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Ethics in Academic Advising: A Grounded Theory of Ethical Practice

Andrew Puroway

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Ethics in Academic Advising:
A Grounded Theory of Ethical Practice

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
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By
Andrew Puroway

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Ethics in Academic Advising:
A Grounded Theory of Ethical Practice

Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Andrew Puroway

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revision required by the final examining committee have been made.

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ABSTRACT

Academic advisors encounter ethical dilemmas and tensions in their work with students and with their institutions. The scholarly literature in the field provides various normative insights to guide practice. Moreover, advisors must grapple with ethical practice as advising emerges as a profession. In the existing literature, scholars ask whether or not an ethical code is necessary and desirable in order to fully emerge as a profession. In order to frame such a code, a deeper understanding of the ethical tensions in advising and how advisors understand and respond to those tensions is necessary. Additionally, a dearth of studies report on descriptive ethics. Although the existing literature on ethics in advising answers the question of what ought to happen when advisors face ethical tensions, it does not provide clear insights into how these advisors make decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

This qualitative grounded theory study examines how primary role academic advisors working in large state university systems engage in ethical practice. In my analysis, I propose a four-phase cyclical model of pre-encounter, encounter, discernment, and response. Each phase highlights discrete but interconnected themes grounded in the data from semi-structured interviews with twelve primary role advisors. Finally, I provide recommendations for practitioners and scholars to implement this understanding of how primary role advisors understand and engage in ethical practice.

Keywords: academic advising; ethics; ethic of care; descriptive ethics
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Academic advisors face ethical dilemmas every day. In 2014, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that only four in ten students who begin a four-year degree finish in four years, that only six in ten finish in six years, and that controversial advising approaches were a possible solution for the low rates (Patel, 2014). Advisors work with students on issues of access to higher education and a myriad of concerns related to students’ academic success. They serve students, but also have duties to other constituencies, including faculty and university administrations whose interests are sometimes at odds with the best service to students. For example, when a student’s mental health issues cause that student to fail courses, does an advisor encourage the student to withdraw and get well, or stay in the courses to serve the enrollment goals of the institution? Advisors in this situation and many others face ethical dilemmas and must balance the disparate interests of various constituent groups. While the literature on advising ethics is replete with normative ethics (i.e. giving guidance on what advisors ought to do), almost no existing literature explores descriptive studies of how primary role advisors actually discern the presence of dilemmas and engage in ethical decision making.

Moreover, systematic study of the cultures of influence and ethical socialization would inform and improve the work of advisors by creating deeper understanding of how ethical practice works. Some scholars argue that advising is not a fully formed profession because it lacks a central code of ethics (Schaffer, Zalewski, & Leveille, 2010). Without a central code of ethics, it is important to understand ethical practice on a local level. Thus, scholarship to further an understanding of ethical practice is a necessity for the professionalization of the field.
In this chapter, I situate myself relative to the research topic through a reflexive statement. I then argue for the significance of the problem. The chapter concludes with a statement of the problem and research questions followed by definitions of terms.

**Reflexive Statement**

My social location as a researcher is one of significant privilege. I identify as a White, hetero, cis-gendered, able-bodied man from a solidly middle-class household that practiced the dominant religion of our community. The privilege conferred by these identities undoubtedly shapes and limits all that I am able to apprehend as a researcher as well as the interaction of researcher with subject. In addition, there are a few experiences worth mentioning in explaining my pre-conceived beliefs about ethics in advising that operated as biases in gathering and analyzing my data.

I have been a professional academic advisor for eight years at the University of St. Thomas, and have been an advising administrator for a year and a half. My primary responsibilities have been in advising transfer, provisional, and probation students. I have been active in NACADA (formerly the National Academic Advising Association\(^1\)) since the beginning of my time as an advisor and have published (Puroway, 2012, March) and presented on ethics in advising. *Critical Advising: A Friarian Inspired Approach* (Puroway, 2016) is a peer-reviewed article which articulates my approach to advising and makes strong statements about ethics relative to social justice. I claim that “advising is not a politically neutral activity” (p. 2) and advocate that advisors “reject neutrality and embrace communitarian ethics with deep respect for advisees” (p. 9). I also served as a member of the NACADA Core Values Task Force.

\(^1\) NACADA used to be the acronym for the National Academic Advising Association; however, after a review in 2008 to understand the internationalization of the association, the association now goes by the moniker NACADA: The Global Community for Advising, without the use of an acronym.
from 2015 to 2017. Specifically within this role, I co-authored draft text for caring as a core value (NACADA: The Global Community for Advising, 2017). These involvements are public statements that I have made about advising and how it ought to be practice that represent biases in how I approach the topic of ethics in advising.

Furthermore, I have spoken with advising colleagues about how they approach ethical problems in practice. In most instances, colleagues express a belief that they do not have a systematized way of understanding and resolving ethical dilemmas. I have noticed that there is relatively little explicit discussion of ethics even as advisors see the challenges they face in creating access. For example, when institutional policies about probation or dismissal seem incongruent with students’ best interests, the discourse seems to focus on procedure rather than the ethical nature of the problem. With this research project, I hope to increase the explicit discourse on ethics in advising. This perception of how advisors were not apprehending the ethical problems and my desire to increase ethical discourse are further biases.

Additionally, my early experiences as a graduate student at Colorado State University taught me that access to higher education is an ethical issue. A close colleague who had a great passion for social justice and access in higher education was also a teaching assistant for the ethics course in my graduate program. He could always draw an ethical dilemma out of issues for students from underrepresented groups. This has stuck with me and I hope that my practice as an advisor centers around creating access for students and advising that inspires action for social justice. My mentor was also a teaching assistant for Dr. James Banning’s Campus Ecology seminar course. Dr. Banning’s work has been very influential in my understanding of college campuses and that has undoubtedly influenced the emerging model that resulted from my
study, especially with the identification of “ethical ecology” as a theme within the emerging model.

Taken together, my experiences around ethical practice shape a view of ethics as important for access to higher education, ever present in practice, and lacking in explicit awareness by many practitioners. I believe that very often practitioners do not apprehend the dilemmas in the work of advising, or student affairs more generally. At the same time, I am open to the possibility that my expectation reflects a rationalist worldview and remain open to types of ethical knowing beyond rationalist dominant culture paradigms.

**Significance of the Problem**

In a recent high-profile case of scandalous behavior in college athletics, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill academic advisors were steering student-athletes toward classes that did not require any work or attendance to pass, thus keeping players eligible for participation in athletics (Stripling, 2014). Stripling reported the ethical pressures on academic advisors who specifically advised student-athletes. Institutions that have had athletic scandals involving academic advisors have moved advising offices and reporting lines of primary role advisors from athletics departments to academic administrators. The ethical situations of athletics are unique, but these ethical lapses seem to highlight three general areas for exploration: (a) the impact of leadership for ethical practice; (b) the goals and mission of the advising units; (c) the institutional pressures from multiple constituencies and even pressures from outside of universities that are the backdrop to ethical dilemmas. Thus, a deeper understanding of the way in which academic advisors discern the presence of ethical problems and dilemmas as well as how they reason through those dilemmas was the goal of my dissertation research.
If remedies offered for recent ethical scandals involving academic advisors are any indication, then the work of advising administrators; the purpose and goals of the advising unit; and numerous pressures from varied constituents all matter for the ethical practice of primary role advisors. Advising administrators provide guidance on the local level for primary role advisors. They also set a tone for faculty advisors depending on the model of advising in-place on their campuses. Likewise, advisors may or may not get guidance from the goals and missions of advising units. Advisors are often part of implementing policy decisions from faculty, upper administrators, and in some cases, state legislatures. The behavior of advisors can influence student success, retention, and access to higher education.

Furthermore, there is debate over the extent to which academic advising has emerged as a profession which has implications for ethical practice and leadership (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015; Gordon et al., 1988; Habley, 2009; Shaffer, Zalewski, & Leveille, 2010). Academic advising lacks a clear definition (Cate & Miller, 2015), so defining the work beyond the local level can sometimes prove difficult. Some scholars note the absence of an enforceable ethical code as evidence that advising is not fully emerged as a profession (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 1988; Lowenstein & Grites 1993; Shaffer et al., 2010).

Moreover, the study of ethics by specific functional area is lacking in the literature (Holzweiss & Walker, 2016). Specific to advising, the lack of a highly centralized ethical code, and a keen understanding of how ethics works in various localities of practice is important but absent from the literature. Understanding ethical practice from a descriptive standpoint combines well with the plentiful writing on codes and other normative approaches to advising ethics. The resulting grounded theory provides seeds for effective praxis between normative
theory and the reality of advising ethics. Moreover, this enhanced understanding may help advising emerge more fully as a profession.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

This study sought to understand the processes by which primary role academic advisors engage in ethical reasoning and practice. I used grounded theory to begin exploration of the ways advisors experience and respond to ethical tensions. I attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How do primary role academic advisors discern the presence of an ethical dilemma or problem?
2. How do they then reason through that problem?

**Definition of Terms**

In this section, I define key terms used throughout this dissertation. Some terms are specific to the field of advising and others are more general terms from ethics. The latter may have a large body of literature attached to each term, and I attempt to give the most concise and pertinent definition possible.

**Academic Advising Administrator:** One responsible for the leadership and training of academic advisors (either professional or faculty), whose duties may include the following as noted in Detwiler and Porath (2015): managing budgets, staffing decisions, training and professional development of advisors, and overseeing an assessment plan.

**Descriptive Ethics:** This approach to understanding ethics is concerned with describing how a culture or group engages in ethical reasoning and practice. It is distinct from normative ethics and metaethics (Holmes, 1994).
**Ethical Code**: Broadly, a source of guidance, or normative statement for what ought to be. It can be formal or informal (Lowenstein, 2008).

**Ethical Problem**: A category of ethical concern which may or may not include a dilemma. It can be either good versus bad or good versus good (Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004). It may also address an ambiguous situation where ethical concerns are present but no clear system of principles are in conflict (Damminger, 2015).

**Faculty Advisor**: One who advises, but who also has teaching and research responsibilities either as a primary role or in equal parts to their advising responsibilities.

**Metaethics**: An attempt to understand the philosophical underpinnings of normative ethics, distinct from normative and descriptive ethics (Holmes, 1994).

**Normative Ethics**: Distinct from descriptive and metaethics and often paired with applied ethics. Normative ethics seeks to “identify and explain…right and wrong or good and bad” (Holmes, 1994, p. 15), and the applied ethics takes the form of attempting to reason through an issue.

**Prescriptives**: Elements of normative writing that state specific behaviors or steps for determining right action.

**Principles**: A normative category expressing ethical ideals, such as justice, from which prescriptives can be determined and dilemmas contemplated.

**Processes**: A normative category prescribing steps for how to reason through an ethical dilemma which would include any protocol of ethical questions or sequential lists for ethical decision-making.

**Primary role/Professional Academic Advisor**: A staff member whose primary role is providing academic advising to students (Gordon et. al., 2008).
Socialization: An ongoing process by which people come to understand and enact the norms, values, and behaviors of a larger group.

Values: That which is held to be good by a community of advisors (e.g. care), which can be the source of a dilemma when there is conflict between multiple values (McClellan, 2009).

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter I provided a reflexive statement as a qualitative researcher. Next, I provided background information and an argument for why a descriptive study of ethics in advising practice is an important contribution to the literature. Finally, I conclude with a statement of my research questions.

In chapter two, I explore the existing literature on ethics in academic advising and applicable literature from student affairs. The review of literature begins with historical context of academic advising followed by the normative foundations of ethics in advising. Next, I examine two problems in researching and understanding ethics including the problems of neutrality and defining dilemmas. I then look at the challenges of culture in ethics and the influence of administrators. I explore the limited number of empirical studies of ethics in advising or related fields. Lastly, I review the conceptual frameworks that guided my thinking at the outset of the study.

Chapter three is an in-depth description of my method. I used grounded theory to explore the research question. The chapter begins with an argument for why grounded theory is a useful approach and goes on to address confidentiality, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and validity.

Next, chapter four includes a presentation of data and the findings of my study. I explain the emerging model grounded in the experiences of my participants. This includes an exposition
of the themes that emerged from analyzing the data. The chapter is structured around the four phases of the model and concludes with an application of the model to a single participants ethical tension story.

Finally, chapter five includes a discussion of the analysis, limitations, implications, and a conclusion. In this chapter, I draw connections between the emerging model and various other existing theories. Next, I look at the limitations of my study. Lastly, I provide ideas about the implications of the study and future directions for research and practice.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explore the literature on ethics specifically related to academic advising and more generally student affairs practice, in which I identify themes, tensions, and gaps. Next, I examine conceptual frameworks that framed my thinking during my efforts to understand the ways in which advisors engage in ethical reasoning and practice.

I have organized this review of the literature on ethics in advising into the following categories: historical context; normative foundations of advising ethics; challenges in the advising ethics literature; advising administrators’ influence; and other empirical studies related to ethics in advising practice. I take each of these topics in turn. As stated above, much of the writing on ethics articulates normative ethics, what ought to be, rather than works of descriptive ethics, that of empirical studies on how advisors engage ethics in practice. Due to the dearth of actual studies of ethics in advising, I include sources from the more general student affairs and student services literature.

Much of the scholarship on academic advising comes from two peer reviewed journals: *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal* and the *NACADA Journal*. I include nine and 12 articles from each respectively. NACADA: The Global Community for Advising is the largest professional association specific to academic advising and is the primary source of scholarship on advising. Directly searching the two journal websites located many of the articles in this review of literature. NASPA and ACPA publications were another source of articles. Additionally, I conducted searches via Summon on the St. Thomas library website. Search terms included: ethics; ethic; moral; virtue; value; social justice; ethical socialization; socialization; advising administration; and ethics + student affairs. I obtained further articles through review
of citations in the searched articles. NACADA and Jossey-Bass publications provide foundational background on ethics in advising. At the 2016 Annual NACADA Conference, I asked the authors of three of these chapters, Marc Lowenstein (2008) and Joanne Damminger (2011; 2015), if they had encountered actual studies of ethics in advising in preparing their chapters and both indicated that they had not.

**Historical Context**

Academic advising has a surprisingly long history despite the relatively recent emergence of a scholarly canon. In this section, I explore the history of advising to set context for both the work and scholarship of advising. This includes challenges in defining advising, scholarship on the history of advising, the evolution of ethical guidance for advisors, and a modern context for understanding advising ethics.

**Challenges of Defining Advising**

Academic advising does not have a common definition (Cate & Miller, 2015). This lack of clarity stems from variations in practice on different campuses (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013c as cited in Cate & Miller, 2015). NACADA has recorded various efforts at defining advising. Lowenstein (2014) distinguished between *theories in advising* versus *theories of advising.* Adopting a theory of advising would give advising a common definition, but no such theory currently exists. In framing the history of advising, Kuhn (2008) defines academic advising very broadly as “situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter…to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach” (p. 3). For the purposes of this study, I use Kuhn’s definition because understanding the historical context of advising must begin from very broad descriptions.
Advising History

Recent scholarship separates the history of academic advising into four eras (Cate & Miller, 2015; Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). The first era includes everything prior to a formalized system of advising that first emerged at Kenyon College and John’s Hopkins University toward the end of the nineteenth century (pre-1870). Scholars characterize the second era of approximately the next 100 years (1870-1971) by an emergence of advising without any sort of examination of the practices labeled advising. The third era (1972-2002) began when O’Banion (1972/2009) and Crookston (1972/2009) articulated a model and an approach to advising respectively. In the late 1970s, as advisors began to connect and organize within other existing professional associations for student services (i.e. NASPA and ACPA2), they noted a lack of academic advising-specific content within these more generalist organizations.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) held its first official conference in 1979. Beatty’s (1999/2009) narrative history notes that one of the ethical tensions of the time was a “dilemma of retention economics” (p. 71) or advising to maintain enrollment numbers without the best interests of students or actual learning. This tension still persists today (Parry, Field, & Supiano, 2013). The fourth era (2003-present) has entailed an increase in scholarship clarifying the purpose of advising and a push to demonstrate advising’s value to stakeholders. In 2006, NACADA adopted a concept of advising to give the work of advising clearer definition (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016).

Evolution of Sources of Ethical Guidance

In 1987, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) issued their first set of standards for academic advising. Though not exclusively dealing with ethical practice, this was

2 Like the note about NACADA’s name change, both associations are no longer acronyms for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators or American College Personnel Association respectively.
one of the first sets of guidelines from a voice of authority within student services in higher education. The CAS Standards have appeared throughout the literature as a source of guidance for advisors (Damminger, 2015; Frank, 2000; Keeling, 2010; Landon, 2007; Lowenstein & Grites, 1993). However, the CAS standards’ adoption and influence is unclear nearly 30 years later (Keeling, 2010).

In 1991, some in NACADA began to advocate for a code of ethics for the profession (Frank, 2000). This discussion led to the *Statement of Core Values for Advising* (NACADA, 2005). NACADA officially adopted the statement in 1994. It consisted of six statements about advisor responsibility including: individuals (students), involvement of others in advising, institutions, higher education, larger communities outside the university, and advisors’ professional role and self. Like the CAS standards, scholars often cite the core values as a source of guidance (Church & Robinson, 2006; Damminger, 2011, 2015; Frank, 2000; Lowenstein, 2008; Lowenstein & Bloom, 2016; Lutz, Boon, & Xue, 2016; Rings, 2012). The original values statements were meant to guide practice without being too rigid for an emerging profession subject to varied definitions on the institutional level. The document states its usefulness for all those who advise, not just NACADA membership.

In the year prior to the adoption of the statement of core values, Lowenstein and Grites (1993) published what is likely the most often-cited piece of literature on ethics in advising. Lowenstein, a trained philosopher, and Grites, one of the founders of NACADA, introduced four ethical ideals from philosophy and from these ideals distilled eight ethical principles for academic advising. The four ethical ideals include: utility; justice; respect for persons; and fidelity. Lowenstein and Grites’ eight principles for advising included: (a) seek the best possible education for the advisee; (b) treat students equitably; (c) enhance the advisee’s ability to make
decisions; (d) advocate for the advisee with other offices; (e) tell the advisee the truth about college policies and procedures, and tell others the truth as well, but respect the confidentiality of interactions with the advisee; (f) support the institution’s educational philosophy; (g) maintain the credibility of the advising program; (h) accord colleagues appropriate professional courtesy and respect. They used case studies to develop an understanding of how the principles applied to common ethical dilemmas in academic advising.

Ideals, principles, and use of case studies are common in much of the writings on ethics since Lowenstein and Grites. In Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook, Frank (2000) integrated the core values as a source of guidance and distilled standards from them. Frank also discusses values and cultural relativism noting that “sometimes one’s personal values, or the qualities that are of greatest worth, in one’s life, may come into conflict with those of the institution or workplace…situations such as these are the root of ethical dilemmas” (p. 46). The following year, Begley gave a keynote speech at the NACADA conference in Ottawa, the content of which later appeared in a journal article (Begley & Johnson, 2001). Begley talked about values rather than ethics, but still framed ethical problems in terms of dilemmas. Moreover, Begley and Johnson (2001) informally report on a study of advising administrators’ perception of values, which may be one of the only points in the advising literature where normative ethics connects to descriptive ethics.

A call for consistent review of the statement of core values was part of the original statement, and in 2004 NACADA conducted the first review. In 2005, NACADA republished the core values with the same six statements of responsibility. However, the new document was more like a code of ethics because it included the structure of an introduction, declaration, and exposition. NACADA adopted a complete revision of the core values in 2017. The new core
values are similar to virtues rather than principles, and include: caring, commitment, empowerment, inclusivity, integrity, professionalism, and respect. NACADA also adopted core competencies that further guide the practice and development of advisors.

Lowenstein (2008) added to Lowenstein and Grites (1993), proposing five ethical ideals and nine principles. These changes reflect more nuance rather than any significant departure from Lowenstein and Grites (1993). Lowenstein splits the ideal of utility into beneficence and non-malevolence. Also, Lowenstein changes the principles slightly and splits the principle of truth telling and confidentiality into separate principles. Lowenstein (2008) acknowledged the importance of the core values and notes the limitations of an actual code of ethics. In a more recent foundational writing, Damminger (2015) re-affirms Lowenstein’s ideas about the role of the old core values in guiding practice. As the above sections demonstrate, the existing literature establishes sources of ethical guidance, but lacks studies of ethics in practice.

**Normative Foundations of Academic Advising Ethics**

In reviewing the literature, I found almost no studies of how advisors in practice encounter and reason through ethical dilemmas. Holmes (1994), in an overview of moral philosophy, notes that: “we must recognize (1) the importance to human affairs of guiding and directing conduct, which grows out of socialization processes, and, (2) in more complex forms, the importance of the perceived need to regulate the conduct of group members” (p. 7). The problems that this difference, is versus ought, presents can be put into three categories: (a) descriptive ethics; (b) normative or applied ethics; and (c) metaethics and moral psychology. Descriptive ethics is that which describes systems of morality and conduct. Normative ethics seeks to “identify and explain…right and wrong or good and bad” (Holmes, 1994, p. 15), and applied ethics is attempting to reason through an issue. Metaethics is an attempt to understand
the “nature of such judgments” (those of normative ethics) and the larger framework and definition of terms for morality.

In the foundational writings on ethics in academic advising, scholars argue primarily for what ought to be, serving as guides for practice. One component of normative writings includes clear prescriptive statements which address behavior or actions advisors should or should not take (e.g. advocate for the advisee with other offices). Another component of these foundations includes ethical principles which ought to be a prima facie reason to take a particular action (Lowenstein & Grites, 1993) and which frames dilemmas in practice (e.g. doing no harm). A third normative category is processes for how to reason through an ethical dilemma including any protocol of ethical questions or sequential lists for ethical decision-making processes. There is not consistent word choice for these three categories across the normative writings. For example, what I refer to here as principles, Lowenstein and Grites (1993) refer to as ideals and they apply the principle labels to what I call prescriptives. Some literature does not fit clearly into a single category. In this review, I attempt to point out the ways the literature fits into these three categories of normative ethics. The following subsection contains explanation of several sources of guidance including: the NACADA statement of core values; the CAS standards; other principles and prescriptives; as well as other processes.

**NACADA Statement of Core Values**

As noted in chapter one, NACADA recently adopted a new statement of core values. Given the limited timespan since NACADA adopted the core values, no significant writings have engaged with the new core values as a source of ethical guidance. However, the previous NACADA statement of core values is structured like a code of ethics (Lowenstein, 2008), and is often cited as a source of guidance (Abelman & Molina, 2006; Church & Robinson, 2006;
Damminger, 2011, 2015; Lowenstein, 2008; Lowenstein & Bloom, 2016; Lutz, Boon & Xue, 2016). The previous statement of core values enumerates to whom advisors are responsible including: those they advise; involving others; institutions; higher education; their educational community; professional practices (Gordon, Habley, Grites, & Associates, 2008). The NACADA statement of core values (new or old) is not an actual and enforceable code of ethics (Lowenstein, 2008). Abelman and Molina (2006) noted that the “statement clearly and succinctly reinforces the importance of synchrony between the practice of advising and the specific organizational patterns, cultural values, curricula, and other critical dimensions of the home institution” (p. 5). Various parts of the old NACADA Core Values have pieces that fit all three categories of normative prescriptions, principles, and processes. Another source of guidance from the NACADA literature is the CAS standards.

**CAS Standards**

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) publishes guidelines for what student affairs professionals specific to various student services must do and should do in practice. CAS standards for Academic Advising Programs (AAP) specifically address ethics in parts 3 and 12 (see appendix C in Gordon, Habley, Grites, & Associations, 2008). CAS specifically states that “ethical leadership is essential to the success of all organizations” (p. 538). CAS addresses ethical issues in advising including: advisor training; confidentiality; responsible use of technology; adherence to the law; creation of statements of ethical practice for advising units; accountability for unethical behavior; and objectivity.

However, like the NACADA Statement of Core Values, CAS standards for academic advising programs (AAP) are not enforceable or in any way binding, but rather serve as a source of guidance. Damminger (2015) points out that the statement of core values and CAS standards
“do not give advisors specific protocols for resolving ethical dilemmas” (p. 57). CAS provides prescriptives more than principles and processes.

Other Principles and Prescriptives

Beyond NACADA Core Values and CAS Standards, the writings of Lowenstein are another highly influential source of ethical guidance. Lowenstein’s writings provide normative ideas for principles, prescriptives, and process. Lowenstein and Grites (1993) claims that: “The ethics of advising appears to be a relatively new field, even though there is nothing new about the idea that advising presents ethical challenges” (p. 61). They explained four ethical ideals which I categorize as principles: utility; justice; respect for persons; and fidelity. From these ideals, they distill eight prescriptives for advising noted above.

Lowenstein (2008) revisits these foundational pieces with some basics of philosophy of ethics and splits utility into beneficence and non-malevolence, which then match Kitchener’s framework described below. Lowenstein splits the eight prescriptives into nine by separating truth telling and confidentiality. Next, Lowenstein claims that the NACADA Core Values fit well with his nine prescriptives, and concludes that advising’s ethical foundations minimally include: (a) recognition of how ethics differs from other areas of thought; (b) acceptance of ethical ideals; (c) derivation of principles and their application; (d) awareness of why ethical dilemmas arise despite valid principles to guide practice.

Furthermore, Lowenstein (2008) highlights the centrality of dilemmas in ethical reasoning. Advisors gain understanding in the face of ethical problems through repeated application of the tools Lowenstein describes. In a recent work, Lowenstein and Bloom (2016) refer to the resolution of ethical problems as “this art” (p. 129), and use the principles in thought experiments to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and potential actions. Moreover,
they assert that master advisors understand that perfect solutions do not exist. They claim that the limitations of principles are an inherent part of reasoning rather than any inadequacy of the principles.

