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How do academic advisors intentionally design their office space to be more inviting? A qualitative study on office décor and self-disclosure

Jessica Garcia
jg4746@rit.edu

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How do academic advisors intentionally design their office space to be more inviting?

A qualitative study on office décor and self-disclosure

Jessica Garcia

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis
of Jessica Garcia presented on 12/2/2022

Claudia Bucciferro, PhD
Assistant Professor
School of Communication
Thesis Advisor

Katrina Overby, PhD
Assistant Professor
School of Communication
Thesis Advisor

Eun Sook Kwon, PhD
Associate Professor
Director of Graduate Program
School of Communication

Tracey Worrell, PhD
Associate Professor and
Director
School of Communication

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Literature Review.....	9
Room décor in office.....	9
Social Penetration Theory.....	14
Research Question.....	17
Method.....	18
Data Analysis.....	19
Results.....	19
Discussion.....	42
Limitations.....	45
Future Studies.....	46
Conclusion.....	47
References.....	48
Appendix.....	52

Abstract

Academic advising has been part of institutions of higher education in the United States since the early 19th century. With the rise of incoming students each year and the wide range of majors and programs colleges offer, advisors are necessary to help guide students through their academic careers. This paper presents a qualitative study on how advisors intentionally create a space that encourages communication and collaboration within an advisor-advisee relationship. The theoretical framework used in this study is Social Penetration Theory, which suggests that facilitating self-disclosure will also support relationship development. For this research, academic advisors working at two different universities were selected through e-mail recruitment and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using In Vivo coding. Six themes involving office décor emerged from the analysis: use of lighting, school paraphernalia, wall decorations, desk décor, plants, and arrangement of furniture. Overall, the data suggests that academic advisors intentionally use office décor to create a space that feels welcoming to students, in order to encourage conversation and facilitate a process of self-disclosure that can support advising goals.

Keywords: Academic advising, office décor, social penetration theory, qualitative methods

How do academic advisors intentionally design their office space to be more inviting?**A qualitative study on office décor and self-disclosure**

Academic advising has been part of institutions of higher learning in the United States since the late 1820's when it was first introduced at Kenyon College in Ohio (Cook, 2001).

College presidents and, later, faculty members led academic advising for their students. With the expansion of curriculum and the introduction of electives in the 19th century, a need arose for academic advising that offered a more individualized form of counseling for the student. In its infancy, colleges and universities offered only three careers for men: ministry, law, or medicine. With the expansion of fields of study such as journalism, chemistry, art, business, and engineering, to name a few, the need for professional advising became apparent (Gordon, 2006). During the decades following the 1930s, most colleges created advising departments because of the increase of degree offerings from professions to vocations that were now available to incoming college students (Gordon, 2006).

This study takes a qualitative approach seeking to understand the role office décor plays in advising relationships, which involves self-disclosure. The meaning of self-disclosure is giving another person information about yourself that they would not otherwise know (Greene et al., 2006). Prior research shows the importance of physical space within advising and counseling, the effects of room esthetic, and the positive outcomes of room décor on clients (Bloom et al.; 2008; Aslam, 2013; Campbell, 1979; Chaikin et al., 1976; Maslow & Mintz, 1956). However, there is a lack of qualitative research revealing how academic advisors create a space inviting to their advisees, specifically in higher education. Through the experiences of the

advisor, this study aims to learn how advisors decorate their offices in order to create an inviting space for students.

There are many descriptions of an academic advisor. However, it is generally agreed upon that academic advising is the conscious connection between a student and a member of a college or university, which includes both faculty members and professional advisors (He & Hutson, 2016). The role of an academic advisor “is to help the student choose a program of study which will serve him in the development of his total potential” (O’Banion, 1994, p. 83). Additionally, academic advisors help students navigate the many institutional policies put in place for the successful completion of their degree. They refer students to appropriate departments for counseling, global engagement, student financial services, and other resources that may be needed. Advisors support their students in academics and can provide direction in career planning (Bishop, 2008).

In the current academic environment, advising is crucial to a student's development within a college or university setting. Some students may need more direction in completing their curriculum. Others may already have a goal and the steps needed to achieve that end goal. However, all students “need career advising that is geared to their education level and developmental needs” (Gordon, 2006, p.7).

