her experience as an MFA student in Creative Writing:

[...] I felt they [her advisors] really saw me, saw my work. I still feel motivated by them. They did this by being very specific with their attention to the work, by taking care with the work, and drawing on a vital range of life experiences, even though they are both much younger than me.

While Sandra focused on the ability of her advisers to reflect back to her as a student, Jason shared a story about how some of his teaching experiences that have informed his reflection on and iteration of his own practice:

English language learners probably have contributed the most for my ability to empathize and take on different perspectives to learning. Nothing has flexed my teaching skills more than working with ELL students through the fundamentals of an unfamiliar language and world view. More specifically, I have worked with refugees who have had serious gaps in their formal education and suffered unimaginable trauma, which has required me to reexamine my teaching strategies and focus on what I can achieve in a short amount of time. [...] I take a longer view of the student's experience beyond one course.

Diana also brought up reflective practice as a key component in her style:

I am very sensitive as a person, and I take moments in classrooms seriously where there has been an outburst or people feel unsafe, because I do pride myself on creating a classroom that feels maybe even otherworldly, like we are stepping into a space where we can listen to one another, where in this moment we feel safe enough to do these things, to be creative, where we can let go of challenges we may have at home. [After] a situation like where a student blew up at me because she was being triggered by a meditation

activity, I will replay that situation and think about how could I have addressed this differently. It's my responsibility to know that many of the populations I work with are dealing with trauma, so I need to understand that a meditation activity I am working with may seem calming and relaxing to me, but a student may feel this heightens her awareness of sounds around her and it is a struggle mentally and emotionally. So I reflect on those things because I do feel a lot of damage can be done in the classroom.

And finally, both Robb and Diana shared stories about their experiences of being advised by me, framed as this style of reflecting back to the student. Robb shared:

You were very crucial in helping me to realize my own identity. I don't shy away from being RobbRobb [his rap name] anymore. Because of something you said to me when I was a first or second year student, you said something about how you had to come out [as queer] in your job applications to your future employers. And I took that very personally—like I was living in some sort of closet, like it was very dirty to be RobbRobb, like it was very wrong to be this rapper who hosted concerts, and I know rap is cool today but historically, in my lifetime, I felt like I had to hide this thing to be marketable. And you said something like, you wouldn't want to be in a department where you had to hide who you were, because you'd have to be collegial with these people. And I took that perspective not just to the job search but as my overall approach to life, that I should be more open about who I am. My mom listens to my music, so why am I shy about an employer? Why hide it? [...] So you sharing that with me helped me discover who I am, and embrace my identity in the professional setting. Certainly its not the same as hiding a sexual orientation, but for me its something that I always felt I needed to cover up for some reason. Being more open now helps me be more comfortable with who I am every day I go to work.

And Diana shared:

You have said words to me that are so influential, and it was a very short moment and informal moment. I was having lunch on campus in the break room, and I was telling you that I was not really sure if I wanted to be a college professor. And you just said to me: I think it would be such a shame if you were not a professor, I would love to be in a class that you taught.

And it seems like such a simple thing to tell a person but it was very powerful, to this day those words really resonate with me. Just the fact that I am a teacher, and that I am capable, in that moment I felt really witnessed, in my potential, and I have always felt very witnessed by you. I feel like you are very much a part of my journey as an educator and part of that lineage of people that really influenced the way that I approach education. Because now I know that if a student is expressing, maybe I shouldn't do this thing, I know how powerful it is for them to hear somebody say: Just do it! You are that! I don't know that this kind of work is really valued in our world, the emotional labor of that, but I thank you for that, I am grateful to you and just have to acknowledge you as part of that lineage too.