Another often cited work, Frank (2000), provides more normative ethics. Frank writes about the conflicts that arise between personal and institutional values. For Frank, ethics seems to flow from values which have a cultural context. Values conflicts are the source of ethical dilemmas. Frank believes that ethical advisors ought to be advocates, interpreters, and models. Frank cites the NACADA Statement of Core Values and CAS Standards as sources of guidance, but is clear that these are not official codes of ethics.

Next, Frank distills the following six standards based on the core values:

- treat students with respect; treat colleagues with respect; honor the concept of academic freedom; understand the institutional culture, its mission, its goals, its expectations; interpret the institutions mission, goals, and values to the community; obtain the education and training required. (p. 53)

Like Lowenstein and Grites (1993), Frank (2000) emphasizes the process of problem solving in dilemmas rather than prescriptive or mechanistic answers to dilemmas. Additionally, Frank calls for advisors to “develop tools for resolving ethical dilemmas” (p. 54) as well as to seek support from others who understand the dilemma.

Buck, Moore, Schwartz, and Supon (2001), make knowledge claims about ethics in advising. They draw parallels between legal and moral obligations claiming that the latter ought to correspond with the former “in every way” (para. 5). Next, they caution against bias and harassment, claiming that students cannot be objectified or controlled, and that monitoring references to students in the third person is one way of monitoring biases. Presumably, advisors monitoring third person language helps create awareness of when they might be thinking of students as objects rather than subjects. Buck et. al. address conflicts of interest calling on
advisors to carefully balance the multiple constituencies to whom advisors have responsibility. They conclude with a summary of six points for ethical advising: (a) do not speak out of uncertainty, (b) do not speak badly of students, (c) present all options available, (d) advisors are morally obliged to correct errors, (e) do not categorize students, and (f) allow students to make their own decisions. These are examples of prescriptives which provide advisors with normative behaviors.

Landon’s (2007) review of literature on ethics in advising advocates a principle-based ethics rooted around dilemmas. Landon notes that “advisors face complex ethical issues serving the dual roles of advocate for both the student and the institution” (para. 14). Landon then advocates “putting one’s self in the other person’s situation” (para. 15), finding balance that minimizes harm, and engaging advisors in ethics training. Like Frank (2000), Landon (2007) notes that “advisor development programs must address ethics and the role that cultures and values play in ethical decision making” (para. 19). This amounts to a prescriptive statement on what ought to happen in advisor training.

Other Normative Processes

Several scholars on advising ethics offer advice for engaging with and resolving ethical problems. These authors often pair this advice with calls for training. Lowenstein and Grites (1993) call for advisors to be “(a) engaged in thinking through the ethical problems they face and (b) equipped with the tools they need for that process” (pp. 60-61). Church and Robinson (2006) articulate a process of five steps for resolving ethical dilemmas: (a) consider the issue without external influence; (b) consider what is best for student and institution; (c) find action leading to the greatest good for the greatest number; (d) quantify positive and negatives of a situation; and (e) decide. Like Lowenstein and Grites (1993), Church and Robinson (2006) use case studies to
illustrate ways that principles and core values conflict. They advocate an ethical perspective called act utilitarianism (Holmes, 1994) which considers the nuances of cases, but which primarily seeks to apply principles and maximize good. Livingston, Carter, and Thomas (2008) is a rebuttal to one of the dilemmas that Church and Robinson (2006) raise. Livingston et al. address Church and Robinson’s dilemma of how to advise a student who asks for assistance determining an “easy class” through the lens of care ethics (described below).

Furthermore, Fisher (2005) offers a normative process for advisors working through dilemmas, which includes conversing with other advisors as well as formal training using the NACADA Statement of Core Values and institutional mission as sources of guidance. Fisher calls on institutions to provide advisors with ongoing ethical development in order that advisors become “strong student advocates, neutral mediators, moral role models, and conscientious staff representatives” (para. 16). Similarly, Lutz, Boon, and Xue (2016) presented a literature review with opinions and thoughtful conjectures. They propose seven "solutions" for ethical problems: (a) examine motives, (b) recognizing our conflicting demands, (c) talking to others, (d) obtaining feedback from students, (e) presenting pros & cons, (f) engaging in self-disclosure, (g) review the literature. Calling for conversation with others is a common element between Fisher (2005) and Lutz et al. (2016).

Additionally, Bates (2003) gives further normative advice claiming that advisors are weak on the details of policy. Bates then prescribes what amounts to an ethical code. The code includes balancing a developmental approach to advising (one that is concerned with the student’s holistic development) and the details of academic policy. For Bates advisors ought to “regularly review academic policy” (para. 9), analytically reflect upon academic policy, anticipate ambiguous scenarios related to academic policy, figure out how it would work “in the
real world” (para. 9), and disregard impressions of common sense for true understanding of the policy. The process Bates describes is unique because it does not involve a dilemma encountered in practice, but rather one which is foreseeable in the framework of a given policy.

Compton (2014) took an approach to guiding practice in advising by exploring the concept of integrity. Compton defines integrity as endeavoring for “consistency” (para. 12) and distinguishes it from ethics and morals. There is a prescriptive process for integrity’s three components which includes discernment, action, and ownership. Resolving dilemmas is a very rational process for Compton. Seven steps for decision making include: “Identify personal morals, minimize harm, practice altruistic behavior, look to the mission statement, know when to bring others into the dilemma, find balance, and stand by the decision” (para. 18). This particular piece provides an example of process coming from a distillation of the principle of integrity.

Finally, the student affairs literature has an often-cited work that brings together principles and process. Humphrey, Janosik, and Creamer (2004) propose a model of decision making for student affairs administrators. The model identifies ethical dilemmas and guides reasoning. It consists of circular layers with principles in the center (e.g. beneficence), character in the next ring (e.g. caring), and then values on the outside (e.g. freedom). From this they propose a four-step process: “(a) identify the problem; (b) classify the type of problem in ethical terms; (c) considering the relevant ethical principles, character traits, and professional values; and (d) making an ethical decision” (pp. 680-682). This model integrates both various ethical ideals and provides guidance in decision making. Beyond the normative categories an analysis of literature also reveals three points of tension in the literature: the problem of defining dilemmas, the problem of neutrality, and the challenge of culture.
Challenges in Advising Ethics Literature

The literature on ethics in academic advising has three issues that present problems for conceptualization of problems and empirical studies. These include the problem of defining dilemmas, the problem of neutrality, and the challenges of culture. In this section, I explore each of these challenges in turn.

Problem of Defining Dilemmas

The foundational writings on ethics in advising generally focus on the encounter of a dilemma. One tension in the literature is a concretized understanding of what constitutes an ethical problem and whether it is distinct from dilemma. Lowenstein (2008) and Lowenstein and Grites (1993) frame dilemmas as conflicts of principles. Frank (2000) proposed that dilemmas are conflicts between personal values and workplace values. Damminger (2011), applying Kidder (1995) to the situation of advising, acknowledges that a dilemma can be between two right actions which are in conflict, such as the choice of telling a truth that might cause harm to the hearer.

Each empirical study makes a choice about how to define ethical problems or dilemmas. In Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004), they allowed for the participants to identify the dilemma. However, participants often identified problems rather than dilemmas. Participants framed ethical problems as a right versus wrong action, whereas genuine dilemmas would contain two right actions in conflict with one another. Ultimately, they noted that the difference in the way scholars were defining dilemma and the way subjects were using dilemma “may have affected the data collection process” (p. 370). Holzweiss and Walker (2016) used the same procedures for defining dilemmas as Janosik et al (2004). Reybold, Halx, and Jimenez (2008) took the step of asking their subjects how they were defining dilemma. These approaches would
seem to indicate that researchers of descriptive ethics must either be comfortable with multiple and ambiguous definitions of dilemmas based on respondent’s understandings or take steps to control for the nomenclature issue.

**Problem of Neutrality**

Another point of tension in the literature pertains to whether a stance of neutrality in ethical reasoning is desirable or possible. Frank (2000) contends that ethical problems are likely to find resolution “in a neutral climate” (p. 54). Landon (2007) argues for a neutral stance and “emotional objectivity” (para. 22) in decision making as well as “putting one’s self in the other person’s situation” (para. 15). Landon’s position may represent a contradiction depending on whether perspective taking of the other is the same as neutral stance. Church and Robinson (2006) articulate a decision-making process that begins with a “blank slate” (para. 14) deconstruction of the problem. Damminger (2011) warns against countertransference and allowing biases to impact advising relationships.

Conversely, some writers claim that neutrality is neither possible nor desirable. Buck et al. (2001), assert that “there is no ethically neutral place from which to advise” (para. 1). Cuyjet and Duncan (2013) argue that value neutrality is neither possible nor desirable. They instead advocate for openness and awareness as practitioners encounter ethical dilemmas. One complication to neutrality is the lens of culture and cultural differences impacting ethics in advising.

**Challenge of Culture**

Given that academic advising can facilitate or hinder access to higher education, issues of diversity, social justice, and multicultural concerns are all ethical considerations in academic advising. Keenan (2015), writing generally about higher education ethics, explores issues of
ethics and access related to gender, diversity, and race. Commodification of higher education is part of the problem of inclusion for Keenan, who writes that society should “view education itself not primarily as a private purchasable commodity but as an accessible good deeply related to the common good and therefore carrying rights and responsibilities for those who engage it” (p. 186). Cuyjet and Duncan (2013) make the connection between culture and ethics explicit as it relates to multicultural competence. They argue that ethical reasoning is culturally bound and must consider inclusion as an ethical issue. A complicating factor is that culture, and therefore ethics, are not static (Cuyjet & Duncan, 2013; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004; Reybold, Halx, & Jimenez, 2008).

Furthermore, Chmielewski (2004) argues that advisor training must address culture, values, and ethics. Going further, Chmielewski encourages institutions to “examine power and responsibility, and audit their ethical decisions regularly, [to] develop employees that function with honesty and integrity and serve their institution and community” (para. 10). Chmielewski (2004) notes that “In our multicultural environment, ethical standards need to be addressed in advising situations and in our classrooms so that conduct can be understood and ethical challenges avoided” (para. 8). Fisher (2005) advocates an understanding of ethics that is rooted in the community and even those smaller subsets of the community that may hold different beliefs. Cultural relativism is a more general issue in ethics (Holmes, 1993).

**Advising Administrators’ Influence**

I also explored the relationship of advising administrators and their influence on advisors, including advising specific writings as well as broader student affairs literature. Advising administrators are faculty or staff who have a role of leading and managing advisors. They are often responsible to upper administration, and implement advising policies which directly impact
students’ lives. This literature included calls for training like those in the foundational literature. For example, Damminger (2011) directly addressed advising administrators’ role relative to ethics calling for training in ethics and ethical reasoning, as well as ongoing discussion and review of ethical issues. Other literature specific to administrators includes values congruence and management as well as socialization of professionals. The literature in these areas includes both theoretically based writings as well as actual studies.

**Values Management and Congruence**

McClellan (2009) clearly states advising administrators’ role relative to values within advising.

First, values play an important role in the work of academic advising and, second, academic advising frequently involves the need to resolve ethical dilemmas based on situations wherein conflict arises among the values related to the constituencies to whom advisers hold responsibility. Given this reality, it seems advising administrators need to understand what values are and how to manage them within the workplace to improve the quality of academic advising. (para. 11)

This is one of the few places the advising literature makes a clear statement about the role of administrators regarding ethics and values. For McClellan, an advising administrator’s role is to manage values to foster a culture, noting that “values play a critical role in fostering creativity and strong coherent culture, and ensuring effective ethical decision making that promotes long-term viability insofar as individuals and organizations manage them effectively” (para. 25). Aligning espoused and active values involves: defining espoused values of the advising unit taking into account all stakeholders; identifying gaps between espoused and active values; and reinforcing congruence and improving alignment.

Similarly, McClellan (2014) focuses on the managerial aspects of administrator and advisor that filters down to students. McClellan makes three suggestions for advising administrators seeking to promote trust: (a) “allow relationships between advisor and student to
develop over time” (para. 21); (b) “advisers should be trained to deal with issues of trust and diversity” (para. 22); and (c) “it is important that advising administrators engage in trust building relationships with partners both on and off campus” (para. 23). This highlights the multiple constituencies to whom advising administrators are beholden, in-particular administrators impact upon students via the advisors they lead.

Next, Begley and Johnson (2001) proposed a two-layered model to explain the relationship of self and values. They do not present a specific research study, but they conducted interviews at a regional NACADA conference. From this informal data collection, they found that advising administrators tend to claim decisions are rational and based upon consequences and consensus. Begley and Johnson assert that espoused values and those actually guiding actions can be quite different, and that there is a potential range of motivations for actions relative to values. Moreover, they found that “self-interest is infrequently acknowledged as a motivation, possibly because professional activity is usually publicly accountable, and ethics and principles tend to be employed under special circumstances” (p. 12). They advocate that advising administrators think through multiple arenas that have competing values to determine best actions.

Socialization

Socialization is the process by which professionals learn the activities and values of a profession, as well as the norms of behavior in that profession (Dinmohammadi, Peyrovi, & Mehrdad, 2013). Hirschy, Wilson, Liddell, Boyle, and Pasquesi, (2015) contains background literature on socialization and reports findings of a survey of entry-level student affairs professionals. They conducted a quantitative study to create and test an instrument for a model of student affairs professionals’ socialization experiences which includes values congruence.
Hirschy et al. found that values and ethics are present in student affairs practice, that “communicating high expectations for ethical behaviors among early career professionals is an important task” (p. 791), and that modeling and discussion are important for promoting reflection. A similar study (Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, & Pasquesi, 2016) explores midlevel student affairs professionals’ feelings of satisfaction. Wilson et al.’s survey instrument administered to mid-level professionals (n=377) found that values congruence was just as important for mid-level professionals as it was for new professionals in Hirschy et al.

Additionally, Reybold, Halx, and Jimenez’s (2008) qualitative study of student affairs administrators, points to the importance of ethical socialization. Some of the subjects that they interviewed spoke specifically of supervisors and mentors. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) conducted a study of new student affairs professionals. Though nothing was specific to either advising or ethics, one of the four themes uncovered in their data was “seeking sage advice” (p. 7). Donnelly (2009) reports on a survey of advisor job satisfaction conducted in 2005 with a large pool of NACADA members (N=1913). Donnelly finds that it is important for supervision to balance autonomy with clear communication of role. Donnelly concludes that case studies and reflection are an important means of teaching this balance.

**Other Empirical Studies**

Other empirical studies demonstrate the connections and disconnections between sources of guidance and actual practice; the types and frequency of dilemmas that various student affairs professionals encounter; and the ways in which administrators encounter tensions between professional and personal moral codes. Overall connections between sources of guidance in advising practice varied. The type of dilemmas encountered by student affairs practitioners differed by institutional type and the frequency varied by position. One study (Kihl, 2007)
uncovered tensions faced in the roles of athletic compliance administrators which may have implications for advising.

**Connections to Sources of Guidance**

First, three studies explore the ways various sources of ethical guidance connect to practice. Keeling (2010) attempted to study the utilization of CAS standards through a comparative case study method. One finding was the unclear influence of the standards. Keeling noted a difficulty in finding sites embracing the standards. Likewise, Abelman, Atkin, Dalessandro, Snyder-Suhyy, and Janstova (2007) conducted a survey of how academic advising units use vision statements. The findings modestly relate to values and ethics in academic advising as the vision statements can represent a guiding ideal for practice. They found that a well-maintained vision statement can influence practice in positive ways for academic advisors particularly those at small private institutions. Abelman et al. asserts that advising administrators who have more contact with upper administration are in a better position to provide leadership that integrates the higher ideals of a vision statement.

Similarly, Abelman and Molina (2006) explored how advisors perceive and use the NACADA Statement of Core Values along with institutional vision of advising through a qualitative case study. They report results of a survey of perception of a re-invigorated vision statement at Cleveland State University. Their basic finding was that vision statements can invigorate a culture of ethics, and advisors can be an important part of that effort. The emphasis of vision statements within the sample institution relative to other institutions is unclear. One claim is that vision statements "have a long shelf life" (p. 6) and are often stale. However, Cleveland State University adopted its vision statement three years prior to the study and its generalizability is unclear.
**Types and frequency of dilemmas.** Janosik et al. (2004) surveyed 303 NASPA members and categorized the different types of dilemmas that respondents encountered. They report on the differences in dilemmas between certain types of institutions and between different positions within institutional hierarchies. Their study used a survey which included demographic questions and then asked for ethical dilemmas facing the respondents. They used a mixed method design that allowed for descriptive statistics but also for a qualitative evaluation of respondent’s dilemmas. The researchers then coded the reported dilemmas using Kitchener’s five ethical principles which are the same as Lowenstein’s (2008) ideals noted above. Their findings showed significant differences in the way certain groups approach ethical problems. Entry level professionals reported fewer justice dilemmas than those with more experience. Those at larger institutions also reported fewer dilemmas involving justice than at smaller institutions. Both women and more senior leadership in the organization reported encountering more ethical issues (Janosik, Humphrey, & Creamer, 2004).

Janosik (2007) re-analyzed data from the survey in Janosik et al. (2004). The most frequently reported issue was the obligation to act. Specifically, Janosik (2007) found that subjects lacked clarity on when to report problematic behavior to a supervisor. Janosik proposes that better supervision can improve this situation “by clarifying expectations, educating, and confronting behavior that falls below established standards” (p. 302). This is another rare but important connection between descriptive ethics and the role of supervision.

Holzweiss and Walker (2016) replicated portions of Janosik et al. (2004). Holzweiss and Walker (2016) had 135 of 227 respondents complete the ethics section of their survey. The results were similar to Janosik et. al (2004). Holzweiss and Walker (2016) found fewer differences in institutional type or size, and only four of the top 10 dilemmas were the same as in
Janosik et al (2004). The replicated study found a new category of dilemma having to do with self-management. Holzweiss and Walker’s (2016) analysis of dilemmas by functional area yielded two findings specific to academic advising (4% of respondents in the overall sample): (a) qualitative data illustrating an advisor’s struggle with a colleague sharing inaccurate information, and (b) that 13% of advisors reported beneficence dilemmas, which is a higher rate than other functional areas. Holzweiss and Walker’s other findings include that: “dilemma types may be changing in terms of frequency” (p. 441), that self-management is a new dilemma type, more research is needed of ethical dilemma by functional area, and that further study of institutional size and type may be necessary.

**Tensions Between Values and Codes**

Kihl (2007) conducted a qualitative study of the compliance officers of the Pacific 10 Conference (NCAA division IA college athletic conference). Using scenarios, Kihl asked subjects to explore various ethical dilemmas common to college athletics. Findings noted the differences between professional and personal moral codes. These differences were a source of ethical tension in determining right action.

Moreover, the multiple constituencies of compliance officers (e.g. student, coaches, universities, NCAA; etc.) create further ethical tensions. Care was a theme that came out of the study regarding how the compliance officers communicated difficult news to these constituents (i.e. telling a student-athlete they were ineligible for competition). However, another finding was that compliance officers could and would hide behind rules rather than engage with larger ethical dilemmas. Kihl suggests three things for preparation of sports managers: (a) they ought to reflect upon background beliefs and the origins from which they come; (b) they need to
develop “understandings of moral concepts” that comes from “their moral perceptions and sensitivities” (p. 298); and (c) that preparation programs must be clear on guidelines for practice.

Kihl’s (2007) study involves a significantly different population than advisors and advising administrators. However, it provides insight into the ethical dilemmas faced by administrators who implement systems of rules such as academic policy. Moreover, like Kihl’s subjects, advisors have multiple constituencies to whom they are responsible. There are several conceptual frameworks which may further illuminate the important roles of academic advisors.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

Within the extant literature on ethics in academic advising and related fields there are common conceptual frames. In this section, I examine four conceptual frameworks including Buck et al.’s (2001) proposition of three dialectical tensions, Kitchener’s five ethical principles, Noddings’ (1984) ethics of caring, and Dahlberg and Moss’ (2005) Critical Pedagogic approach. My study did not seek to use these as analytic theory, but these conceptual frameworks informed my thinking as a grounded theorist. Thus, I am using conceptual framework rather than analytic theory, as my intention was not to explore any of these specific theories but rather to clearly situate my research problem in the existing literature (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009).

**Three Dialectical Tensions**

Buck et al. (2001) article is a brief work of normative ethics. They make a knowledge claim that ethical issues for academic advisors exist on three continua of dialectical tension: neutral vs. prescriptive; encouraging vs. discouraging; and judgmental vs. nonjudgmental. The first, *neutral* versus *prescriptive* describes the extent to which advisors attempt to influence students’ choices. There is a pedagogic choice in the degree to which an advisor uses a prescriptive approach. For example, should advisors tell students directly what major they ought
to select based upon the advisors’ assessment, do they ask leading questions that might lead the
student to the same conclusion, or do they remain entirely open and refrain from giving any
opinion? This may vary by student and situation, but advisors may also have firm principles or
prescriptives to which they adhere.

Second, encouraging versus discouraging pertains to the manner in which advisors seek
to help students understand how academic choices fit with their unique skills and abilities.
Relative to the first tension, this involves a more affective component of advising practice. For
example, in having the conversation about choice of academic program, how plainly does an
advisor tell a student that they think the student is in the wrong major? It could be merciful to
bluntly tell a student earning low grades in pre-medicine coursework that they are not going to
make it into medical school. However, given the implications that advising has for access, the
advisor must question the extent to which their opinion is reality.

Third, judgmental versus nonjudgmental describes the extent to which the internal
monologue of the advisor critiques a student’s words or actions. Buck et al. (2001) are careful to
note that neither end of this continuum is right or wrong. However, they note that advisors must
make a choice about the extent to which they are completely open to anything an advisee says or
instead question everything. They note that in order for advisors to place themselves on this
continuum they must get insights from other professionals.

Overall, Buck et al. (2001) offer a means with which to understand the dilemmas in
advising. This serves as a conceptual framework of ethics in advising practice that frames some
of the ethical tensions present in academic advising. In addition to dialectical tensions,
principles provide another tool of analysis for understanding ethical dilemmas.
Kitchener’s Five Ethical Principles

Kitchener is a highly influential ethicist in counseling psychology as well as student affairs (Urofsky, Engels & Engebretson, 2008). Several other scholars cite Kitchener’s work within the literature reviewed above (Church & Robinson, 2006; Cuyjet & Duncan, 2013; Frank, 2000; Holzweiss & Walker, 2016; Humphrey et al., 2004; Janosik, 2007). Kitchener (1984) introduced the field of counseling psychology to five ethical principles from moral philosophy: beneficence, non-malevolence, respecting autonomy, justice, and fidelity. Many student affairs preparation programs exist as tracks within larger counseling psychology departments and thus Kitchener’s work is part of the literature specific to ethics in student affairs. Kitchener (1985) situates the five principles in student affairs practice and explains the nuances of each principle.

**Autonomy.** First, respecting autonomy involves two aspects including the right to action as a rational agent and the freedom to choose. This raises questions about the rationality of the agent (person acting) and the implications of choices of autonomous agents on other autonomous agents. Rules, codes, or laws flowing from this include those that give rights to privacy as well as those that mandate informed consent. There are numerous situations in student affairs practice where this is complicated by the lack of clarity in whether or not emerging adults are demonstrating the qualities of a rational agent.

**Utility.** Kitchener (1985) explains the concepts of doing no harm (non-maleficence) and acting to benefit others (beneficence). Both principles require some anticipation of consequences of actions by the actor and are often balanced against one another (harm versus good). Kitchener, does not outright endorse doing no harm as the primary ethical principle but notes that others would make such a claim and notes that decisions should be “made in a way that would lead to the least amount of avoidable harm” (p. 28). Beneficence is one of the
primary obligations of a profession, particularly in higher education’s purpose of serving the common good.

**Justice.** Justice, or being just, is another of Kitchener’s (1984, 1985) principles. Often equated with fairness, justice can be distributive relative to resources and services as well as apply to issues of equality and equal treatment. The three standards relative to justice Kitchener includes are impartiality, equality, and reciprocity. Reciprocity, Kitchener explains, is essentially the Golden Rule. Drawing on Aristotle, Kitchener posits that equality and impartiality mean treating equal things as equals and unequal things unequally. This has implications for higher education as a public good and the treatment of students within historically unequal systems.

**Fidelity.** Last, Kitchener adds a fifth ethical principle, fidelity or being faithful, that she argues is a distinct principle. Kitchener’s articulation of the five principles draw heavily on the work of bioethicists Beauchamp and Childress (1979). Beauchamp and Childress articulate the first four principles and note that fidelity is more of a necessary piece of professions keeping public trust but that it is a part of respecting autonomy. Citing Ramsey (1970), Kitchener (1985) argues that in a helping profession like student affairs, that there is an obligation to foster emotional bonds that could not exist without trust. In Kitchener’s view there is a contractual obligation between professional and student wherein the relationship is not one of equals, and thus requires deep trustworthiness on the part of the professional.

**Three-level model.** Kitchener’s (1984, 1985) ethical model has three levels: (a) rules, laws, or codes; (b) ethical principles; and (c) ethical theories. The first are the specific rules that should guide practice. The problem with these is that they can come into conflict or may not cover all situations relevant to practice. Second, is the level of principles and these are the five
ethical ideals noted above. These principles are meant to be a prima facie reason to take a certain course of action. Kitchener explains that *prima facie* is a term taken from law, that means on the face or at first look the principles should be followed unless there is a dilemma or some compelling ethical reason not to follow them. This concept of *prima facie* adherence is a way of balancing ethical absolutism and ethical relativism. For example, an academic advisor should show respect for a student’s autonomy and not share concerns with that student’s family members without the student’s consent to do so, but that adherence is complicated if the advisor fears that not involving family members may cause harm to the student. When the principles are in conflict and there is no clear path forward based upon the principles, then practitioners ought to engage with the issue on the level of ethical theories. Ethical theories engage a body of moral philosophy in determining action or in-action. Kitchener explains that contemporary philosophy would oblige the practitioner to choose a course of action which is “universalizable or generalizable” (1985, p. 28). Kitchener then notes that a decision must be consistent with personal values, and one which the agent would wish to see made into general principles. This latter point is an expression of Kantianism.