Therefore, academic advising is a multi-step process that includes more than simply approving the student’s schedule and moving on. According to O’Banion (1994), the efficient academic advisor will explore life and vocational goals, available majors, courses the student will need to complete for timely graduation, and a final schedule each semester. The goal of the academic advisor is to get the student to ask themselves, “What are my ultimate life goals?” In

order to attain those life goals, vocational goals need to be met, and the role of the advisor is to guide the student through the process. College is a time to help students find what they are passionate about or just as important, what they are not passionate about (O'Banion, 1994). To have meaningful and purposeful conversations with students about life, college, and career goals, revelation on the part of the student is critical. Taken a step further, for some, the environment surrounding students may significantly add to how much a student will reveal about themselves and their aspirations.

In the "*The Appreciative Advising Revolution*," Bloom et al. (2008) discuss the disarm phase, one part of a six-phase model, in which academic advisors create a warm and welcoming space as part of their advising toolkit. The disarm phase encourages advisors to take a long, hard look at their office space. They should evaluate how students would feel walking into their office and being guided through an advising appointment. Advisors can encourage a degree of comfort for the student by ensuring comfortable seating, reflections of a life outside of work, such as hobbies or family, and maintaining an organized office.

For students, the academic advisor plays a pivotal role throughout their college career (He & Hutson, 2016). For many, advisors are the first point of contact when they arrive on campus. Aslam (2013) noted how an advisor's office is set up is especially important in creating first impressions. The physical appearance of an office can put a student at ease, encouraging them to open up about plans and career aspirations. Folsom (2011) argues that "the design and functionality of advising space is integral to and supports advising mission, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes" (p. 83).

Improvements to an office such as wall color, personalization of workspace (including photos, plants or flowers, or artwork), furniture placement, and credentials are all tools that can be used to create a relationship with advisees. Aslam (2013) argues that an office should be treated as a second home to students, should reflect the personality of an advisor, and announce to the student the role advising has in college. Physical objects in an office can help students relate to an advisor and make the appointment seem less business-like and more personable.

Literature Review

The physical space where daily lives are managed is important for completion of tasks. People will choose a place to be productive that is relaxing and comfortable or has many windows that can let in natural light. Employees design offices to be a home away from home, and residents spend money on homes to create a relaxing and welcoming space (Kvan, 2021). Essentially, we often want the places we spend our time in to help successfully complete our tasks, whether detailed or mundane. For example, those who visit the library may react to that space by lowering their voices. Our eyes take in color and brightness and can influence how we react to the space we are in (Kvan, 2021).

In their study of the effects of interior design on communication, Miwa and Hanyu (2006) sought to find the effect that room lighting had on a communication within a counseling room. The authors tested four conditions of room décor: with home-like decorations, without home-like decorations, bright lighting, and dim lighting. This study showed that dim lighting had a favorable result in that it produced positive impressions of the counselor, and participants were more apt to self-disclosure. However, their study did not find any significant patterns in the decorations of a room.

In a study on the effects of room décor and self-disclosure, Chaikin et al. (1976) predicted that “soft” rooms would encourage greater self-disclosure within a counselor and patient relationship. Many buildings that have “hard” structures, such as hospitals, universities, or prisons are often made of cinder blocks and concrete floors, and those features cannot be changed. However, a few add-ons to those counseling rooms can make all the difference. In their study, two 10x10 rooms were decorated; the first room was left with cement block walls, painted yellow, overhead lighting, one table, and one straight back chair. The other room was given an intimate feel with a rug the size of the entire floor, lamps instead of overhead lighting, picture frames on the walls, upholstered chairs, wastebaskets, magazines, and a bench along one wall. In this study, the “session” lasted 14 minutes, and participants were given 10 questions that ranged from “low intimacy to high intimacy.” As predicted, participants disclosed more information and gave much higher ratings in the “intimate” room than they did in the “hard” room. Chaikin et al. (1976) noted that “counselors do not wish to have the physical environment increase their patients' isolation and estrangement from other people and themselves; indeed, one purpose of counseling is to reduce such alienation” (p. 479).

In a qualitative study of room space and design, Sanders et al. (2019) examined 15 clients' viewpoints on how a counseling space should be set up; given the importance room décor has on the self-disclosure of patients. The participants in this study received counseling in a practitioner's office. During their interviews, the participants were asked to recreate a model of what their counseling rooms looked like. Next, they were asked to recreate a model of their “ideal” room.