In these last two stories from Robb and Diana, I was struck by how impactful a brief interaction outside the classroom had been for them. This points to the way in which a reflective style to advising might be characterized as pervasive, meaning these practices of reflection both on one's own practices and reflection back to students are ongoing processes that happen in all manner of interstitial situations, which might not be thought of as formal advising or education spaces but are nevertheless impactful. This brings us back to Jason's powerful reflection that through his students he has come to view teaching and learning as larger, ongoing processes that reaches well beyond the bounds of the classroom. This view of advising, or teaching and learning at large, as pervasive and ongoing, stands in stark opposition to the institutional view of this work and how it is commonly assessed: through final grades, teaching evaluations, alignment of learning outcomes and assignment designs, or through a final defense. Re-shaping academia to match the insights about advising and pedagogy shared in these reflections has radical potential, and indeed some are already carrying out this work from within, as seen in the discussion of the final advising strategy: radical advising.

Radical advising

These are advising practices that are on the margins of dominant institutional practices. This doesn't mean that they are not widely practiced, indeed they may be, but rather the distinction as radical is helpful to mark the ways in which these practices stand outside the espoused purview of the institution. Robb, for example, shared from the student perspective about his doctoral experience learning about embodied cognition and sensory ethnography via embodied practices in the classroom:

In Tomie's [doctoral] class you spend the start of each session for 16 weeks doing yoga, led by her. And everybody is like why the heck are we doing this? And at the very end, she says I'm not going to guide you anymore, I just want you to do it. And everyone moves in unison, demonstrating her point about sensation and knowledge, that through the body we know and remember things. It was powerful to see this in action. Education doesn't have to be lecturing. Have the students get up, break out of their shells.

Diana, meanwhile, shared about developing radical practices as an educator even though it means her aims may not always align with institutional goals:

To be honest I feel my role as a teacher and mentor expands way beyond what I have been expected to know and do as a PhD student or within any institution. I consider my work spiritual, I consider my work as existing beyond the bounds of what we know within Western thought. But, because of the need for professionalism. I don't usually speak about those things within the classroom. [...]

Love is a daily practice in my class [...] And it's just speaking loving words to one another, or if students don't feel comfortable with the word love, speaking empathy or compassion. And it's just about looking at another person and saying: I hope you have a good night's rest tonight. Speaking words of some kindness to another person. [...] I keep in mind institutional expectations, but really I am working on my own goals of witnessing one another, to practice empathy, love and compassion, to build self-awareness and to also build, ultimately, coalitions with one another, to build community, and to see where we can witness difference as well as commonalities.

It is interesting to note that in this case the concept of professionalism plays a different role than as discussed above by Laura and Carolyn. While Laura and Carolyn were able to use professionalism to define healthy boundaries between work and home, or to support student agency, here Diana uses the term to reference a type of professionalism that is an institutional requirement, that actually stifles or silences acknowledgement of the deeper nature of the work of advising, teaching, and learning. Diana's perspective again foregrounds the role of positionality in advising styles, sharing her perspective as stemming from a de-colonial approach to education. This requires the opening up of explicit room for surfacing and

questioning the politics of education, including advising. At this intersection of positionality and politics, Diana brings our attention to issues of power, labor, and responsibility in advising:

It's really crucial to note in higher education, at least in the US, the gender disparity of who is doing emotional labor. I think about my experience in the PhD program, and I think about the people who were most supportive, and they were the people who identified as women or genderqueer people. And then the people that I struggled most with were people who were white and cis male. At the base of that is a neglect of job duties. If we are going to be doing advising work well, we can't have such an imbalance. It is very important to note the labor that women, gender non-conforming, gender non-binary people take on in higher education. People who are most comfortably seated within academic institutions are not doing their jobs. It comes down to white supremacy and euro-centrism, and sexism and patriarchy is a part of that.

And so we come back to centrality of positionality, and the role of power between not only advisor and advisee, but between advisors or the doctoral committee. Here Diana calls us to notice labor within these groups, *who* takes on which types of work in supporting the student, and how this labor is often not equitably distributed or acknowledged. Across all eleven advising styles, with the foundational role of positionality in focus, we arrive at a picture of advising that emphasizes the complexity of the practice, and the many layers of influence that contribute to determine which styles are at hand for any given advisor, which are effective across the advisor-advisee dyad, and for whom. The level of complexity revealed here, even in this study's exploration of only a small group of interrelated people, makes the case for un-taxonomic thinking as an approach well-suited to understanding advising, as opposed to strategies that emphasize taxonomic or generalizable best practices.