**Connection to advising.** Lowenstein, a trained philosopher, introduced these same principles to the literature specific to advising without citation of Beauchamp and Childress or Kitchener (Lowenstein & Grites, 1993; Lowenstein 2008). This highlights the extent to which these principles draw from the long history of moral philosophy. In discussing the principles, Kitchener noted connections to existing counseling and student affairs codes. Lowenstein and Grites (1993) refer to the principles as ideals and use the nomenclature principles to refer to the implications for advising practice that these ideals would have. In the general student affairs literature codes came first and principles second, and in the advising literature they flow in the
opposite direction. Both Kitchener and Lowenstein call for practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of the third level (ethical theory).

**Kitchener in research.** Normative ethical writers in both student affairs and academic advising literature cite Kitchener’s work extensively (Church & Robinson, 2006; Cuyjet & Duncan, 2013; Holzweiss & Walker, 2016; Humphrey et al., 2004; Linstrum, 2009; Pope, et al., 2004). Additionally, a few scholars use Kitchener as a theoretical lens within studies of ethics in practice. Janosik, Humphrey, and Creamer (2004), Janosik (2007), and Holzweiss and Walker (2016) all used Kitchener’s framework of principles to identify and sort respondents’ ethical dilemmas. Given the dearth of studies of descriptive ethics in student affairs generally and academic advising specifically, this use of Kitchener’s work in defining dilemmas demonstrates the high level of influence on our understanding of ethics. Urofsky, Engels and Engebretson (2008) writing about counseling psychology, trace this influence and suggest that there is need for both deeper exploration of Kitchener and more theoretical lenses in the scholarship of practical ethics. Moreover, some scholars raise concerns about the usefulness of Kitchener’s principles as well as principle based ethics in general, in a multicultural approach to ethics in student affairs (Cuyjet & Duncan 2013; Pope et al., 2004).

**Noddings’ Ethics of Caring**

In this section, I explore how Nodding’s Caring Ethics is a useful frame of analysis in descriptive ethics in academic advising. Some literature on ethics in academic advising points to Nodding’s writings on care-based ethics. Noddings (1984) believes logic is overemphasized in ethics and that eros, the feminine spirit (that of love) is a useful notion for ethics based on care for the other. In Noddings’ conception, there is the *one-caring* and the *cared-for*. Noddings chooses joy rather than anguish as the “basic human affect” (p. 6), which is a point of difference
she sees in the *Eros versus Logos* distinction. In this section, I provide an overview of care ethics as well as applications of Noddings work in the advising literature.

**Care ethics.** Noddings cites Mayeroff in noting that to care for another is to help that person “grow and actualize” (p. 9). Conflict still arises, as Noddings notes:

The point lies in trying to discern the kinds of things I must think about when I am in a conflict of caring. When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other. (pp. 13-14)

This passage shows that conflicts (dilemmas) arise in this system of ethics and the final sentence points to a need for criticality as an actor.

Noddings’ (1984) feminist approach that does not disregard the affective piece of ethical reasoning, instead “it recognizes and calls forth human judgment across a wide range of fact and feeling, and it allows for situations and conditions in which judgment…may properly be put aside in favor of faith and commitment” (p. 25). However, Noddings goes on to discuss tensions between institutions whose purpose is providing care. Noddings draws attention to the impact of institutions on the ways care is given and perceived. Because advisors serve as the voice of the institution but often act as solo practitioners, this framework provides valuable insights into the practice of advising. As professionals, advisors and administrators are bound to perform in such a way that would not displease their institutions. Actions, even those based upon caring, need justification. This fits with Noddings’ explanation of care. It is not completely separate from reason and rationalization, but rather “ideally…the reasons for our action/inaction…would persuade a reasonable, disinterested observer that we have acted in [sic] behalf of the cared for” (p. 23). This observer caveat to care-inspired actions is a complicated one because the perfect observer likely does not exist.
Noddings (1984) situates her ethics of caring as a weak deontological argument which is not unconcerned with consequences but “caring locates morality primarily in the pre-act consciousness of the one-caring” (p. 28). Caring also does not seem to fully disregard or embrace a universalist or relativist approach to ethics. Noddings states that “I want to build an ethic on caring, and I shall claim that there is a form of caring natural and accessible to all human beings” (p. 27-28). This seems to claim some aspect of ethical universalism. However, Noddings qualifies her project in that “the ethic itself will not embody a set of universalizable moral judgments” (p. 28). This acknowledges the meta-ethical difficulty of making any statement about morality. Care as a central ethic is present in the advising literature.


Moreover, care appears implicitly in some places in the literature on advising ethics. Livingston, Carter, and Thomas, (2008) critique of Church and Robinson, advocates great concern for listening and relationship that could be said to be a care-based approach. Damminger (2011) cites Kidder (1995) in calling for a balance between care-based decision making in addition to ends and rules-based considerations in ethical reasoning. Tyson (2008) draws parallels between the values of advising and the values of sustainability claiming that care and community are part of the values of both cultures. Moreover, Lieberman-Colgan’s (2016)
approach to advising considers a similar radical openness to “the other” via Buber’s *I-Thou* which has implications for care ethics.

While this concept of care has appeared in the literature, I have found no studies specifically about ethics that have used it as a lens with which to analyze actual data. Citing Noddings and Tronto’s ideas about caring relationships, McClellan (2009) states that a relationally rich approach to advising “may result in the kind of reciprocity-based caring advocated by the care ethicists” (para. 7). Though McClellan makes a convincing argument for care as the common framework of ethics in advising, McClellan does not engage in social science based research on ethics. Noddings’s feminist framework served as an important lens through which to understand my data. A final conceptual framework borrowed from the early childhood literature further informed my thinking about ethics in advising.

**Dahlberg and Moss’ Critical Pedagogic Approach**

A Critical Pedagogic lens is useful in understanding the ethics of academic advising. Given the importance of academic advising for creating or impeding access to higher education of historically underrepresented groups, a critical approach to ethics in advising adds an important voice to the scholarship on advising. Dahlberg and Moss’ (2005) writings on ethics in early childhood education, offers a synthesis of ideas that can be equally applicable to the situation of higher education. Dahlberg and Moss begin their book by drawing a connection to the writings of Bill Readings, who took a critical approach to higher education.

**Describing the political and ethical situation.** Readings (1996) analyzes the origins and maintenance of university’s bureaucratic structures. Citing Foucault, Readings takes the concept of “excellence” in universities as a mechanism of control that allows for corporatism and technologies of education that serve corporate interests. Readings explains later in the book:
My aim...is an anti-modernist rephrasing of teaching and learning as sites of obligation, as loci of ethical practices, rather than as means for the transmission of scientific knowledge. Teaching thus becomes answerable to the question of justice rather than the criteria of truth. (p. 154)

It is this critique of the technologies of education and using ethical practice as a focus of higher education that is applicable to academic advising, which is a form of teaching and an opportunity to shed light on the hidden curriculum of universities.

Moreover, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) do more than embrace the institution as a “loci of ethical practice”, they also note that “institutions can be places where the Other is not made into the Same, but which opens up instead for diversity, difference, and otherness, for new possibilities and potentialities” (p. 2). They reject claims of neutrality in technical practices of early childhood education based in scientism, and instead attempt to seed democratic space for what they call “minor politics” along with a form of ethics centered around “responsibility and the relationship to the Other” (p. 12). The technologies for control which Dahlberg and Moss claim are increasingly the tools of early childhood education, may be similar to tools of retention in higher education.

Advising can function as an oppressive controlling technology if practitioners treat students in a highly prescriptive manner and as objects rather than subjects. Increasingly, governmental and institutional emphasis on retention - which is often mislabeled success - engage advisors in surveillance of students. These retention efforts are seldom the subject of critical ethical discourse. Given the disagreement about the neutrality of ethical actors in the literature described above, this critical framework would potentially identify ethical tensions or conflicts which are unnamed in studies that do not explicitly account for the political situation of education.
Ethics of encounter. Further, the ethics related to that of the Other (sic) which Dahlberg and Moss (2005) invoke is inclusive of ethics of care and ethics of encounter. They explore the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas with his claim that Other becomes Same in traditional Western Philosophy. Instead of this minimization of the Other into the Same via people’s conceptions of autonomous agents, Levinas proposed a radical, complicated, and messy encounter with the Other. Encounter with the Other embraces a paradox in which “being-together presupposes infinite separation and dissociation” (p. 81). Dahlberg and Moss, distill three themes from their exploration of care and encounter ethics.

The first theme is “responsibility” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 82), specifically to the Other and in connection to care. Second, “responsibility entails respect for otherness” (p. 83) which involves respect for differences and the “alterity” of the other. Third, “a rejection of calculative and rational thinking in relations with the Other, and as a basis more generally for ethics” (p. 84), which for Dahlberg and Moss means an ethics that is “radically at odds with an instrumental rationality and a capitalist logic” (pp. 84-85). Education rooted in encounter with the Other must invite students to action. Ethics in advising seen through this framework shows how the political situation of advising is present and induces changes for individual actors within the advising relationship.

Pedagogy of listening. One idea Dahlberg and Moss (2005) put forward as a vision for how minor politics and ethics of encountering the Other can play out in early childhood, is a pedagogy of listening. They explain that “Listening…is about being able to hear the ideas and theories of the Other, and to treat them seriously and with respect” (p. 99). Emphasis moves from product and transmission of knowledge to process wherein there is deep understanding,
listening, and construction of new meanings. They advocate preparation for democracy within early childhood education, which fits equally well with the missions of higher education.

Overall, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) offer a synthesis of ideas from Readings, Foucault, Tronto, Levinas, and Noddings. Dahlberg and Moss’s critique of education as a technology for manufacture of sameness and their call for education as the “loci of ethical practice” provides a needed political dimension to the study of ethics in advising. Current frameworks present in the literature, do not address political dimensions of ethics explicitly and critically. Using Dahlberg and Moss as a conceptual framework for studying ethics in advising offers a robust accounting of societal power present in advising practice.

In conclusion, the conceptual frameworks I described in this section provided a backdrop for my study. If McClellan’s (2009) speculation is correct, Noddings’ conceptions of care are descriptive of the type of care-based reasoning that happens in practice. Dahlberg and Moss’s (2005) critical pedagogic stance situates the work of advising in a political context centered on care and access to higher education as a common good. My study used these conceptual frameworks for understanding the day-to-day practice of advising.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented an in-depth exploration of the writings on ethics in academic advising. This included the historical context, a review of foundational writings of a normative nature, as well as empirical studies related to ethics in advising practice and student affairs more broadly. I reviewed conceptual frameworks that informed my thinking prior to beginning my study. In the next chapter, I present the method that I used in the study of how primary role academic advisors engage in ethical reasoning and practice.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Given the dearth of studies which explore the ways in which ethical practice happens in the real world, the inductive nature of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2013) offers flexibility and description in answering the question: How do primary role academic advisors engage in ethical reasoning and practice? In this chapter, I further develop an argument for why grounded theory was a sound means of addressing the research question. I then provide detailed information on how I conducted the study.

Creswell (2013) describes the inductive nature of qualitative research as “from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer” (p. 22). This careful location of researcher and theory is pragmatic and useful in understanding a process as complex as ethics. Given that complexity, a study in the qualitative tradition will allow an understanding of “processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). A qualitative study allows the research to uncover explicit meanings where none currently exist.

Specifically, a grounded theory approach provided rich data on several facets of the topic of ethics in advising. The inductive nature of grounded theory served as a novel way to explore ethics in advising practice. Inductive logic allowed me to describe how advisors engage ethics without the judgments of the normative writings. At the same time, grounded theory allowed for criticality about what happens in practice. As Charmaz (2011) notes, “we grounded theorists…do not stop with induction as we subject our findings and tentative categories to rigorous tests” (p. 360). Though grounded theory begins from a relatively blank slate with
regards to theory, the frameworks of care and critical pedagogy still fit well. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) claim:

> The procedures [of grounded theory] can be used to uncover the beliefs and meanings that underlie action, to examine rational as well as non-rational aspects of behavior, and to demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interactions. (p. 11)

This attention to both emotion and logic, rationality and non-rationality is consistent with Noddings’ rejection of a purely rational understanding of ethics. Similarly, Dahlberg and Moss’ (2005) “rejection of calculative and rational thinking” (p. 84) in order to remain open to alterity of the other, is congruent with grounded theory. This focus on response to events and problems was appropriate for my study exploring ethical problems and advisors’ responses to those problems.

Moreover, two additional factors supported my use of grounded theory. First, due to the dearth of studies of descriptive ethics in advising, a qualitative approach that builds and proposes a theory provides a necessary first step to future research. Creswell (2013) advocates the usefulness of qualitative methods for initial exploration of a specific problem or group, but also one which moves beyond description and theorizes processes. My exploration of ethics both described and theorized the process of ethical reasoning in advising. Second, grounded theory starts from a place of openness. Charmaz (2014) explains that grounded theory researchers “do not force preconceived ideas and theories” (p. 32). This openness allowed for discovery not rooted in the judgments of the existing normative literature. My exploration remained open to alternative forms of ethical reasoning, such as Noddings’ care ethics, which may be unique when compared to the prescriptive nature of other normative ethical writings.

Furthermore, Creswell (2013) notes the centrality of interviews in grounded theory studies. Specifically, Creswell (2014) notes three advantages to qualitative interviewing which
include: ability to gain historical context, efficacy of data collection when direct observation is not practical, and an ability to direct questions. Thus, three reasons support my use of interviews as a primary source of data collection. First, interviews provided a way of gathering data on the practice of academic advisors, since I did not have the opportunity for direct observation. Second, the use of interviews allowed for dialogue on the presence and process of encountering ethical dilemmas. For example, when a participant identified an ethical problem, I was able to clarify the dilemma present in that problem as the respondent reflected upon the issue. Third, interviews allowed me an opportunity to gain contextual details which were important to understanding a participant’s situation. Moreover, interviews allowed inquiry about certain historical or contextual aspects of the participant’s stories.

**Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study during my coursework. I interviewed three women advising administrators at Catholic universities and conducted a focus group with advisors at one administrator’s institution. It became clear through that small-scale data collection that institutional mission in these Catholic contexts was influential in ethical practice; that explicit ethical codes and reasoning were not influential; and that caring was a chief consideration in ethics. The subjects in the pilot study described awareness of ethical dilemmas coming from a “feeling” that was, at least in part, a bodily sensation. These pilot interviews provided a hunch about the centrality of care in advising ethics that came through very clearly in the data presented here.

**Ethics and Confidentiality**

I received expedited approval to conduct human subjects research from the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). My study was completely voluntary; subjects
could withdraw consent up until the time of confirming the accuracy of their transcribed interview. I explained the risks and benefits to all respondents via email and in a consent conversation prior to the day of the interview. Participants signed and returned a consent form via email (Appendix A). I only interviewed subjects who were over 21 years of age. Risks included the potential identification by colleagues who might recognize the stories in the reporting of data. There were no specific benefits to participants. I mitigated the risks by use of pseudonyms and to the extent possible removed descriptors which could reasonably identify the campus or office in which the respondent works. This provided a level of anonymity that minimized risk and opened comfortable space for respondents to tell their stories about ethical dilemmas.

I treated the data with great care to ensure that information was secure. In addition to the use of pseudonyms on transcripts, I kept all files on a password protected computer and backed-up on a password protected one drive file. For an additional layer of security, I password protected the file containing actual identifiers for the participants. I used two third-party transcribers, both of whom signed confidentiality agreements to ensure the privacy of respondents (Appendix B).

**Sample Selection**

Primary role academic advisors come from various backgrounds and work in many different types of institutions. I used convenience sampling by asking my current network of colleagues for nominations of potential participants from various backgrounds, regions, and institutional types. The sample consisted of all primary role academic advisors rather than advising administrators or faculty advisors. Sampling primary-role advisors allowed for a purposeful sample. Creswell (2013) noted the benefits of maximum variation sampling as a
means of increasing “the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives – an ideal in qualitative research” (p. 157). In order to avoid the appearance of bias in my selection of subjects, I sought subjects outside my network of acquaintances. This was important since I had many connections nationally through the Theory, Philosophy and History Commission of NACADA, which I chaired from 2015-2017, and whose membership tend to have common interests and may think about ethics in ways different from the general membership. I sent an initial email (Appendix C) to 20 colleagues, and sixteen replied with nominations. From those nominations, I identified an initial pool of 33 potential subjects via convenience sampling from the nominations of those colleagues.

Once I received a nomination from a colleague, I solicited participation from the nominee via email (Appendix D). In that email I explained the purpose of the study; the activities required of participation (i.e. interviews, possibly journaling, providing documents that guide practice); measures for and limitations of confidentiality; and instructions for scheduling an interview either via phone, skype, or google hangout. When participants responded, I arranged a phone call in which we reviewed the IRB forms and had a consent conversation. If they were willing to proceed, I then arranged 90-minute interviews with each subject, provided further instructions, and offered to answer any questions they had prior to the interview time.

Additionally, I prompted participants to begin reflecting upon ethical problems or dilemmas that they encounter in their work. I gave this prompt via email (Appendix D) and verbally during the consent conversation prior to the interview. Specifically, I solicited two stories of dilemmas or ethical problems that they have faced in the work of advising. This strategy of story solicitation is useful according to McCracken (1988) for getting a deeper understanding of the question.
Another planned prompting strategy is to ask respondents to recall exceptional incidents in which the research topic was implicated. (The recitation of these incidents will sometimes surface on their own accord, and the investigator must be quick to develop them.) In these cases, a counter-expectational reality has already helped to pry the respondents away from his or her assumptions. (p. 36).

Definition of ethical problem or dilemma remained open, in the same way that Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004) allowed participants to define their own dilemmas.

Of the 33 nominees, 15 did not respond to requests for interviews or opted not to participate. Six more nominees opted out after reading the initial consent form. Twelve participants responded and were willing to participate. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews over a five-week period.

**Participants**

Twelve primary role academic advisors participated in semi-structured interviews. Table 3.1 provides brief biographical and demographic information taken verbatim for each participant at the beginning of each interview. I selected participants through convenience sampling with a focus on representation from a variety of regions. I solicited nomination of participants from advising colleagues I knew at other institutions. Most of the nominators were colleagues, I had met in NACADA. The only requirement of participants was that they were primary role advisors. The participants were less racially diverse than NACADA’s overall membership (83% vs 62% White). I interviewed more men than the general population of NACADA (50% vs 20.5%), and no participants identified as transgender (<1%).

Years of experience in advising ranged from 1.5 to 18.5 years. Age ranged from 26 to 60 years, with a mean age of 38.8 years. The geographic distribution of the participants’ institutions represents five of ten NACADA Regions. Participants identified their most salient identities
relevant in their work as advisors (Table 3.1 shows the range of responses). Level of education ranged from in-progress master’s program to completed doctoral degrees.
Table 3.1

Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years in Advising</th>
<th>Salient Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gavin</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>White male from other region</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Age (youth)</td>
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<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Bi-Racial; Caulasian - African American&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Evie</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
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<td>&quot;I don't believe so&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>white-gay-male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Interviews included open-ended questions (Appendix E) meant to invite reflection on ethical dilemmas, process of reasoning, and influences in addressing ethical issues in advising. Interviews ranged from 50 to 90 minutes. I made audio recordings of the interviews which I then
sent to transcribers. Participants had the opportunity to check the transcript of their interview for accuracy.

Additionally, I collected limited data outside of semi-structured interviews. In two cases I asked for documents that participants referenced as guides for ethical practice. I engaged in memo writing immediately following interviews and as thoughts occurred to me about the data. This enabled me to capture my thoughts and observations about both verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interviews. Memo writing proved to be an important part of connecting the data collection phase with an ongoing analysis to construct an emerging theory as described below.

I followed Charmaz’s (2014) format of intensive interviews with a constructivist framework. Charmaz frames an understanding of the co-construction of meaning that comes from constructivist rather than objectivist perspectives on interviewing. Social location, which can be thought of as the political and socio-historical contexts of various identity factors such as race, has implications for the content and manner in which people will tell their stories. Noting the importance of opening space for respondents’ stories, Charmaz also acknowledges that social location of interviewer and interviewee matter for understanding.

Moreover, Charmaz (2014) encourages questions that explore emergent theory within interviews and which do not disregard “taken-for-granted meanings” (p. 100) within the words that respondents choose. From the themes that I identified in early interviews, I was able to ask specific follow-up questions with interviews that happened later in the process. I reached saturation of data as stories took on similar patterns and emerging themes began to have consistent descriptions. Participants received a copy of the interview transcript.
Data Analysis

I followed an analytic approach for grounded theory studies that involved initial and intermediate coding of the interview transcripts. As stated above, I used memo writing as a tool of analysis throughout the process. Birks and Mills (2015) compare various approaches to grounded theory coding and they categorize the first two rounds of coding as initial and intermediate. They include Charmaz’s (2014) approach which includes “at least two phases” (p. 109). First, I conducted initial line by line coding of the interview data. In this initial coding, I was looking to be as descriptive of what was going on. Next, I looked for patterns in the initial codes via what Charmaz (2014) calls focused coding or what Corbin and Strauss (2015) call axial coding. Beyond focused coding, I engaged in theoretical coding to finalize my analysis.

Memo writing. Charmaz (2014) explains the importance of memo writing throughout the analytic process. It serves as “an intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” and is a “crucial method in grounded theory” (p. 162). Memos are a mechanism for focusing the mind on the data and the relationships of the data. Charmaz states that memos are a “place for making comparisons between data and data, data and codes, codes of data and other codes, codes and category, and category and concept and for articulating conjectures about these comparisons” (p. 163). Corbin and Strauss (2015) refer to memo writing as “dialoging with data and moving analysis further” (p. 106). It is a means of critically questioning your codes which may raise questions to guide further research.

In my project, I used memo writing as a tool of reflection throughout the process. It served as a helpful repository for constant comparison of interview data. This allowed me to identify points in later interviews to ask follow-up questions in an effort to flesh out emerging themes. I also engaged in memo writing to clearly define codes, concepts and themes as I was
analyzing the data. Reviewing all memos and memoing on the connections of themes was a crucial step in the stage of theoretical coding because it was an efficient means of seeing the between codes, themes, and core categories.

**Initial coding.** I sent the interviews to my transcribers as soon as possible following the interviews. Charmaz (2014) encourages an openness in initial coding which is descriptive of emotions and processes. These initial codes “categorize, summarize, and account for” (p. 111) the story present in the data. Early coding allows for the researcher to “identify focused codes quickly” (p. 112) and many of the focused codes emerged from early memoing as I finished interviews and started initial coding.

Charmaz (2014) explains coding as in interaction with the data. Coding is an active process. Charmaz prefers creative and emergent codes, rather than preconceived codes drawing from existing conceptual frameworks. Coding involves questioning repeatedly and even seeing respondents’ choice of language as problematic while at the same time seeking respondents’ perspectives. In initial coding, I used short descriptions which fit tentative categories and when possible I used vivo codes which use the exact words of subjects. I also focused on actions, as Charmaz advises a focus on actions in initial codes is a way of avoiding typing persons and premature analysis. Charmaz summarizes initial coding strategy by stating that codes should be “short, simple, active, and analytic” (p. 120) comparing data with data.

Moreover, I used a line-by-line strategy in initial coding. Charmaz (2011, 2014) advocates for this as a means of focusing in on the data. In addition to focusing on actions, I used this initial line-by-line coding to compare data and identify gaps. In the initial coding stage, I resisted the temptation to move too far into theory building by keeping my focus on brevity and description.
**Focused coding.** Though Charmaz (2014) notes that moving from initial to “focused coding is not entirely a linear process” (p. 141), I engaged in focused coding after initial coding. Focused coding involved analyzing initial codes and choosing the most salient or those which account for important themes of initial codes. At this stage, my aim was to compare initial codes and test potential focused codes against both data and initial codes. Focused codes were still somewhat tentative at the outset of this stage.

This focused coding allowed for more abstract codes to enter the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz encourages researchers to “keep coding simple” (p. 147) and notes that initial and focused coding may prove adequate for analysis without a large number of codes. At the end of focused coding, I had 23 codes. Charmaz (2014), citing Corbin and Strauss (2008), treats axial coding as an optional and potentially helpful step in the development of theory. Though Birk and Mills (2015) categorize Charmaz’s focused coding and Strauss and Corbin’s axial coding as an intermediate step, I used axial coding as pivot point into theoretical coding.

**Theoretical coding.** Theoretical coding is the next step in deriving a grounded theory. Theoretical codes draw relationships between focused codes to “tell an analytic story that has coherence” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150). Charmaz notes tensions in the process between openness and ambiguity, especially when incorporating existing theoretical frames from literature or general ways of thinking. This is the step in the coding process that explores the relationships of concepts delineated in the focused codes. I began by compiling and defining my 23 focused codes. I then looked back at the data to find the most robust examples of each focused code, gauged its prevalence in the data, and highlighted examples that might be counter examples (i.e. data that could be interpreted as the opposite of the codes). From this I began to place focused codes into core categories.
Grouping the focused codes allowed me to think of them relative to one another, and an emerging model began to take shape. I identified focused codes as fitting into four core categories: 1) existing conditions (non-static); 2) tensions and values; 3) actions for discernment; and 4) responses. Some focused codes fit into two or more these core categories. In order to gain more clarity, I then engaged in diagramming. I noticed that my core categories outlined the basic form of the process. This helped to further refine some focused codes into a single core category and to see other codes as pivot points or points of connection within the emerging model. The diagramming evolved over the course of the analysis but crystallized into a coherent visual presented in chapter four.