Interestingly, this study showed a difference between men and women. The men did not seem to care much about the decoration or warmth of a room but were more interested in receiving quality services. The women wanted to create a warm and welcoming space for an office that was clinical in its setup. Most participants did not criticize the rooms they previously experienced. However, almost all the participants changed the arrangement of their previous room to create their ideal room. This study confirmed that features of counseling spaces affected a client's experience in either a negative or a positive way. Some common themes in office space were wall colors, decorations, lighting, and seating, much like other studies of space and comfort.

In their study, Okken et al. (2012) state, “the environment in which conversations take place can also facilitate or hinder disclosure” (p. 739). They posit that a spacious room is another factor in room décor that can affect the self-disclosure of a person. The study hypothesized that increased emotional distance, available when the room size increased, would positively influence self-disclosure. In short, “spacious perceptions” are positively connected with self-disclosure. The results of this study, which had 86 participants randomly interviewed in one of four rooms, showed that the size of the space and self-disclosure were in fact connected to “perceived” disclosure. However, when it came down to disclosing information, the topic of information was of greater importance.

Part of a room's aesthetic includes personal items such as family photos or degrees. In their study, Devlin et al. (2009) examined how credentials and personal photos can influence a person's judgment of a therapist. The authors looked at how many credentials were too few or

too many (0, 2, 4, or 9). This study also aimed to determine how the presence of personal photographs had an impact on the judgment of their clients. In their discussion of this topic, they found previous research showing that having too many credentials can “backfire” (p. 504). Additionally, men often displayed degrees and certificates, while women often displayed family photos.

Participants were given seven pictures of offices to review, each with a different number of diplomas and personal photos. The study's results found that even a display of as many as nine credentials on the wall of a therapist's office positively impacted the evaluation of the therapist's qualifications and “energy.” Regarding family photos, the results showed that when personal photos were displayed, therapists were judged more positively. Some of the qualitative comments in this study stated that the framed photographs gave the therapist more human, down-to-earth qualities. Similar to other findings in the literature, diplomas and photographs facilitated communication within the relationships noted in this study.

Previous research exploring the role of office décor in academic environments has centered on the desk layout, diploma display, wall décor, and display of personal photos. A study on an advisor's office setup at Indiana University-Perdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) noted that an affirmative space encourages partnership and discourse with students (Eckerty, 2011). A cold and unwelcoming space does the opposite by carrying messages of detachment and reticence which can send a stronger message than physically telling a student they are not welcome (Eckerty, 2011). In the study, advisors were assigned layout “A” or layout “B” and students were given both a pre-advising and post-advising survey. Students noted the layout of the desk was necessary. However, they noted that factors other than desk layout were equally as

important. For instance, being greeted by their advisor, proficiency in advising, familiarity with campus information, and the ability to thoroughly answer the students' questions were all just as important. The results of this study found that both the “A” and “B” layouts were welcoming to students. Some students enjoyed not having a desk separating them from their advisor, while others preferred a desk because it gave them a space to put their laptops, books, or other personal items. Eckerty (2011) also noted in the qualitative responses to this study that advising offices could be an excellent resource for encouraging collaboration with an advisee.

In his study of faculty office space Campbell (1979) hypothesized that students visiting their professor would respond positively to a meeting if there were items such as plants (living), art, or wall décor. They would also respond if the office was organized, and the professor's desk was to the side of the office (open) rather than placed between the professor and the student (closed). Campbell (1979) noted two important factors about faculty offices; one, there is a high level of “educational activity” that takes place in a university setting. Second, “that an office is a place that provides a common and clearly defined setting for the identification and functional relationships between attributes of the physical environment and behavior” (p. 248). The results of this study found that Campbell's (1979) hypothesis about the four aspects of a faculty member's office were indeed true. Students noted that they would feel accepted and at ease in an office setting with plants, wall art, a neat room, and had an “open” desk placement. The neatness of a faculty member's desk was rated as the highest factor in how welcome a student felt; if the desk was messy, students felt the professor was too busy to meet with them adequately and felt rushed and unimportant.