Conclusion: ethea of good advising

Stepping back to consider the importance of “invisible” aspects of advising, such as emotional labor, or the work of editorial advising (both of which are often gendered activities), I am also struck by the invisibility of the interconnected entanglement of so many *outside* the doctoral committee who significantly impact the advisor-advisee dyad. In this interview study I have mapped a network including advisor’s advisors, parents, elementary and high school teachers, and other educators. While this is a meaningful expansion of the dyad, it also functions to reveal the many others in the larger network who have not yet been highlighted. For example, the older ‘ancestors’ in the advising tree, as well as the other influences on advising as an extension of teaching and learning from figures who did not yet enter the conversation. It is important to acknowledge both the interconnection of this web, and the incompleteness of our understanding of it. It is important to understand the role of the advisor with humility, as just one node among many, as opposed to characterizing the advisor as an “expert individual” or worse yet, a figure based in charismatic personality such as a kingmaker.

Several concepts stuck with me and stood out from these nine conversations, which I wish to bring forward not as a set of ‘best practices’ but rather as ideas for considering the core *ethos* for approaching the whole project of advising. As opposed to a best practice which implies clear steps, directions, or even a checklist, an ethos refers to the spirit of a culture, activity, or practice. These ethea seem much larger to me than a single style, and could act as foundational principles for advising. The first of these is *intellectual consistency*, as articulated by Jay: ‘Trying to be consistent may be the most important thing, in feedback, advice, and requests. They [the students] need to feel they can rely on you, intellectually.’

This ethos of intellectual consistency resonates with notions of responsibility Diana brought up at several points, even with the co-learning style. We can also see connections with the boundary articulated by William between a collegial style to advising and characterizing a student as *exactly* like a colleague, which would be disingenuous. To provide intellectual consistency, the advisor must have a grounded sense of self and positionality, something also necessary for this next concept, articulated by Diana as *deep presence*: ‘What it comes down to, what makes good mentoring or advising, is to be present with another person, and that requires vulnerability. That whole practice requires deep presence.’

Again, to achieve the ability to be deeply present and vulnerable with another person requires a level of self-actualization on the part of the advisor, which is not something commonly discussed, taught, or valued in most higher education

institutions. Indeed, one of the anonymous reviewers for this article pointed out the strong disjunction in values between *ethos* of deep presence, compassion, and the contemporary context of higher education. This context is increasingly corporatised, competitive, and characterised by overwork, held in place by rhetorics of scarcity as well as forms of monitoring and surveillance that encourage punitive action against faculty for perceived failures or lack of desired outcomes. While the ideas of deep presence and compassion may seem like basic human values, it is notable that these *ethos* have become radical approaches within the current oppositional context that dominates higher education.

Coming back to other stories shared by Diana, when she reflected that the sense of community in her classrooms is not and cannot be measured, we can see a disjunction between the *ethos* of deep presence and institutional penchants for quantifiable metrics as meaningful evaluations of this type of work. Sandra also brings our attention to the *ethos* of *compassion*: ‘The great editor *wants* the story to succeed. This goes back to a philosophy that values the humanity in development in all of us. It’s a very compassionate profession, or it should be.’

Compassion, both for advisor and advisee, through an *ethos* of acknowledging the ways in which we are all still in development, together, brings us to a place of authentic complexity. Intellectual consistency, deep presence, and compassion are all fuzzy concepts, and can each represent aspirational goals which can never be completed or fully attained. To tether the project of advising to these *ethos* is to tether ourselves to ongoing learning. Here we are not working to obscure the difficult, complicated, surprising, joyous textures and tensions of advising through a streamlined model. Aware of the incompleteness of the picture presented here, I offer this contribution as a few more squares in the mosaic of a growing understanding of advising, or yet another turn of the kaleidoscope.

Author biography

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