Validity

There are several perspectives on validation within qualitative research that reflect various theoretical backgrounds. Some perspectives are an answer to critiques of qualitative research by positivism and others as a rejection of positivist logic (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). There can be consideration for internal validation and external validation. Creswell (2013, 2014) offers eight strategies for validation in qualitative research which include: (a) triangulation; (b) member checking; (c) rich thick description; (d) clarification of bias; (e) presentation of negative or discrepant examples; (f) prolonged time in the field; (g) peer debriefing; (h) external audit. In addition to allowing participants to check their transcripts for accuracy, I used four of these strategies in my study: clarification of bias, presentation of negative examples, peer debriefing, rich thick description, and member checking.

First, I have attempted to be clear about my biases through my reflexive statement. I have also articulated the conceptual frameworks that informed my thinking about ethics and ethical tensions in practice prior to beginning the study. Second, I was intentional in finding
negative or discrepant case examples. During focused coding, I would tag negative case examples with the words “counter example” in all-caps. I included these counter examples in my analysis. At the points where these counterexamples were contradictory to the definition of the theme, I included those examples in the presentation of theme.

Third, I engaged in peer debriefing with my chair, Dr. Sommers, during the theoretical coding phase as the model was emerging. In this meeting my chair raised questions about the choice of words for various focused and theoretical codes as well as inquiring about examples of data that supported certain themes. This feedback continued as Dr. Sommers reviewed the draft text for my analysis.

Finally, I attempted to write with rich thick description so that the readers can decide for themselves the merits of the connection. To the extent possible, I used direct excerpts from transcripts. I also endeavored to draw explicit connections between the data from one participant and another. The combination of these four measures provided a means of establishing internal and external validity through challenging my subjectivity as a qualitative researcher.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I proposed grounded theory as the method best suited to answering the questions: How do primary role academic advisors discern the presence of an ethical dilemma or problem? How do they then reason through that problem? I provided details of ethics and confidentiality, sample selection, participant information, data collection, data analysis, and measures for validity. In the next chapter, I present the data and analysis as an emerging model.
CHAPTER FOUR

GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

In this study, I explored academic advisors’ processes of ethical encounter and reasoning. I conducted interviews with 12 primary role academic advisors from eight different public universities. I engaged in data analysis as described in the preceding chapter that informed the emerging themes. As noted in chapter two, I intentionally focus on the emerging theory informed by the stated conceptual frameworks, but not an analysis testing theoretical frameworks. The themes from my analysis formed the basis of an emerging grounded theory.

In this chapter, I outline the emerging grounded theory of how primary role academic advisors identify and navigate ethical tensions, and thoroughly describe the themes present in the participant stories that serve as the basis for the theory. The emerging theoretical model is based upon the participants’ stories of what they saw as ethical dilemmas or tensions in the practice of advising and the steps they took in working through those ethical tensions. The model follows the form of encounter with ethical tensions and dilemmas based upon the stories of participants and includes four phases: pre-encounter, encounter, discernment, and response. Additionally, certain factors influenced how advisors knew they were facing a dilemma or what they perceived as an ethical tension in the work of advising.

Emerging Theory Overview

In this study, I explored how academic advisors encounter and navigate ethical dilemmas in practice. The participants named various situations as ethical tensions or dilemmas in their work. Analysis of these data led to a cyclical four phased model based upon the form of ethical encounter as stated above. The entire cycle of the emerging model is presented in the following figure.
The pre-encounter conditions of the participants included their cumulative experience as well as the ecology of their organizations. From these cumulative experiences and the dynamics of their ethical ecology; advisors brought various schemas to their work; had varying levels of trust in colleagues and supervisors; and engaged in varying levels of self-care. Advisors identified dilemmas as having both cognitive and affective components, though their descriptions of how they “knew they were facing a dilemma” were more often labeled as a “feeling” rather than a thought. The dilemmas and tensions related to conflicts of care, policy, awareness of timing, role clarity, and best advocacy.
In response to these tensions, advisors engaged in activities of building awareness and consultation with others. “Others” with whom advisors consult included other advisors, supervisors, or professionals from other areas. These consultations allowed advisors to access the schemas and practices of others and to clarify policy. This led to validation and empowerment for action or inaction in response to the dilemma. This was typically based on perceived care, adherence to or circumvention of policy, and feelings of best advocacy. The quality of these consultation experiences became a part of cumulative experience and ethical ecology. In the next section, I further explore the themes of pre-encounter.

**Pre-Encounter Conditions**

The initial phase of the model deals with the existing conditions prior to and at the moment that the participants encountered a perceived ethical tension. Broadly these were themes of cumulative experience and the ethical ecology of the physical and organizational structures within which the encounter happens. The existing state of the person and the environment combine to shape behavior (Strange & Banning, 2015). The pre-encounter conditions are not a static point but are influenced by ongoing experience of the practitioner as well as changes in the physical and organizational environment. The cumulative experience and ethical ecology influence the schemas that advisors enact, their level of trust, as well as their habits of self-care. In this section, I explore the broad themes and their subthemes that make up this part of the model.

**Cumulative Experience**

Cumulative experience is a very broad category. There is an intuitiveness to this theme in the recognition that all humans are the sum of their experiences. Experiences shape the way that people see and understand the world and their work. Some participants expressed beliefs
that the foundations of ethics are shaped by moral development from infancy onward. If that is true, it is logical that advisors’ cumulative experience both within graduate school and within their practice shapes their sense of ethics – in other words ethical socialization is ongoing. Specifically, for advisors this includes the understanding of policy as well as their basic philosophy, approach, and habits of practice in advising. Several participants drew connections to graduate school preparation, previous careers, a significant mentoring relationship, or the communities in which they were raised as influential elements of their experience.

I asked each subject what they felt shaped their sense of ethics and morality. Isabel noted that, for her, these concepts have “Probably been…collectively, gathered over my entire life.” Aiden noted that “everyone has their own code of conduct” and that “it’s kind of an amalgamation” of various experiences. The elements of cumulative experience include prior professional experiences before becoming an advisor, time in advising, and experiences with students.

**Prior professional (non-advising) experiences.** Before becoming an academic advisor, Gavin was a financial planner during the Great Recession of 2008 and he felt like this greatly impacted his perspective relative to students and graduate school cohorts. In reflecting on his ethical process, Gavin noted that the “crisis conversation I was having with them [his financial clients] frames my conversations with students.” Similarly, Braden said:

If you’ve done it in the business world, it’s fairly easy to make that transition…the skills that I learned in business dealing with customers, dealing with clients, has helped me in the way that I deal with my students as an advisor.

Both Gavin and Braden are examples of how prior careers are re-contextualized and contribute to cumulative experience.
**Time in advising.** It follows logically that time in advising impacts cumulative experience. For example, Belle was new to advising and prefaced one of her dilemma stories by saying: “For me I have only been doing this for one and a half years. I haven’t come across anything like too crazy I would say.” In this case her dilemma was parental overreaching. Belle articulated how inexperience impacted her ways of discerning dilemmas when asked about the value of a centralized code of ethics:

Um, definitely, because I mean I would be interested in hearing what other people see as ethical issues and like, I guess there are things I face every day that I don’t even think is an ethical issue until I hear it from someone else…and I think having that code would be helpful for when we do come across those dilemmas on how to maybe approach them or suggestions of ways we could at least come to conclusions for ourselves on how to solve those problems.

Belle’s response was similar to Zach’s observation that a code “would be great for onboarding, great for training new staff.” Seeing the value of a code for training purposes was a common sentiment among participants who had been in the profession for more than a few years.

In contrast to Belle, Liam had been advising for longer than any other participant and upon reflecting on the source of his ethics, indicated that “an awful lot of where I am now comes from debating what should happen to this student or that student, you know.” Liam was also opposed to the idea of a centralized code of ethics because his experience had taught him that it was not necessary or useful to his practice of advising. Liam’s time in advising tied into his experience with students which was also an element of cumulative experience.

**Experience with students.** Advisors’ experience with students shaped the schemas (described below) that flow from cumulative experience. These schemas influenced the extent to which an advisor framed the dilemmas (the encounter phase in figure 4.1) as well as the path through the ethical tension to action or inaction (the response phase in figure 4.1). Evie’s
explanation of her ethical influences captures this component as it applies to cumulative experience well:

Just learning from others and experience with students in specific situations have been the most impactful on how my understanding of ethics works. Just scenarios that come up and studying those scenarios and understanding what’s going on with that – just to further develop my ability to understand what is going on with the ethical situation at hand. That’s pretty much it.

Evie added, “I was still pretty young and learning how to be professional at the time, I know now what I would say, but at the time, I just went through it.” Evie’s reflection on her dilemma story further illustrates the impact of this ongoing learning that is part of cumulative experience.

Cumulative experience draws upon prior non-advising careers, time as a professional advisor, and experience with students. It is foundational to how advisors encounter and navigate ethical dilemmas and tensions. Cumulative experience is interwoven with another thematic element, ethical ecology, in shaping the schemas operating at the moment of encounter with a dilemma.

**Ethical Ecology**

The ethical ecology of an advising office impacts how advisors understand and navigate ethical dilemmas. This concept draws from the work of Strange and Banning (2015) on Campus Ecology. Strange and Banning’s basic premise is drawn from Lewin’s (1936) observation that behavior is the function of the person and the environment. The ecology of an advising office can facilitate greater or lesser levels of trust, self-care, and role clarity. These in-turn lead to variable means and quality of consultation as well as awareness building, which are the primary mechanisms that my participants identified as ways of navigating an ethical tension. Here, I define ethical ecology as the environmental factors (which could include the physical environment, the organizational environments, and technology) that shape behavior of advisors.
Physical environment. The physical environment makes a place in which consultation is more or less convenient. For example, Isabel noted proximity to other resources as an important condition in her ethical process:

There is also being where I am physically in the location in the Success Center. My office space is right in between Career Services and the advising manager, so, and the Learning Center coordinator is right across the hall. This proximity allowed for ease of consultation in order to gather information and make referrals: “We often talk things out together or have a lot of sort of mentoring and collaboration advice from different viewpoints of different, you know, factors. It is probably part of the process.” The layout of office space facilitates collaboration.

For Ali, the physical layout of the advising space was a source of ethical tension. She described the problems with confidentiality stemming from the arrangement of cubicles in her office environment rather than private offices. Ali explained, “It’s very, very difficult to have a confidential conversation when two advisors are meeting with two different students and you can hear both conversations.” In this case, the environment causes an ethical problem that undoubtedly shapes the human interactions within the advising space. Ali noted that the advisors in this department would soon receive private offices. While Ali framed the cubicle arrangement as negatively affecting her practice, one foreseeable consequence of the move from cubicles to offices may be less awareness of the work of other advisors, which could heighten the need for consultation. Intertwined with physical space, the organizational environment is part of the ecology that influences advisors’ ethical practice.

Organizational environment. All organizations have a culture shaping the ways in which individuals interact within that organization (Strange & Banning, 2015). Several descriptors of “environment” and other ecological terms related to the people in the organization
were evident in the participants’ descriptions. Isabel said the following of the organizational environment at her institution: “with a good environment to encourage…better practices and good ethical decision making…I feel very supported in that kind of doing the right thing.” Isabel uses the ecological language of “environment” and connects the perception of working in a good environment to feeling supported in taking ethical actions. Her use of the pronoun “we” shows how she sees the environment as a collaborative space.

The organizational environment is shaped by the people within that environment functioning both as individuals and what Strange & Banning (2015) describe as “human aggregate”. In reflecting on the source of her ethics, Belle noted the importance of “the people I choose to surround myself with.” Ali had a unique vantage point to understand the people surrounding the advisor and to see how shared values relate to practice because her role involved working on two different campuses. One of the campuses saw “hand holding” as good service to students and the other team saw it is a failure to help students develop autonomy. The differing values of the staff on each campus highlighted an autonomy versus care tension in advising, and depending on the organizational environment influenced the perception of that tension.

Emma provided examples of the role of organizational environment in self-care, stating, “if the structure doesn’t line you up for happiness and talents, you either take it yourself or you don’t.” By “take it” Emma was expressing that her choice was to choose to remain in an organization that was not contributing to her wellness. Emma’s organizational environment did not support self-care in this case, and though she felt like she was doing good and ethical work, she was clear that it was not an ideal situation. Her perceived ethics happened in spite of the organizational ecology that surrounded her. As a woman of color, she had great awareness of the hierarchy of the structure she discussed in our interview. This influenced her behavior in regard
to information sharing: “I typically will, you know, follow the chain pretty tightly.” The organizational environment for Emma influenced how she felt about her work. Specifically, Emma’s environment impacted the extent to which she engaged in self-care, it served as a site of racism in how she felt treated by supervisors, and it led her to choose behaviors that honored hierarchy over her own ethical inclinations.

Gavin’s reflection on a dilemma with faculty provides a rich statement of how organizational environments facilitate and diminish ethical process and action:

I think just the nature of advising or any of these practices of working with people is inherently fraught with these ethical dilemmas…working with people is messy, it’s not clear cut….working with faculty, um, we know there is going to be politics that come into play and then there is faculty members who just can’t be in the same room with one another because of personality differences or things like that, which you know, you think shouldn’t be that way. We aren’t six years old. We know how to be in a room together, but that’s just the way things are. Egos come into play, and that is something we have to navigate and have to help the students navigate. So I think, I think it is something that as advisors we probably deal with more than we think that we deal with.

Gavin’s perspective captures the complexities of the different groups of people that are part of the organizational ecosystem. Similarly, Liam’s reflection on the state of professionalism in advising noted a tension that can exist between professional advisors and faculty in what he called “an unpleasant power differential” because “in some ways [advisors] are even less replaceable than an individual faculty member at the same time our actual status is really more of a box checker”. These examples show that organizational relationships of professional advisors and faculty members shape the framing of dilemmas and the dynamics of resolving them.

**Technological environment.** The technological component of advisor ecology has to do with how technologies shape behavior within the work of advising. McClellan (2007) argues that “technological” is a unique framework absent from NACADA’s concept of advising. The
importance of considering technology in relationship to ethics is best exemplified by Aiden’s explanation of his ethical influences:

Well, I guess . . . we use Starfish as our student interface, I guess, would be the best . . . I don’t know what the technical term is, and we keep notes on our advising interactions. So, there are some guidelines that our advising coordinating board has set down, and our campus-wide advising director has set down, as these are things that probably should not be put in – not putting in subjective things in the notes and trying to stay more with facts. I suppose that would be a document that I would look to as, obviously, looking at ethical things.

The computer system to which Aiden refers is a computer application for retention efforts. In this case, he identifies a specific ethical issue related to data privacy that comes from the technology. This connects to the organizational environment in how practices are determined within the organizational structure. It also takes the stance that there are knowable objective facts which are more legitimate for the purposes of student retention than the feelings and intuitions of the advisor. Another example of technology influencing the work of advisors was in how Ali had knowledge of a student’s death from social media which created tensions with the privacy policies of her organization. Like Aiden’s situation, technology was both the source of tension and an existing condition that shaped the behavior of advisor, students, and others.

The physical space surrounding the advisor, the organizational culture and dynamics of advising units and the technological environment of advising tools shape advisors behavior including how they respond to encounter, discern, and respond to ethical tensions. Taken together, cumulative experience and ethical ecology are existing conditions that inform advisors’ schemas, build or inhibit trust, and facilitate or diminish self-care. These three things are important themes that emerged for how advisors come into the moment of encounter. I explore each of these themes below.
Schemas

Ethical environment and cumulative experience are conditions that exist prior to the moment of encountering an ethical dilemma. Cumulative experience informs schemas, which are the cognitive shortcuts that advisors access in the moment they encounter a dilemma. Schemas are the knowledge and biases which shape advisors perceptions of advising practice based upon previous experiences. For example, an advisor might be working with a student-athlete struggling with depression and will draw upon the experiences of a past similarly situated student-athlete which may or may not be successful in meeting the needs of the current student. The advisor may have varying levels of conscious awareness of a particular schema. Schemas shape understanding and guide action.

Gavin’s reflection on his ethical process effectively demonstrates the automaticity of schemas. He explained that he does not have a conscious process upon encountering a dilemma, but that he sees his process like this:

Um, I am sure that there are subconscious things or things that I just automatically, like, do that… I don’t concretely think about, um. And part of it too is I mean, not that I have been doing this for a super long time, but I mean with, over the five/six years I have been advising there are patterns of behavior or things that you know. The same stories come up multiple times, I mean the details are a little bit different, but I get… behavior. Things that come up and I’m like “oh, I’ve seen this before;” I kind of can anticipate how the conversations are going to go.

Noticing patterns in this way allows advisors to identify dilemmas and tensions, but it may also cause advisors to automatically respond without seeing the tension of a particular situation.

Gavin noted that newer advisors notice the ease of his automatic responses to students, which he attributes to the confidence that comes from having years of previous experiences. Particularly in difficult student situations, Gavin reflects, “A lot of the kind of thick skin that I have with this work is from when I had that financial planning background or worked with my clients back in
2008.” Gavin’s example illustrates the connections of cumulative experience with schema in that his experience giving bad news for financial clients gave him a sense of confidence in his perception of having difficult conversations with students.

Furthermore, some participants expressed how schemas based on consciousness of mistakes impacted their practice. Aiden noted, “when a mistake is identified, obviously then trying to be more mindful of what you did wrong and what you should do in the future so that you can avoid making that mistake again.” Similarly, Evie explained her ethical process by saying:

For me it’s thinking of most case studies and I go back to them and use that information or situation at the time to . . . just basically think about how that compares to what’s going on if it happens again or if there is something similar going on. And learning from past experiences that help inform me of what to do in current or future situations.

However, when reflecting on the source of her ethics Evie stated that “I’m able to really understand and have great intuition about others,” which seems to draw the concept of schema back towards being more automatic than reflective.

Ali had a salient example of how she accessed schemas when trying to determine how much to allow a student to struggle. She used the metaphor of swimming, noting that she would not let a student drown, but that she would sometimes throw a student in the water to teach them to swim. I asked how she was able to determine when it was time to give a swimming lesson, and she provided this reflection:

It’s lucky that I’m not a new advisor and I…kind of gauge how many times are they emailing me, how many times are they coming into my office. Those students need more lessons than me just shoving them off. Some students, and it’s not to say that these are honor students either, just need to come in once a semester, get their registration number and off they go – they can figure it all out on their own. I have to gauge that – it’s hard, and I have to figure that out, especially in switching departments.
Though she notes student contact as a more concrete measure of readiness for autonomy, her confidence still derives from past experiences with other students that lead her to gauge student need by frequency of contact between her and the students.

As the most experienced participant, Liam very clearly relied upon schemas to guide his practice. In a discussion of unilaterally giving a registration override (i.e. without consultation of the department), I asked Liam how he got to the point in his career where he felt confident in side-stepping policies and processes. His response demonstrates how his judgments in past situations color his actions in this circumstance:

Right, so where you get there is, you know, is if you sit on enough committees and, you know, if you are in the system for long enough, you hear the rationalizations, and I don’t mean that in a defense mechanism sort of way. You hear the reasoning for why this policy or that policy exists, right? And some policies you hear are very thoughtful, right? And really take into account the institutions goals and the students’ needs. So you hear good ones. And then you also hear bad ones. Where it’s like well… sometimes there is no reason given. Sometimes there is a poor reason given. And so and if I don’t, if I can neither come up with nor be told a good reason and, especially if it is contrary to… rights and responsibilities kind of defined by the institution, I feel pretty comfortable saying, hey, this is the way you can do this thing. Again, I’m aware it is also something that is also supported by the institution or at least mechanically allowed by the institution.

In this passage, Liam explains how his experience of creating policy exceptions in the past influences his present actions. Later in our interview, Liam brought experience back to the instinctual level in reflecting on the necessity of trust in petitions processes. He stated, “the longer you do this the more you get used to people lying to you and you get better, at least I have found, the better I can tell whether somebody is just lying.” Liam’s wealth of cumulative experience as an advisor, likely in combination with his personality, seem to provide great confidence in acting upon schemas.

Schemas informed by the cumulative experiences of the practitioners is one facet of the pre-encounter condition. Schemas draw upon past interactions, past mistakes, and past policy
exceptions that shape awareness and understanding prior to and at the moment of encounter with a dilemma. Next, I explore the theme of trust that came from both cumulative experience and the environment of professional advisors.

**Trust**

Trust is an essential condition for effective consultation that seems to arise from or is reciprocal to affective harmony. The lack of trust is a source of dilemma and a potential impediment to resolving ethical tension. The participants in this study developed trust organically and informally within teams. Advisors can build or break down trust over time. There is some evidence in my data that trust building may be easier in more racially homogenous environments, and that trust may create comfort that limits criticality of a situation.

Personal connection seemed to be a foundation of trust in colleagues. When asked about how a trusting relationship developed with a close colleague, Belle responded:

Um, honestly it, I don’t know, I think when I first got here, she was one of the people who actually interviewed me…for my job. When I first got here we would go out to lunch sometimes. We ended up teaching an FYE course together. I guess just through lunch, yeah I think that would probably be the way I learned to trust her so much.

Later in the interview, Belle gave further explanation of what she saw as the causes of personal connection and trust:

Um, I think we all come from like very similar backgrounds. I think we have very similar personalities. I mean there is definitely things we like, we don’t always agree on. We have differences. But for the most part, I mean, we are just helpers. Like we just really want, to help and see the best for our students. Stuff like that. We are just always on the same page when it comes to things like that.

Belle clearly sees homogeneity in regard to shared values in approaching students as contributing to an environment where she could trust her co-workers.

In contrast, Emma and Evie described environments where differences inhibited trust. Emma and Evie identify as women of color and both described encounters in the workplace that
gave rise to conditions where they did not have trust. These examples highlight how cumulative experience and organizational ecology tie into trust. Evie explained how she came to not trust her previous supervisor:

Her approach was not coaching as much as it was micro-managing and you could sense the power trip, kind of, with that. And so, I didn’t feel supported; I didn’t feel like I was guided in any way. It was more like, “You need to do this job and this is what your job is.” There was no discussion about how it could improve or . . . what my strengths are or how they could be utilized or anything like that.

Then when encountering a dilemma in which her previous supervisor asked her to act beyond the bounds of her training, Evie explained:

My problem was that I didn’t trust my supervisors, my immediate supervisor and her supervisor at the time, to know what they were doing. So, it was kind of like should I even say anything or will it make a difference? Will it change the outcome? I kind of felt pressure just to go through with it because I had no power at the time to say anything. So, yeah, a fairly uncomfortable feeling – just mostly that.

Emma described racial tensions with past supervisors that inhibited her trust. Despite these examples of challenges related to trust with past supervisors, both Emma and Evie felt a level of trust with their current positions, but with those who occupied the same place in the hierarchy rather than with supervisors and others in higher positions.

Liam had a unique statement on how trust factored into granting students exceptions to academic policy. In reflecting upon the process of a committee of professionals reviewing student petitions, Liam noted that:

Ideally trust plays as little a role as possible. Honestly. So, you know, the longer you do this the more you get used to people lying to you and you get better, at least I have found, the better I can tell whether somebody is just lying. Right? Especially if they are like 18 and don’t have a lifetime of lying to people under their belts.

Liam’s perspective in this passage reflects both his personality as well as his long experience as an advisor. It also is based upon his prior experiences and the ecology of his current and
previous institutions. This is an example of how the model functions as a loop, in that Liam’s wealth of past encounters led him to a perspective on trust.

Trust comes from relationships with people within the environment and becomes important in the discernment phase of the emerging model. Trust holds a place of importance because it facilitates or inhibits the extent to which advisors engage in consultation with one another. One other important condition related to how people can understand the encounter phase and engage with the discernment phase is their level of self-care.

Self-Care

For the purposes of this study, I define self-care as the activities of work-life balance that create or diminish ideal conditions in which to encounter and navigate dilemmas. Participants’ cumulative experience and the environment in which they work contribute to self-care behaviors. Like other pre-encounter conditions these are not static but they do exist before and at the moment of encounter. Recent works of popular psychology and behavioral economics explore how morality and willpower relate to various facets of self-care because of how human physiology influences decision making (Ariely, 2010; Ariely, 2012; Baumeister & Tierney, 2012). In this study, various participants raised self-care as a topic but it was not a specific line of inquiry despite the fact that I did not ask any explicit questions about self-care.

Most explicitly, Emma called self-care an ethical issue, noting the tension in her past supervisor’s verbal support of self-care that was inconsistent with work load expectations and laudatory comments about what Emma saw as the poor boundary setting between work-life and home-life. In her dilemma story, Evie’s situation where her supervisor pushed her into having a conversation that was beyond the scope of her role as an advisor, she also referenced boundaries:

Well, I care about others, I care about the student and how he’s doing. I used that focus, or that lens, to talk to him about why it’s important to be aware and that we care about
him and want to make sure he’s okay, and give him an opportunity to talk to somebody who wants to listen. But, I don’t think I was doing the best. . . I don’t think the student was being served in the best way. So, that was always in the back of my mind as I’m going to get through this, I’m going to make the student feel okay, but I’m not okay. And also, just de-escalating, making sure it doesn’t get worse. Sometimes that’s all students need is someone to talk to and listen. So, that was my approach – but making sure that there were boundaries there too.

In this instance, she acted out of care for the student but with great challenge to her self-care.

This idea of boundary setting was part of Evie’s understanding of self-care and likely related to dilemmas of role clarity.

Zach provided a succinct connection between ethical action and self-care when asked for final thoughts on how he engages in ethical practice:

If your bucket is empty, how can you help fill another’s bucket? So, making sure you’re taking care of yourself so you can take care of others is important. . . I would imagine if you are overtired, are you able to do your best work, and how ethical is that when you’re not able to give your best to every student. Yeah, that could be a consideration.

Like Evie’s expression of care for the student, Zach observes that effective care for others requires intentional care for self.

Julia brought up self-care when talking about her ethical influences. She learned the importance of self-care from an early career mentor who drew the connections between caring for self and caring for others:

So I had a really strong mentor for advising, which I would say kind of opened me, opened my eyes in a sense to the way that, to things, we needed to consider in this work….I learned a lot just about caring for others and also self-care from her and ways to kind of find a balance particularly I think at that first example being an academic advisor with my peers.