Theory

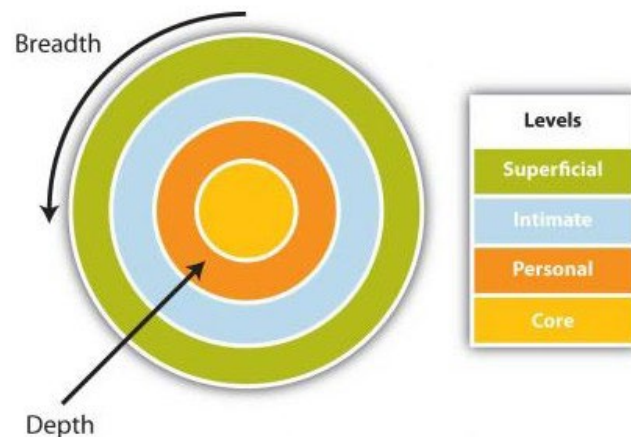
Theoretically, this study is rooted in social penetration theory, which was developed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973). Social penetration theory summarizes that interpersonal relationships, through a gradual process, move from a superficial to intimate phase. Social penetration theory (SPT) has been previously used to study romantic relationships (Forkner, 2013; Tryssa & Zarkasi, N.D.), business relationships (Hwang et al., 2014; Mangus et al., 2020), online relationships (Tang & Wang, 2012; Maheshwari & Mukherjee, 2018), and educational relationships (Cooper, 2022). The core findings of these studies showed that interpersonal relationships evolve over time from superficial to intimate communication in various types of relationships.

Social Penetration is both the open communication and the effects of an interpersonal exchange. Social penetration considers “verbal, nonverbal and environmentally oriented behaviors” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 5). People interact verbally through conversations and nonverbally through body language, which can include posture, eye contact, body movement and one’s countenance among others. Behavior based on one’s environment includes the spacing of an area, the proximity between two people and how physical objects around an environment of interpersonal communication are used. Further, it is noted that before, during and after interactions with another person are occurring each member of the group is internalizing the verbal, nonverbal and environment aspects of the conversation taking place (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Social Penetration Theory uses the metaphor of an onion. Like the layers of an onion, there are layers of personal information that people will peel back as a relationship progresses

(see Fig. 1). Specifically, four layers of self are revealed (superficial, middle, inner, and core personality) as they begin to form a relationship with another person (Carpenter & Greene, 2016). For self-disclosure to occur between a dyad, there needs to be breadth, depth, and norm of reciprocity within a social exchange. Breadth describes the amount of subject matter discussed, while depth is how intimate those topics are delved into. Figure 1 shows what breadth and depth would look like as a relationship moves from superficial to intimate. Norm of reciprocity is when a person feels that they must give information in return to someone who has divulged information to them. (Carpenter & Greene, 2016). There are three aspects of SPT that will encourage or discourage a relationship: participants' personal characteristics, outcomes of exchange, and situational context (Mangus et al., 2020).

Figure 1



Note. Adapted from Toward a Computational Model of Social Relations for Artificial Companions, 2016, p. 679

Theory (Carpenter & Greene, 2016) regarding personal and life aspirations, can help the advisor to better meet their students' needs as they venture through the following four or more years of college life. Altman and Taylor (1973) clarify this analogy by explaining, "as people continue to

interact and maintain a relationship, they gradually move toward deeper areas of their mutual personalities through the use of words, bodily behavior, and environmental behaviors” (p. 27).

The book, *Business Communication for Success* (2015b), provides a useful explanation of STP by stating, “people go from superficial to intimate conversations as trust develops through repeated, positive interactions” (p. 16.4). In addition to the breadth, depth, and norm of reciprocity mentioned previously, self-disclosure requires time, risk, and trust within a relationship. Relationships need to be given time to grow. Relationships take a risk by putting information out to the other person that may be criticized or may be valued. Trust will reveal degrees of communication within the dyad.

While previous literature illustrates the positive impact of a warmly decorated office through the lens of the advisee and, in some of the literature, the patient, no previous studies have investigated office décor through the lens of the advisor. Effective college advising is fundamental for student success. The nature of the relationship established between a student and advisor and the degree of self-disclosure achieved in said relationship matters for the outcomes of the advising process. Since office décor has been found to be important in other professional environments, investigating the role it may have within the college advising environment seems relevant.

Research Question

Previous literature suggests that room décor can play a role in how an advising interaction evolves. The display of items such as soft lighting, personal photos, degrees, plants and personal objects has been found to convey the impression of a more welcoming environment, therefore aiding conversation. Room décor has the potential to allow students to

feel they are stepping into a space that will allow for open communication without intimidation throughout the years a student will be in contact with their advisor (Bloom et al., 2008).