She refers here to the demands of being a peer advisor (an undergraduate advisor to undergraduates) for an honors program. This is an example of how the environment places demands on an advisor and how Julia’s cumulative experience framed those as a need for self-care.
Prior to the encounter of a dilemma, advisors bring a variety of cumulative experiences with students and the practice of advising. This cumulative experience interacts with the environments in which advisors encounter ethical tensions. Based upon these pre-existing conditions of cumulative experience and environment, advisors have schemas to access, varying levels of trust in colleagues, and engage in self-care to a greater or lesser extent and in ways that influence decision making. These thematic elements exist as dynamic pre-encounter conditions that an advisor brings into the point of encounter.

**Encounter**

Next, I explore the moment when participants encountered what they perceived as a dilemma or ethical tension. I define encounter as the time when the practitioner became aware of a perceived ethical tension or dilemma. This could be an instantaneous moment encountering an incident or it could be a longer encounter where an advisor comes to a slow realization that a situation presents an ethical tension. In this section, I begin by focusing on the moment of perception as a nexus of cognitive and affective dissonance. I asked my participants to assess the extent to which their ethical tensions were cognitive, affective, or both. Answers varied but participants used more affective than cognitive language in describing the moment of encountering ethical tensions. After exploring the cognitive affective nexus, I organize the subsequent sections into subheadings based upon the sources of tensions that emerged from my data analysis which included: care, policy, timing, role clarity, advocacy, and fidelity to autonomy (see table 4.2).
Table 4.2

*Focused Coding of Named Tensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Ethical Tension</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>A principle or virtue that guides practice, usually with the student's best interest in mind. It is related to why some said they even came to advising or others said advisors &quot;must be&quot;.</td>
<td>What support to offer a student struggling with alcoholism without crossing into enabling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Perceived rules and practices set forth by an institution that advisors sometimes perceive to be at odds with the student’s interest either individually or for specific subgroups of students. It could be formal or informal, related to students or not</td>
<td>Does an advisor make an exception to a registration policy (set forth by the faculty) in order to do what best serves the student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Timing</td>
<td>The limitations of the deliberation – response that add pressure to a situation that advisors will perceive as a tension</td>
<td>Does an advisor agree to give a student a reference when they ask you the day before it is due?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Clarity</td>
<td>Tensions that arise from mixing or ambiguous roles advisors play with students, faculty and staff</td>
<td>Should an advisor address concerning behavior in class or should that fall to a trained mental health professional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Advocacy</td>
<td>Actions that are intended to best serve a student in light of bureaucratic systems, policies, and processes (in some cases because they are designed to serve institutional interests at conflict with that which advisors see as the interests of an individual student or specific population of students).</td>
<td>How does an advisor respond to a student who expects higher completion of requirements from their transfer credits? Does the advisor have a response to the institution?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cognitive Affective Nexus

In attempting to understand how professional academic advisors discern the presence of an ethical dilemma or problem, I was particularly interested in whether or not advisors perceive ethical tensions as more of a thought or feeling. As participants told their dilemma stories, I asked if their awareness of the dilemma was more cognitive or more affective. My data reveal more feelings than thoughts (or purely cognitive responses). However, seven total participants named the tensions as both cognitive and affective. This nexus of affective and cognitive dissonance as a marker of ethical tension is an important finding for understanding the point of encountering a dilemma.

The language participants used tended to be expressive of emotion (e.g. “feeling,” “felt,” “worry”), but some described their encounter moment as something not making sense as a thought. However, the description of encounter was not always clearly a conflict of thought or feeling, but was often both or one leading to the other. For example, though much of her awareness of dilemmas came through emotion (worry) in her particular dilemma story, Julia made this observation about the cognitive and affective connection of encountering ethical tension:

I think it can be both…it is hard for me to say it is entirely one or the other…I think it is hard to separate them entirely. I think that it can be more one or the other depending on the situation, but I do not often think that it is entirely one or the other.

Another layer of complexity is obvious in Julia’s reflection on whether literature of advising influenced her actions when she explained “I do not think I was actively aware of thinking about that at the time. It was just more knowing that this was something that required additional help that I wasn’t going to be able to provide.” This idea of “just more knowing” is a complicated nexus of cognitive and affective dissonance in the moment of ethical tensions.
“Knowing” becomes a problem for understanding an ethical situation. It seems unlikely that all feelings of tension represent a genuine ethical dilemma, nor do all gaps in cognitive understanding. Advisors told stories of dilemmas in which no clear conflict of principles or conflicts within a principle were obvious, but rather described emotionally challenging situations. For example, multiple participants raised student mental health as a topic in discussing dilemmas. However, for participants, the tension around this topic stemmed from a feeling that they were not in the role they saw as most helpful to the students (i.e., mental health counselor). This is not an explicitly ethical issue. These seemed to be the stories that stuck with advisors because of the perceived risks and emotional magnitude. Braden explained why he thought it was such a common topic related to ethics and how it fit with advising:

Well, I think it’s fitting . . . it’s a pretty high-risk situation. On the one hand, you’ve got the student and they’re paying a lot of money for tuition and they have the pressure and stress to perform well in a discipline like engineering. It’s pretty high stakes. There’s course requirements that have pre-requisites. One bad grade can negatively impact your GPA, so I think from the standpoint of the student, there’s plenty of opportunity for mental health issues to come up. I also think that given this generation of student, I think that they’re not used to specifically handling these situations on their own and they’re put in that situation at the university maybe for the first time. It may be their first time away from home, so without the safety net of their parents, they can feel very stressed, very frightened. I think that plays out for them certainly in depression and anxiety. We do have mechanisms on campus to help students deal with that, but they have to take the first step. We’re not following them around with a big piece of bubble wrap to insulate them, they’ve got to be willing to take that chance that somebody out there might be able to help them – and that’s very risky for them.

Braden’s explanation of tensions regarding advisee’s mental health describes both cognitive issues (e.g. GPA, high cost) as well as the emotional labor advisors face when encountering depressed students (e.g. helping students cope with stress and fear).

Several themes emerged as the points in which ethical tensions reside. Themes of care, policy, anticipated consequences, time sensitivity, role clarity, and best advocacy were present as the sources of ethical tension and part of its resolution. These themes had points of overlap. For
example, advocacy could be seen as care in action, likewise tensions in policy could relate to the
timing of a request. However, the themes could also function as conflicts of stand-alone virtues
(e.g. as how do I render the best care for a student?) or as principles (e.g. what is the right way to
adhere to this policy?).

Care

Care is a value, principle, or virtue that guides the practice of advising. It typically
means acting with the student's perceived best interest in mind, though it can be more
complicated. For some participants care was so foundational as a value that rendering care is
what drew them to the role of professional advisor. One participant claimed that to be an
advisor, one "must be" caring. Julia explained how ingrained care was in the work of advising,
stating, “I think, I mean a lot of the reason that I choose to do this work I think is about caring”
and described her early career socialization with a mentor by saying, “I learned a lot about just
caring for others.” Liam related care to being a part of the process of students hoping for the
future, and said of advisors: “you are definitely going to be bad at your job if you don’t care.”

Similarly, Braden saw compassion and the fact that he cared as his strength as an advisor,
though he also valued his ability to be “brutally frank.” He also said that “you have to like
students” when working as an advisor. Evie explained her process for getting through a dilemma
with a student by first noting, “Well, I care about others; I care about the student and how he’s
doing. I used that focus, or that lens, to talk to him about why it’s important to be aware and that
we care about him and want to make sure he’s OK.” She explained the values guiding her
practice by saying that she wishes to “be that connection for them on campus that they might not
have anywhere else.” In a later response she provided examples of what she saw as the role of
advisors: “We enforce policies, we listen to students. I’m working with a student right now who
is literally losing his mind. I’m trying to make sure he gets help.” These were among numerous expressions of care that framed dilemma stories for all of the participants.

Care plays a part in the framing of dilemmas. In particular, advisors would identify situations as dilemmas based on the emotional labor of caring. Braden, for example, noted:

Where I struggle a little bit is emotionally there is . . . I feel compassion for a student and I don’t want them to be hurting. And so, that part of it, for me, is a little bit tough sometimes. I mean, I get over it and I don’t let it impinge my ability to give them good advice, but sometimes it’s just sad.

Similarly, Julia described knowing she was facing a dilemma in the worry that she felt for a particular student. Zach rationalized bending a registration procedure in part to “ease” a student’s pain. Isabel described a limitation of advisors, noting, “we can’t do the work for all the students.” These emotional cues are part of the encounter with the dilemma related to care.

Dilemmas can be about determining the most caring resolution or they can put what an advisor perceives as the most care for the student in conflict with another principle. For example, Gavin reflected upon how to proceed when a student repeatedly sought exceptions to the withdrawal policy:

And then next semester we had a repeat of the same behavior. And then now we are getting the situation that okay, how often do we repeat this cycle and work with the situation. Um, [because] now we are stuck in, um, this is, I mean is this student getting support? Is it helping the student to continue the cycle? Um, do we ask for additional documentation? If the student is withdrawn, they are no longer able to use the counseling services on campus, but is it, it’s, so what’s the best case for the student.

Here Gavin asks questions in weighing how care for the student, or “the best case,” fits within the possibilities of the policy. Similarly, Aiden weighed out what is best for the student in completing a degree against how compliance with a policy might teach the right lessons for the student in a meritocratic society:

Am I going to go and tell the Office of Admissions that hey, this student didn’t submit this one transcript from this institution nor did they ever tell you that they went there, and
then destroy that relationship with that student…Or, is the student going to be honest about it and come forward when you present them how that’s not necessarily a good practice to be in from an ethical standpoint.

This is an example of where Aiden felt a conflict of care versus fidelity to policy.

Care can also hold tension with truth-telling. Julia discussed how care was seen differently with the community college counselors with whom she worked that tended toward more “hand holding.” Leyton felt a need to present all of the options even when he did not believe that the option the student desired was the best option, noting, “while I don’t have very much faith in the student based on how they presented previously, it is an option for them so I need to present it for them.” Braden had a view that care requires difficult conversations where one does not allow students to hide from an issue, even if students experienced negative emotions as a result of being “found out”. In this situation, Braden also articulates a tension between care and autonomy:

I’m really frustrated. I mean, I would like . . . it’s my nature to want to help, but at a certain point, I feel like I’m being taken advantage of. The willingness to help, the enthusiasm to help starts to wane and so . . . yeah, that’s kind of where I am with this student right now.

So, there is a delicate balance in respecting autonomy and rendering care.

Moreover, Gavin talked about having to balance rapport with a student, rendered through care, and telling them what will and will not result in the desired outcome:

I mean because I can tell them what is not going to be approved, but that, again, it is their individual experience. I mean if I tell them that, they are not going to come back for an advising session or they are just going to immediately be shut down from advising and not come back when they need help.

Liam noted the difficulty in not just doing whatever the student wants. He felt that he had witnessed advising centers that operated under the practice of appeasing students’ wants, but found the more deliberative approach better. This illustrates a connection between moment of
encounter, care, and the ethical ecology of advising centers. Isabel reflected this ethical ecology and care connection in discussing her ethical process: “I would always say there is a lot of shared compassion and passion for helping students and everyone is very student centered.” She perceived her environment as an ethical and caring one.

One way in which advisors expressed care was through a commitment to hearing students. Gavin observed, “it is kind of listening to their individual experiences…valuing their experience.” Care in action through things like hearing students and truth-telling are evident at ethical encounters as sources of cognitive and affective tension, as well as themes of response toward resolution of tensions.

In summary, care for some participants was advisors’ raison d’etre. Advisors can have conflicts of how best to render an action of care or the determining the most caring action, as well as times when the action they see as most caring is in conflict with another theme of ethical tension. One site of this tension is when and advisors perceive the caring action in conflict with policy.

Policy

Participants in my study described numerous ethical tensions involving policy. I coded references to both formal policy as well as examples in which participants felt they were supposed to follow a particular practice even if the source of that expectation was informal. Policy could come from various sources including supervisors, school or colleges within the universities, upper administrators, and governments. Advisors experienced tension related to exceptions to policies about registration, course pre-requisites, academic standing, internal office procedures, and academic program requirements. The source of tension arises from advisor’s perception of policy in the moment of encounter.
It is logical that policy creates the ethical tension because of the expectation that advisors follow the rules even in potentially complicated situations. In discussing sources of ethical guidance, Evie explained how policy, more than an ethical code, consciously frames ethical issues:

It’s hard for me to say because it’s such a broad thing…could be, that I’m not thinking of as specifically related to ethics, but we have plenty of policies in place that if you wanted to put an ethical lens on it we could [talk] about policies that inform students on when they should graduate or what they’re allowed to do when it comes to repeating courses – what is the background for that and is it ethical?

The ethical tension can exist in the implementation of policy relative to the intention of the policy. Julia specifies policy in explaining sources of ethical tension as “differences in understanding of…[how] policies, you know, [are] implemented [is a] space where some of that tension lives with colleagues.” Julia’s observation highlights that inconsistency in implementing policies can be within an individual advisor’s practice or in different advisors taking differing interpretations of policy – both are a source of tension.

Policy provides a baseline of the job and is particularly helpful for practitioners new to advising. Policy can be a formal starting point for bringing the moment of encounter into focus, as Isabel, who had only been an advisor for one year noted:

I guess, the part of the process is if I don’t know the policy, you know, I’ll first try to research it on my own. If it is an interpretation issue, you know, I’ll reach out to somebody else to get, you know, another opinion. So that’s kind of the process, I guess, when there is something I’m not sure of how to answer or how to handle.

This passage shows us that advisors develop an understanding of policy from other staff members. They seek wisdom in both policy interpretation and circumvention – a connecting point between encounter and discernment phases of the emerging model.

Advisors’ concern for student achievement, development, and wellbeing can form a tension point between care and policy. When a successful student did not follow the
expectations of disclosing poor past performing transcripts on their admissions application, Gavin felt tension in how to follow the policy in a way that would serve the student and the institution. Aiden had a similar dilemma related to transcript obfuscation, noting the desire to help the student: “I know you want to support the student and you want them to put their best foot forward in whatever they’re doing, but certainly they need to be upfront and honest about their academic records as well.” These perspectives illustrate a point where policy adherence or circumvention meets care.

The sources of policy are numerous and sometimes at odds with one another. Liam described a situation where a department created a policy to circumvent a larger institutional policy, and advisors acted to then circumvent the departmental policy in order to best serve students. Leyton’s encounter with a student facing conscription in another country is an example of how the policy of foreign countries impact the best advice advisors can give to students.

Advisors in my study were skeptical of policies and policy exceptions that are not scale-able to the entire student body. Emma expressed frustration at the granting of exceptions to policy on an individual level:

In terms of my practices if I get an unethical window or hole, for instance someone gave the student all these exceptions that they should not have had…they just should not have had at all, … I like to graduate students and I like to be a part of getting it done, but if someone, and we clearly see it documented over and over again, someone has told you this, and you decided never to do it and now you are making fuss about it. And we clearly have documented that you decided never to do it. And someone else just above us just goes and does it. And I say “us” because advisors, we are getting so pooped upon.

Similarly, Julia said specifically: “I think in specific kinds of advising situations…an exception to a policy is going to be made for some reason, I think it is important to ask, you know, would we make this policy [exception] for any student?” Julia described a scenario where a department retroactively implemented a policy for the entire institution without consideration of the impact
on advising. Julia and her colleagues struggled in explaining to students a situation that did not make sense, and to deal with the affective tension of students having what amounted to added requirements for graduation. In this situation the academic department faculty thought they were acting out of equity by retroactively implementing a policy for the entire student body. However, Julia did not see it as a solution that best served each individual student.

Some participants described ethical conflicts relating to policy as more cognitive than affective. Aiden notes the cognitive nature of policy in this reflection on whether or not his awareness of the dilemma was more thought or feeling:

I guess it’s probably more of a conflict of the head for me. But, given my background, I tend to sit on facts and policy rather than really getting torn up about it emotionally, although it does come into my frame of reference now having been an advisor for as long as I have. I’ve seen some situations where the student is just getting the raw deal at the end of that and you don’t want that to happen to them, but what else can you do? The policy has been set down for a purpose and if you’re going to apply it evenly, ethically you kind of have to do that. I guess that’s where my mind goes when it comes to ethics.

This passage also highlights the point at which the cognitive and affective come together for Aiden as an advisor. He is concerned for the treatment of students despite the policy, and this is the point in which Aiden discerns the dilemma – it is his encounter.

Similarly, Evie had a situation where she had to weigh out a graduation timeline policy versus a student’s desire for a second major. Evie’s institution created the policy based on financial aid requirements. However, there was a loophole in which Evie could simply ignore the policy and the student could then seek an exception when other offices within the university noticed the non-compliance. In this situation Evie experienced the point of encounter as cognitive. Conversely, Ali felt a more affective conflict of policy in the requirements and limitations of disclosure in the situation of a student death. She could only talk about the death within a “chain of command” within her college, but others were asking her for information. Ali
felt unable to meet the needs of others or her own sense of grief in respecting institutional policies around non-disclosure of a student death.

Some participants noted the ways in which policy was sometimes in conflict with student development. Zach had a reflection about the ways policy did or did not fit with student development:

Yeah, so I think that [whether or not you view students as adults] changes your approach in not just your daily practice but also in the policy creation and implementation and how do you view the students, whether they are legally adults but they are the same age as kids.

Ali felt ethical tension within her department when a peer advisor (an undergraduate student worker) blatantly violated academic policy. Her director allowed the student to remain in a position of prestige and authority. The director’s actions raised concerns for Ali in regard to the ethical development of the student and other students. Moreover, Braden expressed frustration at the ways in which students adhered to the withdrawal policy strategically to avoid suspension. This allowed his advisees to avoid consequences which may have furthered their development.

Similarly, policy conflicting with care was a common source of ethical tension. Gavin explained this tension explicitly while reflecting upon his ethical process:

I think throughout all of this, with any of these ethical judgment calls with the student, or for any advisor, it’s, what we are always keeping in mind is what’s the best case for the student. Um, and I, and usually that’s where these dilemmas come into play, is how to navigate between what is within our role, what’s within our capabilities, what’s within what we can do, what’s the best case for the student. I mean that is why we are an advisor, because we want to support the student. Um, why we are in the helping professionals that we are. And sometimes we are constrained by institutional politics, institutional policies, um, and we are bound by certain things.

Zach expressed a similar sentiment about care versus policy dilemmas:

When you’re working directly with a student you have to approach the situation differently than when you are creating or evaluating policy. I don’t think it’s a tension that will ever leave advising as a profession. But, making sure that when that policy is
being created, or implemented, that the people that do that direct work have a voice in the process.

Earlier in the interview, Zach attributed a knowledge of sociology as a strength in helping students navigate this type of bureaucracy. This sociological lens led Zach to see the permanence of this tension between care and policy, but with the observation that advisors ought to have a voice in policy.

In summary, policy is a unique theme within participants stories of ethical tensions. Advisors in my study described situations wherein they went out of their way to adhere to policies as well as to circumvent policies. Relative to other themes participants described policy tensions as more cognitive than affective, but advisors often had feelings or qualitative assessments of the rightness or wrongness of a policy. Policy can present tensions with other ethical interests such as caring and other aims such as student development. Policy can also be in conflict with other policies leaving advisors to navigate conflicting directives. Encounters of policy along with rendering care are often impacted by the constraints of time.

Timing

The timing of encounter with an ethical tension and need for resolution of that tension influences the deliberation and action. This is a logical condition of decision making and present in various ways within advisor’s stories. Timing can also be part of why an advisor perceives a situation as a dilemma. At times, advisors must make decisions in the moment when working with a student that changes the experience of the tension and the ability to deliberate. One advisor viewed length of time for deliberation as a point of wisdom, but another felt less need for deliberation as their career progressed. Time could alter perspective on a situation, meaning if a long time had passed since the source of the ethical tension, advisors perceived it differently than if it had just happened. Finally, one advisor explicitly observed that rendering care took time.
Leyton shared a story about a student asking for a recommendation at the last minute that exemplifies the timing theme very well. The advisee was not seemingly well prepared for graduate studies, but asked Leyton to complete a recommendation form for early admission to a graduate program. In this situation, Leyton had little time for contemplation or to engage in truth-telling with the student. Leyton specifically noted timing as the source of the dilemma:

I was not sure that she was actually going to go through with it. And then when she did go through with it [applying to an accelerated early-entry graduate program], there was not really much time to discuss that. And so, I think it became a dilemma because we were dealing with deadlines for the application, as well as preparing to register for the next semester. I think the timing of it really made it a dilemma.

Advisors often face deadlines based upon the academic calendar as well as ill-timed requests from students. Leyton was a gatekeeper for the student’s future academic plans, while needing to weigh justice against beneficence with little time to engage in contemplation.

Another challenge advisors face in timing is when to offer a particular piece of advice. Isabel reflected upon when it was okay to suggest that a student consider attending a community college. She felt it was a lack of fidelity to the institution’s retention goals to come right out and suggest that a student withdraw. However, she explained that “as things progress through the advising, there are those occasions where, you know, it truly is a good time to recommend that option to them.” In this circumstance, timing was related to both Isabel’s assessment of student readiness as well as a progression of academic decline that allowed her to give advice for withdrawal without feeling as though she was betraying fidelity to her institution.

Timing seemed to alter perspective on dilemmas. For example, Gavin described a situation in which he questioned what action was most ethical in part because of the length of time that had elapsed. Similarly, Liam explained that whether or not individual advisors granted exceptions or a committee granted exceptions “had to do with … the magnitude of the exception
and the recency of the exception.” Similarly, Emma saw disclosure of evidence for mis-advising as ill-timed if it was beyond the point where she or others could rectify the situation. In this case, Emma’s value on truth-telling was overridden by non-maleficence, in that she saw disclosure of the unchangeable past as harming the student and the advising relationship with the student. Julia described a similar tension when discovering mis-advising in fidelity to colleagues versus truth-telling to students. Like Emma, Julia’s resolution was inaction based upon timing.

Advisors described three additional features of timing. First, Leyton explained a time factor that the duration of tension is different with student dilemmas than with staff dilemmas. He said: "The ethical tensions I’ve felt with co-workers or faculty members, I think, have felt less resolved.” Second, Gavin acknowledged that the level of care he provides his students takes time to render and that the length of the relationship with the student also matters for care. Emma had a similar observation about time and care when she lamented her lack of time to give to her adult-learners. A final and important observation about timing was exemplified by Evie’s belief that her slower deliberation came with experience, noting, “I also take my time before making a decision, which is not something I always did either. I’m just basically learning from past mistakes and what has happened when I don’t do those things.” This is a point of connection with how timing in the encounter connects to pre-encounter cumulative experience as well as functioning as a means of discernment (e.g. taking time or slowing down).

Timing like other themes is a source, site, and resolution of ethical tension. An ethical tension can stem from the timing of a request or the timing of when to act. An advisor might face tension in knowing when to act because of related tension in what action is warranted by their role. This need for role clarity encapsulates a separate theme.
Role Clarity

Participants experienced ethical tension when their role or the role of others was not clearly delineated, in addition to when they were asked to operate outside of their defined role. Participants points of conflict related to various issues including student mental health problems, petition processes, and communication with faculty. Gavin made a summative statement that captures this tension: “where these dilemmas come into play, is how to navigate between what is within our role, what’s within our capabilities, what’s within what we can do, what’s the best case for the student.” Advisors felt conflict related to role clarity when they anticipated that their limitations and the limitations of the institution would not lead to a desired outcome.

Concern for student mental health was a common issue in which advisors felt ethical tension. Julia expressed an understanding of the differences between mental health counselors and academic advisors, but was frustrated by the limits of what she could know about the care a student might be receiving from a mental health counselor. Braden expressed frustration with the pattern of students with mental health diagnoses working with him but not following through on connecting with a therapist. Leyton had a background in mental health counseling and noted how that informed his advising practice:

So, I think in my role I tend to . . . I can see how this feels like big stress to you now, but I can also see how this is going to continue piling up for you. And, I’ve seen how this is likely to impact you in the future. I feel like I really try to push for that more with students for that reason.

Leyton has knowledge that is beyond the scope of his job that helps him in his role, but he also is clear that his role is not the same as that of a mental health counselor.

One of Evie’s dilemma stories had to do with a conflict of role in which her supervisor asked that she meet with a student for the purposes of a mental health concern:
That school also had counselors there and I say that because at one time, a student wrote something in a class that was very disturbing and concerning to others. But, for some reason, they wanted that student to meet with me about it. I have zero counseling background, I don’t know how to handle a student who is writing things that are strange and disconcerting and . . . maybe threatening to the instructor.

In this situation Evie explained that “I tried my best to work with him, to point out to him why it was not appropriate to write that. But, again, that’s not my training or background at all.” When asked whether this was a cognitive or affective conflict for her, Evie reflected specifically about how understanding her role made that conflict what it was: “A lot of both. I felt conflicted, but also paying attention to my role at the same time. What is my role? Is this what I should be doing? Is this a conversation she should be having with me?” In this case Evie seems to have understood her role with clarity and her limitations with regard to addressing a student’s mental health, but her former supervisor pushed her beyond that point.

Participants offered numerous examples of role clarity related to faculty. Ali reflected on how she felt that faculty often do not understand the role of advising:

It’s amazing that people, including faculty, don’t realize it [the role of advisors] and they don’t realize how much students actually do see us for who we are and what we do, and trust us. It’s just amazing to me that faculty don’t . . . and some of them don’t even realize, as advisors, what we actually do and what we have to deal with. I mean, sometimes we’re a counselor, sometimes we’re mom.

Braden saw this tension point with faculty not understanding roles differently than Ali, he stated: “I feel it really helps my role as an advisor to understand where faculty are coming from and to have that in my toolkit as a way of addressing issues that students have.” In regard to faculty, Belle stated that “I never want to overstep my boundaries, especially with people who have been at the institution so much longer than I have.” Aiden noted that advisors should not steer students away from “bad professors.” Aiden’s belief about steering students could be a situation where fidelity to faculty is in conflict with truth-telling. Other than Aiden’s fidelity issue, the
named tensions with faculty may not be of an ethical nature so much as a frustration within the work of advising.

At times advisors encounter role clarity issues in distinguishing their duties from those of other departments. For example, Evie expressed concern over sharing graduation tracking duties with the registrar’s office in order to further timely graduation and how that blurred the lines of advising work versus registrar’s work. Other participants shared stories that involved admissions decisions outside of the scope of their role as advisor, but which drew them into difficult ethical issues. The organizational structures within the institution seem to create expectations of clear role definition that leads to dissonance with the reality of practices. In other words, it is the expectation of other departments that advisors will perform certain roles that are potentially at odds with how advisors understand their role.

Various duties require advisors to play multiple roles internally that sometimes conflict because they have fidelity to both student and institution. Liam offered reflections on the multiple roles that an advisor plays in hearing students’ petitions:

That advisor, who knows the student better than anybody else at the institution generally has to make a call. So, um, that, that setup of hearing a student’s petition, potentially being that student’s advocate within the institution, but also as the…officer of the court or the representative of the institution…You also have to have your eye on the overall quality of … what we produce [educated students]. So that’s a very common ethical dilemma.

For Liam, role clarity means having clarity in the messiness of multiple roles and relationships with students and the institution.

Another source of tension in role clarity is related to advisor’s awareness of the limitations of advising as well as the limitations of their institutions. Gavin observed:

I want to support the student, but this student is making decisions that we know are poor, but there is only so much we can do. There is only so much she can do. So this is, it’s one of those how much can we support the student. Is it institutionally we are setting the
student up for failure?” With some ethical challenges, there is the question of what lengths an advisor might have gone to for a different outcome.

In reflecting on the suicide of a student, Julia pondered: “Because there is still that part of like oh, could we have done more?” This is an example of questioning the end point of the work of advising and relates role clarity to the theme of care.

Overall, role clarity had to do with the relationships of advisors to other constituents and the tasks assigned to them by their institutions. Participants described tension points where expectations of their roles were unclear as sources of both cognitive and affective dissonance. One role that advisors may or may not take on is that of advocate.

**Advocacy**

Another dimension of ethical tension for advisors is in determining the best advocacy for a student. I coded actions that advisors took to best serve a student in light of bureaucratic systems, policies, and processes that complicate care or rendered harm as advocacy. In some cases advisors advocate for the interests of an individual student, and in others, for specific population of students.

Isabel had a clear statement of how she saw advisors role as that of an advocate:

Students will come to us out of community college and um, “what’s my path”, you know and I always know as an advisor, that I’m the student’s advocate. So, I’m always trying to see what’s the best for students and I’m always aware that time and money are both big factors for students. So an ethical dilemma is, you know, do I keep them here for four gen eds or do I tell them “yeah, go ahead back to community college” and um “those gen eds will transfer here at a third of the cost.”

The situation Isabel describes here illustrates the tension between student and institution in which advisors serve as advocates for students. Gavin also explained this tension in saying, “advisors, we are the gray area, but we are here to 1. kind of enforce University policies, but then also 2. be the advocate for the students, you know translate the University to the student, um and
vice versa.” Gavin’s statement highlights the way that advisors advocate within the institution on behalf of the student while helping the students understand the institution.

Sometimes advocacy meant reaching out to others on behalf of the student. Aiden, for example, reached out to academic advisors on other campuses within his university system to determine rules related to “academic bankruptcy” for an individual student. Belle described a situation in which she tried to assist a student with a professor conflict and went to a curriculum director on the student’s behalf as an advocate. Julia said, “I think it is a tension for sure. In my recent work as a transfer counselor I advocate for transfer students across campus, and have learned in the last few years that many faculty don’t quite understand why someone would transfer.” These examples demonstrate the connection between advocacy and role, which is that advisors choose advocate as a role. For instance, advisors may not formally be charged or trained to provide academic support services, but may choose to advocate on behalf of students to those with the power to bring these services into place.

Furthermore, participants frequently discussed how granting policy exceptions was a point of tension that advocacy could sometimes alleviate. This how this theme functions within the phases of encounter, discernment, and response. Emma explained that whenever someone above her in the hierarchy made an exception for a “privileged individual,” she would seek out as many other students as she could to make the same exception.

But me and my students, I took all those exceptions they gave that woman and every time I was reviewing things for graduation and things like that, I made an exception for like 25 people. I made a whole list and I said this is what you’re doing for this one student. I want to give the [other] students this particular credit, and I looked through all their stuff and just took the time and like gave the class for all these students. Anything that I could possibly do. And I gave like 20 students all these like wiped away classes. One after another after another… And that’s what I do. I find exceptions. Like, if you are going to do this, then let’s do this.
This was a way of engaging in ethical reasoning about systemic exceptions that exemplifies the theme of advocacy. Liam gave a similar explanation of advocacy as “making use of the institution and all the rules to a student’s advantage.”

Julia attributed the advocacy functions of advising to the culture and systems of working within a large institution:

I have been at primarily very large institutions where there can be quite a large separation, a great distance between an undergraduate student and a faculty member. Um, primarily researchers who maybe teaches a couple of undergraduate courses a year.

No other participants made such an explicit attribution about institutional size, but there were other examples of how larger state systems required advocacy of advisors between campuses within the system.

Advocacy has obvious ties to showing care, understanding policy, and it is a role that advisors can choose to play. Advisors must advocate for the best interests of students but balance this with the best interests of the institution. The tension that resides in the best interests of students versus institutional objectives relate to the ethical principle of fidelity to autonomy.

**Fidelity to Autonomy**

Advisors encounter ethical tension in being faithful to students’ autonomy. Fidelity to autonomy is an ethical principle, and means respecting a student’s right to make decisions where they have choice. For advisors, this might mean helping students understand the choices available to them. This desire to make students aware of choices becomes an ethical tension when advisors feel that it conflicts with another principle, such as beneficence. In other words, by presenting all options to respect autonomy, the student may choose a path that the advisor does not view as being in the student’s best interest. This also relates to the discernment phase of anticipated consequences and the response phase action of truth telling.
Several examples of the tension from respect for autonomy were present in the dilemma stories of advisors. Isabel felt tension in doing too much to help students avoid academic probation when they were not engaged in their own success. Conversely, Julia questioned whether or not she was intrusive enough in her advising to ensure a student’s safety. At a certain point Julia had to trust that the student in her story of ethical tension was engaged in psychotherapy, as they claimed to be. Both Isabel and Julia felt tension in determining if they allowed students too little or too much autonomy. Braden named a similar tension in a story about a student who felt wrongly accused of cheating by a faculty member. Braden did not believe the student, but needed to help that student navigate the process.

Belle provided a very cogent example of where fidelity to autonomy went beyond policy. She saw the privacy requirements of FERPA as a legal mandate not to disclose information to parents, but also noted that:

I just think like, as much as parents want to be in their student’s lives I think they are adults and they need to be treated as adults and respected as adults. So if they have, if they feel like they do not want to share the information, then I do not think that they should have to.

In another connection between respecting autonomy and policy, Evie described feeling ethical tension with the automatic graduation policy which did not respect students’ autonomy. Her institution implemented a policy that automatically graduated students even when they were wishing to remain at the institution to complete a second major.

Fidelity to autonomy as a point of care and respect for students was at the heart of many of the tensions the participants described. It also has connection to policy such as FERPA, role clarity relative to intrusive advising, and the extent to which an advisor should advocate for students. Encounter with ethical tension is understood by a dissonance of cognition and/or feeling. Tensions arise from issues of how best to show care for students and others, adherence
or circumvention of policy, timing of encounter relative to a need for response, clarity of the advisor’s role, the best course of advocacy, and respect for autonomy. Taken together the themes in this section describe the tension points of the participants in my study. Once the encounter with tension happens, then advisors begin to engage in various means of discernment.

**Discernment**

Beyond or within the point of encounter with a dilemma, the participants described actions that fit into two interrelated themes for moving toward a response to the ethical situation. This is a phase that I call actions for discernment as these were not in and of themselves a response. These could happen in the moment of encounter or well after that moment of encounter. The two themes that fit into this category are building awareness and consultation. The latter is sometimes a means of accomplishing the former, though consultation seems to have multiple functions.

**Building Awareness**

Advisors would take actions or ask questions in order to build awareness of the dilemma or ethical issue. This included asking students questions to better understand the tension and the student as an individual. It could also include asking questions of themselves either within the moment of encounter or after that moment. Evie gave a definitive statement of how building awareness works for her: “And so, I try to use information, I try to gather all the information I possibly can, what I know, experiences, what’s happening right in front of me – that kind of thing, to inform ethical decisions.” Similarly, Isabel listed the questions that she asked herself when describing her ethical process:

It would be pretty upsetting to have this conversation when you are not quite sure, um, how to fix them, I guess. You know, is it lack of motivation? Is it just sort of the student’s context for work and school? Or, um, you know I read some articles about that that, ah, makes me think, think about it in a little bit of a different way as far as, you
know, growing up and what was their home environment, their family environment? What is their context for work? What is their context for doing well in school? What is doing well in school? You know we talk about like improve your study habits, like maybe they don’t have study habits.

These are examples of reflective questions that Isabel used to question her initial judgment of the tension with a student who was not meeting the academic expectations of the institution.

Furthermore, multiple participants discussed the importance of seeing every student differently and understanding their context as important to this ethical discernment. I coded these types of things as subcomponents of building awareness, labeling them “understanding student contexts” and “every student different.” Ali noted in describing her approach to working with students,

So, these students study different. I actually try to relate to the students and talk to them, so when they come in I’ll be like, “So, what are your interests? What clubs are joining? Are you in honors? Are you in band? Are you in choir?” How much they talk to me is probably how I gauge it – because if they want to . . . I’m not going to ask them, “OK, how was your date last night?” I can ask them where they’re from, their roommate, things like that, but I can’t, “So, do you have any brothers and sisters? What’s your blood type?” I don’t get into the nitty-gritty unless they start it.

Other participants expressed similar sentiments in describing their approach to advising and their ethical foundations.

This desire to understand students as unique individuals is a component of what I have coded as “building awareness.” Evie’s dilemma story about deciding whether or not to challenge a student’s expression of implicit bias illustrates how her understanding a student’s individual context helped her to discern action:

And, at that point, I couldn’t decide whether I needed to make her aware or let it go, and I realized we were there to focus on something way more transactional, which was dropping a minor and, again, it’s a 30-minute appointment – and I had just met her. So, I just had to stop and move on – move on from that.
In this situation Evie had to determine what could reasonably be accomplished in regards to this student’s development. In doing so Evie was weighing doing harm versus justice. In this case, Evie asked questions of herself that led to the awareness that this student’s level of readiness for development was limited.

Gavin’s ethical process illustrated how advisors would ask students questions to build awareness. He had found a discrepancy on the transcript of a student that he began to suspect was either the student’s lie of omission or an error by the admissions office on his campus. When Gavin ran into this cognitive dissonance in the moment of advising the student, he explained that he “questioned the student about it.” From there he engaged in gathering information from admissions on the process and why the credits were not factored into the student’s admission.

Similarly, Julia compared her dilemma stories and noted the following as a commonality:

I would try to gather as much information as is possible in the situation. Um, we have a, I tend to have a fairly collaborative approach with my team, um, and I have been lucky in all of the settings I have been in to have that, because I think it is helpful sometimes to discuss these types of issues with other professionals, of course in a confidential setting.

This statement shows the connection between the information gathering and the other discernment action in working an ethical dilemma – consultation.

Consultation

Consultation is a core component of how advisors in this study determined a response when facing a dilemma. It was present in the stories of all participants. I assigned consultation as a focused code for data that showed conversations with other interested parties as a means of discerning an ethical response to a perceived dilemma or ethical tension. The most common form of consultation was with other advisors or supervisors and it happened on an informal basis. The purpose of consultation was to gather information on policy, discern role clarity, and
anticipate possible outcomes. Consultation relates to schema in that it allows the advisor access to the schemas of supervisors, fellow advisors, and colleagues in other areas.

Isabel’s description of her ethical process provides a concise explanation of consultation and the value of it: “We often talk things out together or have a lot of sort of mentoring and collaboration, advice from different viewpoints of different.” Isabel believed her team of advisors to have a sense of praxis that rose above consultation being mere opinion sharing:

I would say the colleagues here, um, kind of base their practices on theory. So usually when we are discussing something somebody has some experience and can relate it to, you know, a specific theory or policy or practice. I don’t consider a lot of any of our decisions opinion based…we will have discussions sort of like anecdotally versus that, but we know that we would, you know, turn to research or our resources or something before we would make any kind of decisions.

Unlike Isabel’s belief that consultation in her department was not mere opinion sharing, Belle labeled it as such. Belle explained her ethical process as “mainly talking with other advisors who I work pretty closely with and then having a conversation about it with my supervisor. They gave me their opinions, the things they would recommend.” Similarly, Braden labeled consultation as opinion gathering: “I like hearing what other people have to say and I think because I seek out others’ opinions, they seek out my opinion as well, which is good for the exchange of best practices and so forth.” For Braden consultation facilitated discernment of best practices ethically and globally.

Moreover, Leyton’s supervisor provided a more formalized means of discussing difficult issues with students which he noted when describing his ethical influences. Belle’s experience of consultation was not simply being told what to do in any situation, as she noted that those she consulted “didn’t ultimately make a decision or tell me what you should do, but they helped me kind of like work through the process.” Aiden expressed a different sentiment:
if we have seen it and there is something that we’re supposed to have done or supposed to do in this situation, then it’s very directive, ‘This is what you should do,’ and being honest about it. Obviously, no advisor is infallible.”

These are examples of the variety of perspectives on just how direct consultation could or should happen in practice.

Isabel had confidence in the ethical ecology of her specific advising unit for consultation. She said:

I don’t believe our collaborations get anything like ‘this is how it always is so this is how we do it,’ you know like, your just based off of experience, but I mean experience in finding the resource or experience in the policies is kind of you know shared knowledge, I guess. Shared knowledge is helpful.

Similarly, Leyton said, “I consult with my co-workers or supervisors about anything I may have on my mind. I’m lucky to work in an office that really values asking questions so I try to take advantage of that.” Other participants expressed similar sentiments about their teams of advisors. This highlights the importance of organizational dynamics in creating ethical cultures, because ecology will likely facilitate or inhibit consultation.

Consultation allowed advisors to access schemas of other professionals. Isabel reflected on the value of consulting other advisors in the larger state system she was part of, she explained that “it is nice to have… someone to go to… you might be the only one doing that particular job, but then there is one of you at almost every campus, that you have the other campus as resources.” Aiden explained how the process of consultation accesses the schemas of others:

I suppose usually when I’m talking to the director of advising for the college or if I’m talking to [supervisor’s name], our assistant director, I’m usually coming at it before I’ve taken action and, in that case, it’s: “Have you seen this before? What did you do? What do you think I should do?

This excerpt shows whose counsel Aiden seeks (supervisors) as well as questions he sees as relevant to the discernment phase.
Engaging in consultation seemed to affirm a course of action for advisors. Aiden said explicitly that consultation was affirming: “I consulted with a more senior advisor and the director of advising for the college and they re-affirmed my position where the student needed to be honest with the Office of Admissions and turn everything in.” Similarly, Leyton expressed the same sense of validation from consultation in describing his ethical process when a student asked him to support her application to a graduate program for which the student was ill-prepared:

Yeah, when she first brought it up, it was something that I had talked with other advisors about. This is a student who, we offer drop-in advising which we cycle through what advisor is on duty for that, and this is a student that frequently uses drop-in advising over making appointments, so she is somebody who has met with a lot of people in our office through that. So, I think there was a lot of other people in the office that were kind of aware of her general actions. So, I definitely consulted with a couple other people in the office who also said that it was a bad idea, but agreed with what my ultimate decision was.

In this situation, Leyton’s consultation affirmed both his thoughts and feelings about the situation prior to his choice of action or inaction in response to the tensions.

Zach provided another statement of how he found consultation leading to validation. When asked about whom he consulted in choosing to ignore a rule about registration, Zach illustrates the how consultation can provide validation:

I talked with some peers about what they thought the likelihood that the class would fill or that if the seat was taken, given the population that we had yet to come in to transfer orientation this month, what is the likelihood that someone else would need that specific class and the kind of balance was, you know, it’s probably not going to fill or, if it does, that the professor is pretty easy going about letting one extra person in if they need to. So, I did more conversational research on the context of the situation.

In this example, Zach seeks out the opinion of others before circumventing a policy about which he felt tension. Zach felt that the procedure for registration implemented on the level of the
academic department or college did not meet students’ unique needs. He ultimately followed his instinct, but sought outside perspective via consultation before acting.

Consultation can be an act of building awareness. Julia observed that discussion with colleagues was useful:

…to kind of make sure you are not missing any piece either, you know, so I’ll often, you know, go to others to kinda like, okay can we talk about this student’s situation and see what we think might be possible ways to address it.

Julia’s use of the “we” pronoun in this excerpt was emblematic of this discernment phase. Julia went on to say, “I think that is also an attempt to be as fair and equitable as possible also. So I would say those are probably pretty common for most situations.” This shows how she felt like consultation was a means of connecting to values or principles (i.e. fairness and equity).

Furthermore, Julia’s statement above seems to indicate that advisors hold values in community with one another. Julia explained her thoughts about the origins of equity and fairness by saying “I think in many ways they are a shared value. As we know the definitions of equity and fairness can be difficult to define.” She then explained that it is a difficult relationship because of individual perspective, but still uses the pronoun “we,” indicating a collective process of defining and discerning.

Similarly, Braden expressed a belief that “personal ethics” were always in operation. However, he saw value in consultation:

There is, to a certain extent, an understanding that we will operate with some modicum of . . . you know, be it our personal ethics, beliefs or how we will conduct ourselves. Certainly, when there is a dilemma that could be construed as an ethical dilemma,. . . my first choice is always to get another advisor’s opinion; just kind of look at what other people are doing, maybe ask some advice, let them tell me if what I’m doing is right or wrong. For the most part, though, I think I operate fairly close to . . . I have a pretty tight moral compass so I don’t really let myself get into situations where my ethics could be called into question.
Consultation for Braden was a way to ensure that the process for determining that a response to ethical tension had legitimacy. Liam took this process piece a step further when he indicated that consultation was not just a step in discernment, but the source of his ethics when he said, "I think it comes from thinking about it a lot and talking to other people about ethical dilemmas and what should be and why.” This shows some of the reciprocal relationship between consultation and cumulative experience.

Some participants explained that similarities in perspective helped facilitate consultation. This is another indicator that homogeneity may facilitate trust, but that a sense of collegiality kept advisors open to differences in this consultation process. For example, Julia illustrated this by explaining her feelings on differences with colleagues (as opposed to students):

I think I am a little less comfortable talking about that. I think it is because it is a little bit, I don’t know how to say it without sounding weird, but almost “oh, I don’t want to tattle on my colleague.” You know, but sometimes you just have a different approach with a student or a different approach or focus in your position. There are definitely advisors that I work with that I know have a very different view of students and view of purpose in the institution. And that definitely can be a struggle. I think that I try to find common ground, but it is not necessarily that I think, it is not necessarily that they’re doing anything wrong, it is just that we are coming from different approaches and so that can be a little sticky sometimes.

Similarly, Zach provided a perspective on discord with colleagues:

What could also be true, there also have been times where people would tend to default more to . . . what’s the word? Precedent or more general circumstances as opposed to looking at each individual case as its own situation, its own exception. And, so, that tended to create conflict, I think, just based on world view and personal outlook on the advising work. And, so, I think those were some different ethical challenges that would come up amongst the committee members that were there.

Both Julia and Zach’s statements above show how perceived differences can complicate engaging with colleagues who might have different views of advising and ethics.

Moreover, a retreat from consultation based on differing approaches is problematic because advisors can gain a deeper criticality in getting differing opinions. Emma viewed higher
education as a highly unethical industry and provided a counter example to the ethicality of consultation:

Working exclusively in higher education, which is, I would say, very unethical at every turn. And so coming to terms with how do I want to live in it, knowing that making ethical decisions aren’t always the most popular decisions and choices. But knowing and not having that fear to do that. It’s kind of like speaking. Bringing the voice to the table often is an ethical thing and I think that’s another place where it starts. It’s ethical to have these considerations. Right? So, um, I think that is kind of where it stems.

Emma believed her social position created challenges and opportunities in speaking truth to power.

Similarly, in Evie’s situation where her supervisor asked her to function as a mental health counselor to a potentially unsafe student, she did not feel comfortable consulting with her supervisor and pushing back to gain role clarity. Following a student’s death by suicide, Ali’s perception of university policy was that it prohibited her from openly discussing the situation. The following excerpt from Ali further illustrates challenges when consultation is not readily available to an advisor:

Yeah, . . . at that time I was advising in the College of [name of college] and I was very, very close to I’d say at least five other advisors. . . . and then, when was the right time to talk to them about it? After the funeral? At graduation where he was supposed to graduate and then there was a chair empty for him? I mean, I was kind of all alone. And yet, you really need the help and support of other advisors and then, you know, when I finally did break through . . . obviously, I’m not going to post that on Facebook – to me, that’s the wrong form of media. And, they’re like, “Oh, why didn’t you tell us, you could have talked . . .” I was like, “I didn’t even know when I could.”

Ali, Evie, and Emma’s examples show that consultation is a means of gaining support and seems to have complicated their navigation of ethical tensions.

Consultation can be a means for advisors to engage in both critical reflection on a situation but also in group think. When relational dynamics limit consultation, then advisors are left to operate in a vacuum. Consultation and awareness building provide advisors with
validation and empowerment for a particular course of action or inaction in response to an ethical tension.

**Response**

In the model described thus far, advisors operate within an ethical ecology and an accumulation of experiences. These are the basis for schemas, trust, and level of self-care which are in operation when advisors encounter a tension or dilemma. The advisors know the points of tension or dilemma primarily when conflicts of care, policy, timing, role clarity, best advocacy, fidelity to autonomy cause cognitive and/or affective dissonance. Within the moment of that encounter or in a longer period of discernment, advisors engage in activities of building awareness by questioning themselves or soliciting more information from those involved. They also engage in consultation with other advisors, supervisors, or staff members. These discernment activities, building awareness and consultation, have two primary functions which are (a) to validate and empower through access to the schemas of others and (b) the clarification of care, best advocacy, as well as policy adherence or circumvention. This leads to the response phase of the emerging model.

Response to an ethical dilemma or tension can be an advisor’s action or inaction, which either brings resolution to a situation or carries that tension forward. Inaction may be more likely to result in advisors carrying emotional tension forward. The action or inaction typically relates to the tension at the moment of encounter, specifically perceived care, adherence to policy or its circumvention, and what participants determined were best advocacy actions. In the response part of the process, advisors ply the activities of advising such as documenting, guiding students through bureaucratic processes, truth-telling, and hearing students.
Documenting

Documenting is not an inherently ethical action, though it is often a duty that institutions require of advisors. It can sometimes operate like a contract in that institutions should be faithful to the notes that advisors make regarding advice given to students. For example, if an advisor misadvises a student leading them to take the wrong course for a particular requirement, the institution must then determine whether or not to grant an exception to allow the wrong course to satisfy the requirement because the student took the course in good faith based on the advice of the advisor. In this way, documenting can be the source of a dilemma. Emma, Gavin, and Julia all told stories about discovering misadvising through documentation. Julia explained that “it is easy when…it is in writing, right, they have an email exchange, take this class, blah, blah, blah, and then sometimes you have to honor that and make an exception.” She contrasted this with the absence of documentation saying, “It is less easy I think when it is, you know, it kind of becomes almost like a ‘he said, she said’ sometimes.” The resolution in this case comes from following the trail of documentation or discerning right action despite the absence of that documentation.

Furthermore, Emma explained that documenting was both the evidence of the dilemma and the means of addressing the dilemma of uncovering misadvising, noting, “I typically would do a follow up email and cc [carbon-copy] the person and their advisor or whatever…and then put it in notes.” In this situation Emma discovered the dilemma through documentation, but also sees documenting as an essential step in the resolution of the dilemma.

Another ethical tension comes in requiring documentation of medical or other extenuating circumstances in an academic petition process. Liam explained what he saw as the problems in these processes: “the other factor is the documentation, which is itself its own ethical dilemma, because not all students have things that are equally documentable.” Liam saw this as
a problem for committees or individual professionals considering exceptions to academic policies. However, he preferred that these processes relied upon documentation rather than the word of students:

I am much happier designing processes and having processes that don’t require us to take those leaps of faith, because then we are, I feel like there is a greater risk of unfairness, bias, etc. Um, so, the difference between saying “Oh you had mono? Okay, you can drop the class.” Or “okay you had mono and you have documentation of having had mono, okay.” You know?

Ethically, Liam viewed documentation as the basis for granting an exception to policy.

Gavin also discussed how documentation factored into exceptions to university policy for a struggling student. He explained:

One situation is a student who has come back multiple times asking for exceptions to university policies…and it is always that gray area that we come into…I mean as advisors we are the gray area, but we are here to 1) kind of enforce university policies, but then also 2) be the advocate for the students, you know translate the university to the student, um and vice versa, um, and I mean we have policies in place for those exceptions to university policies that if the student can provide documentation for extenuating circumstances we can circumvent those policies.

In this excerpt, Gavin demonstrates how documentation becomes a response to an ethical tension. In this case circumventing the established policy resolves the tension, and to do so requires documenting the reason for the response. Having the documentation solidifies the resolution in the mind of advisors. The utility and use of documents exist within bureaucratic systems that are part of the organizational ecology of advising and which becomes the site of response to ethical tensions.

**Guiding Students Through Bureaucratic Processes**

Policy adherence or circumvention was at the heart of many dilemmas and could be a conflict within itself or in-conflict with other principles such as care or best advocacy. For example, Zach described a situation where he sought to balance respecting that a course was full
by the rules of the department faculty and giving a student an override out of a sense of care. In this case, Zach asked the student to reflect upon other options and to seek her own solution, but ultimately circumvented the policy. He valued that the student would make some “earnest honest effort” to comply with the policy before he intervened to circumvent the policy.

In this situation, Zach balanced the rights of faculty to make registration policy even when he saw it as arbitrary and conflicting with care. Care for the student in this case did not automatically mean giving her what she desired, but Zach approached rendering care as inviting the student to reflect upon options. Zach needed to operate in such a way that faculty did not see an override as capricious. At the same time, Zach demonstrated to the student that though the bureaucratic rules were pliable they were also purposeful and should not be ignored entirely.

**Truth Telling**

Truth telling is a basic requirement of fidelity as an ethical principle, and is essential for respecting student’s autonomy. Advisors’ responses to ethical tensions often involved some dimension of what to say to another person. Participants felt that they needed to inform students of certain information as an essential means of respecting autonomy. Choosing truth telling for advisors may be a way of washing one's hands of foreseeable consequences, but it does respect autonomy.

Truth telling as a means of response can take on several forms. First, it can be telling one’s own truth, as was the case for Emma. Emma explained that she tried to disabuse new staff members of any naivety they may have of organizational politics right from the beginning:

> It drives me crazy. And I see these…I call them the new babies. You see these new babies coming into advising and I try really hard to be my practicum students and grad student’s teacher, so they know actually how to navigate this.

Emma sees sharing her perspective as a means of resolving the tension of working in what she
sees as unethical environments.

Belle had an example of how speaking her own truth about her feelings to an overreaching parent was her way of responding when she felt discomfort with the situation. In this situation the parent, who was also a licensed therapist, had access to her daughter’s account information unbeknownst to the student:

Should I tell the student, that sort of thing. I didn’t want to step on anyone’s toes. Um, I ultimately did not tell the student, but I did have a session with the mom about how I thought she should talk to her daughter about it, um, and that I did not feel comfortable knowing that information [that the mother had the daughter’s password] and that from now on I would feel more comfortable like kind of discussing stuff with her daughter.

In this case, Belle responded to the tension of whether or not to tell the student about their parent’s overreach by telling the parent exactly how she felt about the situation.

Also present in Belle’s situation is choice to not tell a truth to a student – that their parent had access to their account information. In the following passage, Belle elucidates the process of contemplation whether or not to tell the student the truth:

You know I want what is best for student and I know the student was struggling a lot, just with like a lot of personal stuff, a lot of school stuff, but, and so my mind would have been like you know I want, I feel like she should have the right to know that her mom was doing that, especially if she never gave her mom permission to do that. But then on the other hand, her having FERPA… So I don’t know, it just was like internal battle like that I had with myself…. I mean more of a feeling I guess.

This shows both the emotional aspects of this contemplation and is an example of inaction as a response. Braden had a similar explanation of truth telling as a space to encounter significant emotional tension as a means of care:

The emotional part of it when you’re looking across the desk at a student who is in tears because they realize either they can’t handle what it is that they’re trying to do – in other words, they can’t handle the academic stress of the major that they’ve chosen, or they realize that they’ve been kind of found out, you know. With certain types of substance abuse, for example, students . . . they try to . . . let’s just say if a student is in my office and they’re high, I can tell that. I can recognize that and I’m not going to allow them to play the sympathy card necessarily – like somehow, some
magical thing happened that didn’t allow them to go to class, didn’t allow them to study, didn’t allow them to be successful when what it was, was them doing something that they shouldn’t have been doing.

Here Braden sees a duty in speaking a truth to a student that their substance abuse is the source of their academic issues. He acknowledges the emotional challenge of these conversations but is resolute in the truth telling as a response.

Similarly, Leyton felt that giving all options was important when faced with one of his dilemmas. He explained: “I believe that we have to present all options to students, even if the options may not be the best option… I think in that situation it was an option for her, even though it wasn’t the best option.” However, this was a major challenge in Leyton’s other dilemma story. In that other scenario he encountered a situation where an international student was facing academic suspension and whom Leyton believed was not sufficiently mentally healthy to succeed academically. The student faced conscription back in their home country if they became academically ineligible to remain in the United States. The nature of the dilemma was in part the number of possible options available to the student:

I think he is a student that I feel like I need to be a little more forceful with because of the language barrier. He is not a student that I can be like . . . he is a student that I try to give multiple options to, but maybe not the amount of options that I would give to another student. So, I think he is a student that I need to be a little more black and white with and kind of put my foot down and be like, “You have these two options, you need to pick one,” versus there may be situations with other students where I say, “Technically, there’s these other things that you can consider.” I think with this student, knowing that his English is not very strong, I hesitate to give him those options because I think that just confuses him more. So, I try to evaluate the way that I’m speaking with him to make sure that the instructions . . . in a way, I feel like I’m, more so with him than with other students I work with, I feel like I’m giving them instructions. So, I think that definitely kind of plays into it too in that I’ve kind of tried to do it the other way with him and that does not really bode well with him. I’ve been trying to be more . . . I guess prescriptive would be the best word for it, which is kind of against my general advising philosophy, but I think there are some times when you do have to kind of do that.
In this situation, Leyton faced cultural barriers as well as competing interests (likelihood of academic success versus student losing their visa) in determining what was best for the student.

Furthermore, Isabel noted complications in even rendering an opinion of best option when presenting all options to students: “So, kind of giving those options out. You know it’s not that you want to advise someone out of your school and into another one, but sometimes that is the best option for a student.” In another spot she noted: “I feel that, yeah, that I owe them that much to make sure anything that I know that could possibly help them, then I get them connected to it.” However, she also explained, “I wouldn’t tell them what I thought their best option was. I would like them to come to that conclusion on their own.” The struggle for Isabel is fidelity to the student versus the institution, as well as beneficence to the student. This situation is one in which presenting all options without regard to the best option may respect fidelity, but it challenges beneficence by withholding an opinion that may benefit the student. This is a difference in approach to dilemma in that Isabel is taking a principled rather than a consequentialist approach. In other words, Isabel is enacting truth-telling as a principle (a duty) and hoping that truth telling of information rather than truth telling of her opinion will bring about the desired outcome.

Gavin gave an example of truth telling that did not take the form of giving options, but telling a hard truth that the student may not want to hear. It is similar to Isabel telling a student a truth that does not fit with the institution’s best interests:

It also was getting to the point too where it is, you, maybe you shouldn’t be in school for awhile. And it’s a hard conversation to have. You know I firmly believe all students do have that right to education, but is it that detrimental to be in this situation where it is also not necessarily the student’s fault, but the other perspective is, maybe don’t walk that way if you know that this location is here.
Gavin is referring to a situation where a student struggled with sobriety in the environment of the college campus, and had to walk past an on-campus bar to get to her classes. Like Braden’s situation above, Gavin is balancing enabling the student and enforcing university policy as well as giving the student what they want (to remain a student) with what might be best for the student (focusing on recovery first).

Evie had an example of withholding the truth as an ethical inaction response. She did not tell the student about a policy, and in fact, calculated that the registrar would miss it or that they would be able to circumvent the policy. She explained:

I decided to not inform the student that there is a possibility that they could complete their degree requirements this fall because I know that the Registrar’s Office is looking at students, they’re looking at notes we write about students, and they’re looking at if they’re completing degree requirements and haven’t applied for graduation. And, I know they reach out to students about that, but they’re not doing it very well, they’re not doing it perfectly. I don’t feel that it’s necessary to do that part of it perfectly either because I know that there’s a chance that they may miss it or they may be misinformed about what that student needs. But, again, also, it is also up to our college [said college name] here too, since the student is in [college], to make that call on whether or not they should finish or not. So, we’re up against what the policy is and what the Registrar’s Office staff are doing, but we still have a little more power to make that decision. So, rather than panic the student and give them a “what if” scenario, I decided that it would be better to deal with the Registrar’s Office directly and protect the student from having to worry about this possibility of feeling like they have to graduate this fall when they’re not ready. And also, just kind of lean on the inaccuracies of the Registrar’s Office to explain, “Well, they’re wrong.”

In this situation, Evie is enacting what she sees as beneficence over fidelity to both the student and the policy of the registrar’s office.

Evie explained how experience shaped her commitments to honesty. In this excerpt she is responding to a prompt about the origins of her sense of ethics and is describing telling a truth to a colleague that the colleague did not want to hear:

So, I wasn’t always this way. I think I have learned a lot of hard lessons about ethics and morality. I, as a younger person, wasn’t always honest because I didn’t want to get in trouble or something like that. I would be more sneaky about stuff as a young person.
So, then I learned what that does and what that means and have really taught myself about how honesty is more important than anything, which sometimes isn’t great for others because they don’t really like honesty so much when you’re being honest about them or what’s happening. It’s hard to confront people and be real. The other day, I had lunch with a colleague and I apparently said some things that made them feel uncomfortable because of their own insecurities. But, I don’t have a problem just saying outright, like, “I’m applying for this lead position role and I’m doing it because I was encouraged to apply.” And the other person felt more . . . like I wasn’t humble about it, which is interesting. I bring that up just because it’s so recent and it was surprising to me that my honesty and my confidence made someone else feel less confident. So, then I think about does that impact me or them more and how is that important. I guess that’s just an example of how I will just be outright honest and be . . . again, this is not how I always was, but that informs me about what’s important. I spend a lot of time reflecting on those things and what is important for people to hear and when is it important to be honest and forthright about things.

This is an example of the final step in the process where experience feeds back into the pre-encounter conditions for the next time an advisor encounters a similar ethical tension.

Liam was the most experienced advisor in the study. His perspective shows how experience created confidence in truth telling or truth withholding. Liam explains how he comes to the decision to steer a student around a departmental policy on registration:

I am usually about as transparent as I feel I can be with the student. It just makes the most sense. And, ultimately I just decide unilaterally that well if that is what they want they [the academic department] should probably do it some other way, something that is actually in keeping with, you know, so I don’t feel particularly obligated to honor their wishes.

Liam is comfortable with breaking fidelity with an academic department but seems to feel obligated to maximize truth-telling to the student. Liam’s confidence provides an example of how experience feeds back into pre-encounter conditions that validated the action to circumvent policy.

Julia, another more experienced participant, reflected upon how she felt truth telling to be complicated. Truth telling for Julia was something which she needed to do in order to prepare
students for their transfer from a community college to a four-year program. However, some of her colleagues at the community college thought her honesty would discourage students:

that’s been kind of an ongoing thing, because again, it’s not my role either to come in and tell people how to do things either. It’s just this is how it is going to be at [campus]. If they are going to [campus] we want to prepare them for that kind of thing. Yeah. But that was real odd for me at first.

Similar to Liam, Julia’s experience has shown her the value of truth telling. However, she experienced this with less confidence, finding it to feel odd. This feeling of “oddness” is one that perhaps relates more to the tension with colleagues than with that of students. Participants described the importance of speaking truths to students, relatedly advisors described the importance listening to students as a response to ethical tensions.

Hearing Students

A final theme of response is one that I have coded as “hearing students.” This theme is an enactment of care for many of the advisors who used hearing students as a response to dilemmas. This theme was present in responses to dilemmas and also in discussing general approach to advising, source of ethical development, values guiding advising, and ethical process. Hearing students is a process-oriented response in that it does not necessarily move toward any outcome, but rather becomes an action of care.

Gavin had a definitive example of how hearing a student was the response he needed in helping students going through academic difficulty:

And some of them are just like “oh, I am not doing well in that class.” Okay well let’s talk about why, what are your extenuating circumstances? “Well, I’m just not good in chemistry.” That’s not really the purpose of this, but let’s kind of talk through what is going on. So, I mean still again listening to them and not just shutting down saying that’s not good enough.
In this excerpt, it is clear that hearing students can at times involve questioning to get beneath the surface meaning of what a student is saying. This is similar to information gathering in the encounter phase of the dilemma but also has an emotional context to it that is process oriented.

Evie described hearing students in her general approach to advising. For Evie, hearing students was deeper than a specific theoretical orientation in her advising:

My approach is just trying to be more personalized; as much as possible making a student feel like they’re being paid attention to. That’s not necessarily philosophy or a theory or anything like that. That’s my own experience speaking, and what they need and just really listening to students to understand how they’re different and this might work for one student and then not for another. We’re still here, we want to make sure they’re doing OK, and that kind of thing in general. So, just all of that mixed together.

Evie’s claims about her approach in this excerpt match her actions in responding to the suicidal student described above, when she noted, “it’s important to be aware and that we care about him and want to make sure he’s okay, and give him an opportunity to talk to somebody who wants to listen.” Evie’s description of her approach also connects hearing students as a response with the earlier theme from the discernment phase of building awareness.

Moreover, in Braden’s dilemma story in which he was working with a student who claimed that a faculty member was treating them unfairly, his response was not to assume the student’s truth, but to hear them:

So, unless it’s a clear indication that the faculty member has just messed up royally – like they put something on their syllabus or they didn’t put something on their syllabus that they were trying to enforce in the class and it had an adverse effect on the student . . . something like that, I always defer to the faculty member. Now, that’s not to say I won’t listen or be a sympathetic ear to a student when they have complaints about faculty.

It is clear that Braden feels that his best action is similarly process oriented in that he does not see the resolution as subsequent action with the faculty member but rather to show empathy through listening to the student.
Liam had an explanation of how hearing students can become complicated in large, resource-limited systems. Liam explained how he thought an idealized system would respond to student requests for exceptions by hearing each student’s petition in person. However, he brought his reflection back to the reality of the situation at his institution:

So, yeah, that’s a challenge, ‘cause it’s a huge, it’s a huge drain on resources to make all of those face-to-face appointments. Especially at an institution the size of the [campus]. It just, it would take forever. It might be worth it, but it would take forever and cost a lot of money.

Liam’s reflection shows how hearing students is an ideal response but that it is not free of complications.

Ultimately, hearing students is an enactment of care. Concern for care is the framework of a dilemma at the point of encounter and also the path forward in responding to a dilemma. In this way care is a central virtue in the way participants understood and responded to dilemmas. Care functioned almost like self-evident rationale for the participants’ confidence in their responses to dilemmas.

**Feeding Back to Cumulative Experience**

The experience of encountering and responding to a dilemma logically feeds back into cumulative experience. Participants learn from past mistakes and successes. Participants either carried forward ethical tensions or found resolution of those dissonances, both of which became part of their cumulative experiences for the next time they faced an ethical tension. In this way the model is circular.

Carried tension often has an emotional dimension for advisors. For example, Julia described the carried tension after the suicide of an advisee: “I think that is why it stuck with me for so long because there is still that part of like oh, could we have done more…so I still struggle with that a little bit.” The emotion lingers and becomes part of cumulative experience. Belle
gave another example of the emotion that carries ethical tension when asked if the feelings associated with her ethical tension outlasted the solution when she said: “I think the feeling actually still even continues. Like every time her daughter comes in I still think about it. The affective component of Belle’s dilemma remains in her consciousness in subsequent meetings with the student.

Similarly, Emma was very clear that the dilemma she faced in deciding how much negative information to share with colleagues inquiring about a job posting within her department. In this situation, the lack of communication from Emma’s departmental leadership increased her feelings of frustration within the department. This tension increased Emma’s need for support and desire to leave her role: “higher ed…I already know that I gotta get out of here sooner than later,” and “I couldn’t imagine advisors not having counselors.” Emma’s experiences in encountering tensions in the workplace led her to see self-care as a necessity for those doing the emotional labor of advising. Self-care is one example of an existing condition that then continues the loop of ethical encounter, discernment, and response.

**Looking at the Whole Model**

In this section, I provide an analysis of a dilemma story to further illustrate the model in its entirety. To further explore the emerging model, I present how Zach encountered and navigated what he perceived as an ethical tension in the registration policy for transfer students on his campus. Various themes are present in each of the phases of the emerging model.

Zach encountered a situation wherein he decided to ignore the established rules for transfer registration overrides. In the pre-encounter phase, Zach’s cumulative experience shaped a belief that the rule was arbitrary. Zach’s level of understanding prior to the situation with the policy was part of what shaped this view. The environment of the campus was such that the
policy was easily circumvented from a technical standpoint – the technological component of the environment allowed the final response. Zach also had ideas and schemas about his work as an advisor that involved helping his advisees find passions.

Zach’s moment of encounter came when a transfer student desired a course that was not open to her. The policy that excluded the student from the course seemed arbitrary to Zach, but he did not want to proceed in bad faith. Zach’s dilemma in this situation was that the policy intended for institutional efficiency was in-conflict with the desires of this individual transfer student. It also was a matter of timing, care, and best advocacy. The timing component of the dilemma was that the student at other points in time would have been able to claim an open seat in the course, but by adding the student it could also prevent another student with a legitimate claim to the seat under the policy from registering for the course. The care component was that Zach saw this course as one for which the student was passionate and thus an opportunity to foster that student’s academic passion. Zach also believed that giving the student what she wanted would ease her transition as a new transfer student. These beliefs framed this encounter as a matter of care and best advocacy.

Moreover, Zach described this dilemma as a feeling, but also had both cognitive and affective descriptors in framing ethical encounter in response to a question about how he knew he was facing a dilemma:

Well, it was a feeling. It was a recognition that changing the coding would mean that there is going to be one less seat in that class for a potential later transfer student, but I weighed that against the specificity of the course topic and, based on my experience, the likelihood that someone would take that seat . . . I believed that there would be other ways for a student in that same situation to get into the class if they needed to. I knew that there could be policy I could fall back on if I needed to. We have a strict first-day attendance policy and a student could show up and still get into the class. So, I think I kind of looked at the situation and kind of weighed the pros and cons and decided to act.
Zach’s weighing of “pros and cons” is both logical and emotional. From this cognitive and affective awareness of the dilemma Zach then moves through discernment. The primary means of discernment for Zach was informal conversation with his colleagues. This excerpt provides details about discernment:

I talked with some peers about what they thought the likelihood that the class would fill or that if the seat was taken, given the population that we had yet to come in to transfer orientation this month, what is the likelihood that someone else would need that specific class and the kind of balance was, you know, it’s probably not going to fill or, if it does, that the professor is pretty easy going about letting one extra person in if they need to. So, I did more conversational research on the context of the situation.

When asked about the formality of this consultation, Zach noted the following:

Yes...Just dropping by someone else’s office and, “Hey, what do you know about this professor? This class? What do you think? What can I do with this student who is trying to get into it?”...It was more focused on the problem solving and trying to figure out how we...and part of this was going back to, you know, this is student’s only orientation at the university and how can we make that as welcoming as possible and helping them make a smooth transition. This class seemed like it was going to be a big boost for them.

The consultation Zach describes allows him to better anticipate consequences through accessing the schemas of colleagues. In so doing it normalized the action in a way that provided empowerment and validation.

Next, Zach quickly decides on a course of action. In this case, he had the student’s record altered in such a way that she could register for the course. However, Zach took an intermediate step of having the student attempt to comply with the policy:

Yes, so let’s see what other classes meet these same requirements, what other things would work with your timeline, what about this class in particular – could you find another class that is...but, it really came down to that time and the offering seemed to be a perfect match. And so, after, I guess...yeah, it prompted some reflection and work on her part, but then after I felt that she had done enough with that work, I was able to get her into the class.
As noted above in the description of helping a student navigate bureaucracy, this is both an attempt at a balanced response and an educational one in that it teaches the student that advisors care for them within a bureaucratic system.

Lastly, Zach has the experience of this situation to guide future actions. For him he described the ethics of the situation in terms of process:

For me, it’s a matter of process – do you have the same process for people? And, my default is always to look at the person and the process may have been put in place for a reason but it will work itself out.

In this statement there is at least the perception that Zach will act based upon this experience in the future out of a sense of equity. Later in the interview Zach offered a reflection about policy that is evidence of how the dilemma encounter shapes his perception: “making sure that when that policy is being created, or implemented, that the people that do that direct work have a voice in the process”. This ideal for policy creation and implementation is at the same time the result of his cumulative experience and his desires for his organizations ethical ecology – thus completing the circle.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented data to support an emerging model of how professional academic advisors encounter and navigate ethical dilemmas. The emerging model is a cycle of pre-encounter conditions, encounter, discernment, and response feeding back to existing conditions. Each of these phases are composed of themes present in the data. The existing conditions consist of an advisor’s cumulative experiences and the environment in which they operate.

Encounter with dilemmas happens in the course of the work and is knowable on both a cognitive and affective level via schemas, sense of trust for others, and levels of self-care. The
substance of these encounters is related to themes of care, policy, anticipated consequences, timing, role clarity, best advocacy, and fidelity to autonomy. Discernment happens through consultation and other actions that build awareness of the dilemma and possible responses. Consultation with others is the primary mechanism of discernment and often happens informally. The discerning actions serve to empower and validate a particular response.

Responses could be either action or inaction on the part of the advisor. This action or inaction will either provide resolution or carried tension. The response themes include: adherence to or circumvention of policy, truth telling, and hearing students. These responses are often related to the source of the dilemmas, in particular policy or care. The response feeds back into conditions when encountering future dilemmas – they become cumulative experience and shape the ethical environment. In the next chapter, I discuss relationships between this grounded theory and existing conceptual framework; present limitations of the study; and provide recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE
LIMITATIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The grounded theory I describe in the preceding chapter presents a framework for understanding the data. In this chapter I discuss how findings have clear relationships to existing literature and the implications this emergent theory has for the field of advising. Next, I account for limitations of the study. Finally, I conclude with directions for future research.

Discussion

There are several points of convergence between the model that I described in the preceding chapter and the existing literature for both ethics in advising as well as other theoretical frameworks. Ethical ecology as I have described it, is taken and understood directly from Strange and Banning’s (2015) writings on Campus Ecology. The cognitive and affective components of ethical encounter and ethical reasoning in my model have some explanation in the existing literature from moral psychology regarding moral domains. In particular, care relates to Noddings’ (1984) framework described in chapter two and gives some validation to the hunch laid out in the advising literature by McClellan (2009). Dahlberg and Moss’s (2005) pedagogy of listening can explain the appeal and the potential of listening as an ethical action that advisors in the study described. Lastly, Buck, Moore, Schwartz, and Suppon’s (2001) three dialectical tensions and the connection required to understand role within these tensions is validated in my study as well.

Campus Ecology

Strange and Banning (2015) apply Kurt Lewin’s formula of understanding behavior as the function of both person variables and influences of the environment (B=P\(\cdot\)E). Strange and Banning are focused specifically on student behavior and learning, but the formula itself has
explanatory powers for people in all environments. Their work looks at several facets of the environment including both aspects of the physical environment such as things like the layout and design of office space, as well as how the organizational culture is part of the ecology of an organization. It follows that both person factors (i.e. the experiences that people bring to the present moment) and environmental factors surrounding them (i.e. the interaction with the physical and organizational ecology) shape all behavior. This shaping of behavior would include discerning a dilemma, contemplation of a dilemma, and actions or inactions to resolve it.

This campus ecological framework explains how the pre-dilemma circumstances influence both the ability to discern a dilemma as well as the process taken to resolve it. Thinking of the physical environment, office layout and the extent that the physical environment facilitates access to other professionals influences the means by which advisors can engage in consultation. Organizational dynamics also play a part. Leadership within a professional advising unit can seek ways of creating a culture that consults beyond the physical environment. For example, the advising administrators can seek to open conversation where advisors talk about their work and things that they find problematic both cognitively (e.g. with policy) or affectively (e.g. best expressions of care). Moreover, some of my subjects noted that when trust is absent that they do not engage with others. Advising administrators can seek to create cultures of trust within professional advising units.

**Moral Intuition**

Participants in my study described both cognitive and affective tensions in the moment of encounter with dilemmas and when navigating ethical tensions. Many of the participants explained that their awareness of the dilemma came from feelings. Moreover, the phase of my grounded theory that involved discernment and response to ethical tensions was often driven
more by emotion than by purely cognitive reasoning. This affective component of ethical reasoning is explained well by Jonathan Haidt's (2013) perspective on moral psychology.

Haidt (2013) reviews the literature on moral psychology and argues that "intuition comes first, strategic reasoning second" (p. 281). This is important not just for the moment of encounter with the dilemma, but also for navigating the dilemma: "Affective reactions structure and constrict the mental space within which subsequent thinking occurs" (p. 283). For Haidt, this is not an entirely problematic lack of reasoning. Citing Damasio, Haidt explains that "when emotion is removed, the result is not hyper-rational behavior, it is a disastrous inability to narrow down the choices and then choose among them" (p. 284). Haidt's perspective explains the emotional language and description that participants used in describing how they encounter ethical tensions.

Moreover, Haidt (2013) explains that though people engage in confirmation bias when confronted with their initial moral intuition, that a group of “flawed reasoners” (p. 288) can effectively challenge one another. This allows for normative standards to become integrated into the process of ethical reasoning. However, this connection to others has a tension that Haidt also explains in noting that “Morality binds and blinds” (p. 293). This raises an interesting question about the efficacy and function of the consultation component of the grounded theory: Does the consultation challenge or validate? It likely can be either or both, but validation was clearly described more clearly in the data.

Care

The ethical implications of care are central in the grounded theory. Care is one of the seven core values of NACADA: “Academic advisors respond to and are accessible to others in ways that challenge, support, nurture, and teach. Advisors build relationships through
empathetic listening and compassion for students, colleagues, and others” (NACADA: The Global Community for Advising, 2017). The association task force (on which I served) held extensive discussions with membership about what should be included in the core values of advising, and “caring” was one of those final values.

Noddings (1984) explanation of caring as an approach to ethics is very congruent with the data and grounded theory. Conflicts of care are a source of ethical tension for participants in my study, but also serve as justification for responses (actions/inactions). These conflicts arose at times from both the presentation of circumstances in students’ lives, as well as the institutional constraints and impacts how practitioners provide care to students. These data support McClellan’s assertion that the feminine ethos of caring is present in the ways in which academic advisors perceive and navigate ethical tensions in the work of advising.

Holmes (2004) studied care in academic advising relationships and skillful listening was central to the way in which care was present in advising relationships. According to Holmes, care rendered through listening, among other displays of care, builds trust. It is not surprising that the data in my study showed that both care and trust are central in ethical tensions and resolutions. Moreover, Holmes’ finding about the importance of listening are also present in my study of advisor ethics.

**Pedagogy of Listening**

Participants in the study often rendered care through listening. In light of other factors that inhibited students’ desired outcomes, participants described a strong motivation to hear students as a response to ethical tension. As noted in chapter two, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) believe that a pedagogy of listening can function as a means of counteracting the controlling nature of advising. They claimed that “Listening…is about being able to hear the ideas and
theories of the Other, and to treat them seriously and with respect” (p. 99). This openness to the other seems to be in the care-rendering of the advisors who participated in my study and seemed to describe hearing students as an important action in navigating ethical tensions. Hearing students may be a way that advisors at large research institutions represented in this study humanize the otherwise dehumanizing bureaucracies that Readings (1996) described. However, it is unclear from the data if the political ideals and dimensions are part of this listening. It may be that “hearing students” is in fact a means of asserting power and control by meeting an emotional need of the student while failing to address oppression or imbalances of power within systems and policies.

It is important to note that Emma, a participant of color, spoke explicitly about how the bureaucracy of her institution was controlling for students of color. Emma had studied Critical Theory which may explain why she was able to articulate criticality of what she saw as oppressive systems on her campus. She also spoke of experiences with students and with white colleagues that amounted to justice dilemmas. She and Liam were outliers in how explicit they were in their understanding of the arbitrary nature of policy and policy exceptions. Both described taking actions to undermine systems of control and broaden exceptions to those without the social capital to ask. Their framing of the system is a potential example of how academic advisors rejecting the neutrality of what are seen as technical systems that control and limit access to higher education.

**Three Dialectical Tensions**

Buck, Moore, Schwartz, and Suppon (2001) articulate three dialectical tensions as described in chapter two which included: neutral vs. prescriptive; encouraging vs. discouraging; and judgmental vs. nonjudgmental. Each of these tensions was present in the stories of my
participants. Some participants came down clearly on one side of a tension. Isabel for example found neutrality the more ethically appealing option in advising students, claiming that she never would just tell a student what to do. Instead she presented options. Conversely, Leyton found tension in limiting the options for an international student but determined that presenting fewer options to the student was the best course of action. The themes of the encounter and response phase could be understood as fitting into these three dialectical tensions.

Moreover, the largest congruence between these data and Buck, Moore, Schwartz, and Suppon’s (2001) article is their claim that advisors must get insights from other advisors. Connection to other advisors is a function not only of knowing where an advisor stands on these tensions as a starting point, but it is essential for them to move through discernment toward response. The importance and nature of consultation is one of several implications for practice.

**Implications for Practice**

Based upon the model presented in chapter four there are a number of recommendations for advisors and those that lead advisors (advising administrators). In order to continue to develop as a profession, advisors must continue to deepen awareness of ethical tensions and how to access the normative literature in discerning responses to ethical tensions. These include recommendations relative to the model and recommendations based on other aspects of the data. Most of the recommendations revolve around how the model can deepen anticipation of ethical problems that are inevitable in advising and on teams of advisors.

First, because advisors bring their cumulative experience to the work of advising in ways that influence their framing of dilemmas and tensions, it is important for advisors to engage in critical self-reflection. Brookfield’s (1995) framing of critical reflection can help advisors understand their own autobiographies as educators and adds a political dimension to that
criticality that is important for social justice. In Puroway (2016), I explain how Brookfield’s framework can inform self-reflective practices, but I would broaden that perspective to simply understanding the past experiences that one brings to ethics. For example, some of my participants mentioned rural upbringing as an identity which they believed shaped their perspective on ethics. Advising administrators and others who train and socialize new advisors should understand how identity shapes awareness and approach to ethical reasoning. The necessity of this kind of lens on training is present in the literature (Begley & Johnson, 2001; McClellan 2009), and is supported by my findings.

Next, ethical environments matter. The environment on a physical and organizational level is important to the awareness of ethical dilemmas as well as facilitation of response. Administrators and those with control over physical spaces on campus must consider how space can increase students’ feelings of comfort and safety (Strange & Banning, 2015). Additionally, the more access that office arrangements can provide to other advisors, the more potentiality there is for consultation and role clarification. Close proximity of other practitioners allows advisors the opportunity to seek challenge, validation, and empowerment when faced with ethical tensions. My participants’ descriptions of consultation mostly highlighted how consultation happens informally. Thus, proximity of office and common shared spaces, such as the proverbial water cooler, are likely important aspects of ethical environments.

However, it is not enough that the physical environment should facilitate consultation. Advisors must be in relationships of trust and they must have organizations that promote self-care. Advising administrators should follow McClellan’s (2014) suggestion and seek to build teams in such a way that advisors trust the other advisors with whom they work closely. When trust was present for my participants, they engaged in consultation to better understand their role
and normalize their responses. When trust was absent, advisors acted in ways they felt were ethical but with feelings of uncertainty and resentment for the lack of support. For example, in the case of Evie when she was asked by her supervisor to have a conversation that she felt was beyond the scope of her role, lack of trust impeded a third-way forward that served everyone’s needs and ethical boundaries. It is likely that the experiences of trust or distrust feed more experiences of trust or distrust.

Trust is an element of ethical ecology that influences the ethical reasoning process. Trust building should happen between supervisors as well as fellow practitioners. Participants in my study described how trust developed organically. It was not always an entirely conscious process. One subject indicated that trust was built through informal activities such as eating lunch with colleagues.

Moreover, in addition to trust, advising administrators should seek to foster organizations that encourage self-care. Recent works on willpower point to the physiological aspects of decision making (Baumeister & Tierney, 2012; McGonigal, 2013). An organizational environment that encourages self-care is setting up members of the organization to be in a more optimal physiological state for exercising good judgment when the practitioner encounters an ethical tension.

Though informality was important in facilitating consultation, advising administrators could be systematic and intentional in raising consciousness about ethical practice. The normative ethical literature is important, and systematic and periodic review of ethics in higher education should be part of continual training like that described by Damminger (2011). Continual training will keep ethical practice in the forefront of people's minds. Most participants could name formal sources of normative ethical guidance but relatively little specific impact
from those sources on their daily practice. This will help with the rational and cognitive aspects of recognizing and naming ethical tensions. Advising might look to other professions for ways in which ethics are continually renewed and taught.

Armed with the knowledge of the emotional dimensions of moral intuition, advisors should be taught to pay close attention to their emotional reactions as potential harbingers of ethical tension. Advising administrators should consider the emotional language that advisors use when describing their practice. Tense or frustrating emotions may be evidence of an ethical tension in care, role clarity, policy, or advocacy. Advising administrators should help advisors individually and collectively develop a deep and critical understanding of the ethic of care, how it plays out in their work, the limits of care, and other virtues which may inform their advising practice. Moral intuitions should be challenged as a rhetorical exercise because though validation and empowerment through consultation are important they can lack the criticality of reason. Advisors need to find ways to resist engaging in uncritical group-think while at the same time benefiting from their colleagues’ schemas. At the same time, advising administrators should view every opportunity in which advisors express tense feelings as a time to engage in dialogue to create role clarity.

Furthermore, advisors and advising administrators should engage multiple constituents in understanding, applying, and making exceptions to policies. They should anticipate ethical tensions that happen regarding timing and act to minimize these types of ethical issues. Advising teams should create opportunities to name dilemmas and tensions of seeing every student as an individual versus administering equitable systems. Advisors should engage in strategic change management when faculty or other constituents adopt policies that are applied inequitably or frequently circumvented.
One of my more experienced participants, Liam, observed that advisors tend to bring advising solutions to a problem. They have a traditional set of tools for helping students in discernment, curricular planning, and self-management that they bring to each situation. This set of tools is an important consideration in the development of institutional policy. Thus, it is important for advisors to find ways of expressing their perspective to those with the power to create and change policies as stated above. Zach made a similar observation about the importance of advisors, who explain the policies to students, being involved in the creation of those policies.

Moreover, advisors should also seek ways to transcend the traditional set of advising solutions for more critical ethical consultation and response. By gaining awareness of the ways in which advising tools shape practice, advisors might gain clarity about how to find creative responses to ethical tensions. For example, many campuses are beginning to use software applications that enable instructors to alert advisors when a student is facing academic difficulty. The technical procedures and processes for these early alert systems may shape advisors actions in ways that are technical and bureaucratic rather than more genuine expressions of care. In such instances advisors should critically question their use of the technology in a way that might both benefit from the technological efficiency while enacting the core value of caring.

Lastly with regard to practice, advising organizations need to be aware that issues of race impact the ethical practice of advising on numerous levels. Emma’s experiences as a black woman practicing advising highlight how racial dynamics within an advising unit have ethical repercussions. Emma was uniquely situated to see the systemic oppression that stymied underrepresented students within her institution because she had experienced (and was experiencing) it along with them. She also described situations wherein the internalized racism
and white guilt of her past supervisors, diminished the capacities for trusting relationships and facilitation of reflective consultation. Critical self-reflection and commitment to social justice (including racial justice) is an essential element of ethical practice for academic advisors. There is no level of critical consciousness that can be achieved that will allow for complacency on the part of advisors or advising administrators.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. My participants were less racially diverse than the overall population of NACADA members (83% vs 62% White). They represented more men than would be represented based on NACADA membership (50% vs 20.5%), and I did not interview any people who identified as transgendered. There are likely gender differences in the ways in which practitioners encounter and navigate ethical tensions as well as the ways in which they express care.

Beyond personal demographics of the participants, all participants were either on a large public university campus or were part of a large public university system. No participants were currently employed at private institutions, community colleges, proprietary institutions, or minority serving institutions. Janosik, Humphrey, and Creamer (2004) found that student affairs practitioners at large public institutions reported fewer justice dilemmas. Though this lack of institutional diversity may have limited the types of dilemmas, some participants had worked at different types of institutions previously and shared experiences prior to their current roles at large public institutions.

Moreover, the 12 participants represented only seven institutions. All 12 participants were nominated by people with whom I had prior professional relationships. Moreover, all participants were willing to take the time to talk with me about ethical issues. I solicited
participants who chose not to reply to my inquiries and two potential participants opted not to participate after reading the consent documents. It is possible that those who chose not to participate in the study had thoughts and feelings about ethical practice that were significantly different than those who chose to participate in the study.

In using a grounded theory approach, I made the intentional choice to leave the definition of the ethical dilemma or tension open to the participants’ interpretation. This allowed for the participants to name what they saw as dilemmas rather than limiting the potential scope by offering established ethical dilemmas from the advising literature. The limitation of my open approach was that some of the tensions may not meet the definition of dilemma in the way that an application of Kitchener’s principles or a more deontological approach to ethics might require. However, at times, I would offer to my participants an analysis of principles in conflict in unstructured follow-up questions to their dilemma stories. A study using more specificity about dilemmas may have yielded different results.

As stated, the descriptive power and strength of the model presented is limited by the small number of participants from relatively few institutions of the same type. However, it is a starting point for future research on how advisors engage in ethical reasoning and practice. The data presented here and the emerging model relate to the existing literature.

**Directions for Future Research**

There are several obvious projects that could stem from this study. Aspects of the model could be tested quantitatively. For example, the extent to which all advisors engage in consultation could be the subject of survey research. Further qualitative inquiry could refine the model and seek deeper understanding of how varying demographics might influence the extent to which this model holds true beyond the experiences of my participants. For example, there
were ways in which Emma’s perspectives were unique because of her experiences of oppression – the model emerged from the consonances of participants stories more than the dissonances.

A greater depth of study in various frameworks would illuminate these data in numerous ways. Similar studies with more specific theoretical lenses would also add to the body of knowledge on ethics in advising. Moral psychology has various theories such as those summarized by Haidt that could help advising as a profession promote ethical practice. Moreover, applying specific normative frameworks from moral philosophy to these data, or similar data of descriptive ethics, might help the profession of advising refine the normative literature as well as inform the most efficacious way to teach advisors how to engage in ethical practice.

Taking into account the limitations listed above, a number of variations could be tested and explored in the future. For example, would repeating this study with advisors at small private liberal arts colleges yield a significantly different model? Replication of this study with a more diverse and varied pool of participants may yield more robust results, though in this case themes emerged quite readily in the data collection phase.

Last, my research consisted of a prompt given one to three weeks prior to a single interview with each subject. Future research could focus on a more longitudinal approach to understanding how advisors encounter and navigate ethical tensions. A study that provided guidance on the type of dilemma or a cue to an ethical tension, and asking participants to journal would potentially provide more access to internal mental events over time than a single interview. Similarly, a case study could be both a test of the model proposed by the grounded theory as well as a means of drawing upon multiple perspectives on the same incident of ethical tension.
Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I articulated limitations of the study which included the limited demographics of participants and a single type of institution. I explored convergences between the grounded theory model described in chapter four and existing theoretical frameworks from the literature. Next, I provided recommendations for advisors and advising administrators to consider based upon this model including the need to create physical and organizational environments that foster trust as well as critical reflection leading to effective ethical consultation and role clarity. Lastly, I proposed future directions for research on descriptive ethics in advising.

Academic advisors’ work impacts the lives of students in positive and potentially negative ways. Care is a common value and virtue among academic advisors. Discernment of the most caring action for many advisors is synonymous with discerning the most ethical action. There is much that has to be balanced in rendering that care and advisors need one another in order to know and understand the complexities of those situations. The way advisors respond can impact both individuals and institutions. As advisors encounter ethical tensions, trying to do what is right, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing, they learn from their experience and from one another then take that experience into the next encounter of ethical tension. As advisors seek to professionalize, understanding this pattern is a strength that we can harness not only to do better for ourselves and our students, but also to make institutions of higher education more ethical and more just.
References


Figures

Figure 4.1: Emerging model of ethical encounter and response
Tables

Table 3.1: Participant overview – p. 51

Table 4.2: Focused coding of named tensions – p. 76
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

[1068589-1] DISSENTATION: Ethics in Academic Advising Grounded Theory Study

You are invited to participate in a research study about how academic advisors understand and respond to ethical dilemmas in their work life. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because a colleague put forth your name. You are eligible to participate in this study because you work as a professional academic advisor. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Drew Puroway, doctoral student in the leadership doctorate at the University of St. Thomas, and is being supervised by Dr. Jayne K. Sommers, of the department of leadership at the University of St. Thomas. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways in which academic advisors encounter and respond to ethical dilemmas in their work. The study will involve an audio recorded interview on skype/facetime or phone, which will then be analyzed and compared to other interviews for themes. This research may help further academic advising as a professional field by contributing to the body of research on the practice of advising.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Reflect upon ethical problems or dilemmas in your work as an advisor, and think of two stories to tell from your practice of advising in which you have confronted an ethical dilemma. Please remember that the story should be shared in a general way which does not violate the confidentiality of a student or fellow colleague, so be prepared to tell your story without identifiers.
- Participate in an individual interview of approximately 60-90 minutes via skype/facetime or telephone.
- Review a transcript of the interview for accuracy.
- You may be asked for follow-up information either via a confidential journaling question or a follow-up interview likely to take approximately 30 minutes.

The total time commitment is approximately two hours. The location is wherever you feel comfortable telling your story that has an internet connection for use of skype, facetime, or
telephone. You will be one of approximately 15 participants in this study. The interview will be audio recorded. There may be follow-up after your review of the interview transcript.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

The study has risks. This study asks you to recall and share two stories of encountering an ethical dilemma. You control the time, place, and manner in which your story is told – the only requirement is that there is either a telephone or internet connection with a computer with skype or facetime application software. There is a possibility that the privacy or confidentiality of the study could be compromised by a data breach or if a colleague of yours recognizes your ethical dilemma story in the reporting of the study. In order to minimize the risk of a data breach, all electronic recordings and documents will be stored in a password protected server. The recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study. In order to minimize the risks of identification by others who know you will be given a pseudonym in the reporting of the study and all specific identifiers (such as name of institution) will be also be given a pseudonym or left vague (e.g. describing your institution by region, size, and Carnegie Classification).

There are no direct benefits for participation in this study.

**Privacy**

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. As stated above, you control the place in which you engage in the skype/facetime interview. You also have control over what stories you choose to tell.

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will directly identify you. The types of records I will create include an audio recording of the interview, a transcript of the interview, and research notes. All files will be kept on a password protected onedrive account. Audio recordings will be accessible only to Drew Puroway and Dr. Jayne Sommers. The recordings will be deleted upon the completion of the study. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Drew Puroway or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up until you have reviewed your final transcript, without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be used if you have completed the review of the interview transcript for accuracy. You can withdraw by emailing Drew Puroway [dwpuroway@stthomas.edu] and stating “I wish to withdraw from the study”. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

**Contacts and Questions**
My name is Drew Puroway. You may ask any questions you have now and any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-261-2812 or via email to dwpuroway@stthomas.edu. You may also contact my faculty research advisor, Dr. Jayne K. Sommers, and she can be reached via email at somm2720@stthomas.edu or phone at (651) 962-4405. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 21 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

__________________________________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of Study Participant                          Date

__________________________________________________________
Print Name of Study Participant

__________________________________________________________  __________________________________
Signature of Researcher                          Date
APPENDIX B

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement Text

Institutional Review Board
Grants and Research Office

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

A. INSTRUCTIONS

Please read through the entirety of this form carefully before signing.

Electronic signatures are not valid for this form. After completing the required fields, please print and sign this form in blue or black ink. After this form has been signed by the transcriber, it should be given to the principal investigator of the research study for submission. After receiving the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement, the principal investigator should scan and upload the signed form to their IRBNet project package.

The transcriber should keep a copy of the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement for their records.

This agreement is for transcribers only. However, if your duties as a research assistant include transcription, you will need to review, sign, and submit the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement as well as the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement. Confidentiality agreements can be found in the document library in IRBNet.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY OF A RESEARCH STUDY:

Confidentiality is the treatment and maintenance of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure (the consent form) without permission. Confidential information relating to human subjects in a research study may include, but is not limited to:

- Name, date of birth, age, sex, address, and contact information;
- Current contact details of family, guardian, etc.;
- Medical or educational history and/or records;
- Sexual lifestyle;
- Personal care issues;
- Service records and progress notes;
- Assessments or reports;
- Ethnic or racial origin;


- Political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs.

As a transcriber you will have access to research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that include confidential information. Many participants have only revealed information to investigators because principal investigators have assured participants that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. That is why it is of the utmost importance to maintain full confidentiality when conducting your duties as a transcriber during a research study. Below is a list of expectations you will be required to adhere to as a transcriber. Please carefully review these expectations before signing this form.

C. EXPECTATIONS FOR A TRANSCRIBER

In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to:

1. Keep all research information that is shared with me (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) confidential by not discussing or sharing this information verbally or in any format with anyone other than the principal investigator of this study;

2. Ensure the security of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) while it is in my possession. This includes:
   - Using closed headphones when transcribing audio taped interviews;
   - Keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews on a password protected computer with password-protected files;
   - Closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
   - Keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
   - Permanently deleting any digital communication containing the data.

3. Not make copies of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) unless specifically instructed to do so by the principal investigator;

4. Give all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) and research participant information, back to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber;

5. After discussing it with the principal investigator, erase or destroy all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that cannot be returned to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber.

Name of Transcriber:

IRBNet Tracking Number:
Title of Research Study:

Name of Principal Investigator:

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have reviewed, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations for a transcriber described above. I agree to maintain confidentiality while performing my duties as a transcriber and recognize that failure to comply with these expectations may result in disciplinary action.

____________________________________
Signature of Transcriber

___________________________
Date

____________________________
Print Name

Revised: 08/08/16
Dear _________,

I hope that you are well. I am writing to ask for a favor as I begin collecting data for my doctoral dissertation project. I will be conducting interviews with primary role advisors as part of a grounded theory study. I am using convenience sampling to connect with my first few participants.

I am not asking you to participate in the study. However, if you are willing, I would appreciate a referral and introduction to one or two of your advising colleagues at your institution. All you would need to do is to CC me on an email of introduction to one or two of your primary role advising colleagues at your institution. In that email please state that you know me through professional networking, that I am conducting research on advising, and that I will be in-touch with them to see if they are interested in being interviewed for my doctoral study.

After your email of introduction, I will reach out to your colleague with more information and an invitation to complete a very brief questionnaire to determine if they are a good fit for the study.

__________, I am aware that we know one another through NACADA and that the majority of our interactions are through the association. I want to be clear that my research project is neither funded or sponsored by NACADA, nor is it using any association resources.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for any assistance you are willing to give.

All best,
Drew
Dear __________:

This is Drew Puroway (a friend and colleague of __________). Sorry for the long delay, I am finally following-up with more details on my research study. Please read the information below and the attached consent agreement. Assuming you wish to proceed with involvement in the study, then please reply to this email with a good day, time, and phone number to call and review the consent agreement and to schedule an interview. The consent and scheduling conversation should take about 5-10 minutes. I hope to finish the interview phase by the end of January, so the interview would ideally be scheduled and completed in that time frame.

If you choose to participate in the study, I would ask you for the following:

- Review and sign consent documents (attached)
- Reflect upon ethical problems or dilemmas in your work as an advisor, and think of two stories to tell from your practice of advising in which you have confronted an ethical dilemma
- Participate in an individual interview of approximately 60 minutes via skype
- Review a transcript of the interview for accuracy
- Additionally, I may ask for follow-up information either via a confidential journaling question or a follow-up interview.

The goal of the study is not to uncover unethical practices, but rather to determine how advisors are socialized to frame ethical issues and engage in ethical practice. Your consent to participate would be completely optional and you can withdraw that consent at any point up until your review of our interview transcript. The risks of participation are that despite the use of pseudonyms, others might find identifiers in my dissertation or the reporting of my study that would connect you with your statements. Though there are no direct benefits or compensation to you as an individual, the study could contribute to the field of advising by helping us better understand ethical practice as an emerging profession. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board [#1068589] at the University of Saint Thomas, and reasonable precautions will be taken to preserve your anonymity including the use of pseudonyms.

If you are willing to participate, have further questions about the study, or concerns, please contact me by replying to this email or calling (651) 261-2812. My dissertation chair is Dr. Jayne K. Sommers, and she can be reached via email at somm2720@stthomas.edu or phone at (651) 962-4405.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Drew Puroway
APPENDIX E

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

DATE: 
TIME: 

SUBJECT:

☐ Consent form Received
☐ Need phone fully charged with charger plugged in right near the computer
☐ Get recorder ready
☐ Facetime/Skype (need phone # and/or skype name)

Script:

I am beginning the recording now.

Consent: This interview is for my dissertation research project, the topic of which is ethics in advising. The goal of the study is not to uncover unethical practices, but rather to determine how advisors identify and navigate the ethical issues or dilemmas they encounter in the real world. You have signed the consent forms, and I want to remind you that your participation in this study is completely optional and you can withdraw that consent at any point up until you have reviewed the transcript for accuracy. Though your identity will not be linked to your statements through use of pseudonyms, there is some risk of participation in that someone (for example the person who nominated you) might find identifiers that would connect you with your statements. The interview is being recorded.

Demography:

College or University where you are currently employed: ______________________________

City & State of that institution: _____________________________________________________

Current Job Title: ______________________________________________________________

In your current position, do you consider yourself to be a primary role advisor? __________

How many years of experience do you have in advising? ______________________________

How many years of experience do you have working in higher education? _______________

Do you consider yourself to be an active member of NACADA?__________________________

Are you an active member of any other association?___________________________________

How do you identify your race or races?_____________________________________________
How do you identify your gender? (what pronouns do you use?): ________________________

How old are you? ________________________________________________________________

What is your educational background? (degrees earned; majors etc.)

__________________________________________________________

Are there any particularly salient features of your identity that you think impact your advising practice?

__________________________________________________________

Questions:

1) What influences (ie grad school, etc.) have impacted your understanding of ethics and ethical practice in advising?

   a. Are there any documents from NACADA or another organization that guide your practice as an advisor? Any specific to ethics?
   b. Does your institution give you any guidance?
   c. Please describe your your approach to advising and/or theory you draw upon and/or advising philosophy and/or guiding principle

2) You were asked to reflect on one or two dilemmas that you've faced in your practice of advising, could you please tell the stories of those dilemmas?

   a. How did you know that you were facing an ethical situation? (was it more thought or feeling – cognitive or affective)
   b. At what point in the story did you know that you were in a dilemma
   c. Was it more of a cognitive or affective sort of awareness? More thinking dilemma or feeling dilemma or both? If both which came first?

3) Could you please talk about the process you go through when trying to resolve an ethical dilemma?

   a. Is there any way that the professional literature informed your understanding or action in his situation?
   b. Is part of your process to consult others and if so, who do you consult and what does that look like?
   c. I noticed that both dilemmas were about students/colleagues/faculty. Do you ever encounter dilemmas with other staff or faculty? Does that look different than with students?

4) There is debate in NACADA about whether or not advising is a distinct profession. This is not to say that we don’t have a degree of professionalism. However, it is a debate over whether or not we have all the ingredients that constitute a profession. One criticism is that we lack an enforceable code of ethics. Would a code of ethics from NACADA for advisors be useful to you? Why or why not? Would it be helpful for everyday use or more for bigger picture use with your institution?
5) Where do you think your sense of ethics and morality comes from?
   a. What values drive you in the work of advising? [may have to identify values in their story]
   b. Perhaps specifically ask about equity and fairness.
   c. Does a sense of social justice inform your ethical actions? If so, how?

6) If you had to name a hope for each and every one of your advisees, what would that be?

7) Solicit a final reflection – Do you have any final thoughts or reflections on how you encounter and navigate ethical tensions in the work of advising?

REVIEW NEXT STEPS: 1) TS Review; 2) Journaling Assignment; Can't thank you enough, and hope our paths cross in the future