However, there is limited research that helps us understand advisors' perspective in this area. To explore how advisors are setting up their offices to connect with their advisees in real life, this study poses the following research question, "*How do advisors intentionally design their office space to be more inviting to their students?*"

Methodology

The methodology used for data collection was semi-structured interviews with undergraduate academic advisors at two four-year American universities. University A is a private university located in the northeast with an undergraduate student body of about 16,000 students (this included the university's international campuses). University B is a public university located in the southeast and has an undergraduate student body of a little over 20,000 students. These universities were selected for this study because, as an investigator, I have previous experience at both institutions as a student and advisor. Therefore, this is a convenient sample of advisors working at both universities who are part of my professional network. As a member of these groups, I am in a privileged position to enter conversations with them regarding their relationships with students and their perception of office décor.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, a telecommunication application. Zoom was the most appropriate tool for this research because each interview could be recorded. Zoom also provided automatic transcriptions of each interview, which were then reviewed for accuracy to ensure the dialogue was properly captured. Additionally, each interview was stored on a cloud

drive for the privacy of participants. Advisors were interviewed from April 7th to September 12th of 2022. All qualitative interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

A total of 21 academic advisors were interviewed. Eleven participants were recruited from University A, all of them female. Ten participants were recruited from University B, seven of whom were female and three of whom were male. The range of time that academic advisors have been working in the field of advising ranged from one month to 25 years. This yielded broad opinions and descriptions of room décor. Participants were recruited via e-mail using different sampling methods. First, I composed an e-mail detailing the purpose of this study and what is being asked of the potential participant (see Appendix A). The e-mail was then sent to all advisors on an advisor listserv at University A requesting participation in this research. For University B, the same e-mail detailing the purpose of this study was sent to specific advisors and also asked if they could identify other advising colleagues that would be a good fit for this study. Names of the advisors who participated have been changed to protect individual identities. During each interview, ten questions were asked of each participant and a complete list of questions is available in Appendix B.

The data was extensively examined by reading, memoing and collectively reflecting and finding potential themes found during the immersion process. In Vivo Coding, which is “the use of direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases (Saldaña, 2021)” allowed for a more robust description and first-person narrative of how advisors were intentionally setting up their office space to encourage interpersonal communication with their advisees. After each interview was transcribed, I printed a copy and read through each one. After reading each transcript, I highlighted all the data that answered each

interview question. After highlighting the relevant information on each printed copy, I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize the data. The spreadsheet contained a tab for each interviewee. Within each tab, there were three columns: one that stated each interview question, one for the answer to the interview question, and one for all of my notes throughout the interviews and how they relate to Social Penetration Theory. For examples of the spreadsheet, see Appendix C.

Results

As participants described their offices during each interview, six themes of décor repeatedly emerged; lighting (which included windows), school paraphernalia, wall décor, desk décor (which included desk layout, computers, and seating arrangements), plants, and other furniture. These six themes fell into two broader categories: intentional décor and unintentional décor. Intentional décor referred to items that advisors purposefully brought into their offices for both the student's benefit and because of their own personal taste. Examples of intentional décor included items such as wall art (personal and diplomas), plants, room scents, personal photos and other tchotchkes. Unintentional décor referred to items that came with the office when advisors moved in. These items were provided by the university or part of the built-in office space and generally could not be taken out of the offices. Examples of unintentional décor were windows, university-provided wall art, seating, desk (including the arrangement), and computers.

Lighting

Soft Lighting

Soft lighting was a theme that frequently occurred as many of the advisors commented that they did not like the harsh overhead, fluorescent lighting that are generally installed in offices. Almost half of the advisors interviewed brought lamps into their workspace because they

felt soft lighting created a “homey” atmosphere for their offices and provided a sense of comfort. One advisor noted that she turns on her lights just on darker days, not every day, “and so, I have lamps that I’ll turn on you know, on darker days...” While Barbara mentioned, “I have lamps. I have all eye levels lamps so it's a very calming environment.” Another participant, Brandy explained, “My golden lamps, I don’t like to have the overhead lights on.” Other descriptions about the lighting in offices included:

I guess I should say I have some lamps in here too that I usually keep on as opposed to the overhead lights.

I forgot to mention that I bought in some lamps from home, too, because I don't like the overhead light.

So, I tend to keep the shades not closed but drawn enough to keep it kind of ambient might be the better word not dark. I have a couple of lamps in there.

Advisors noted that lamps created an environment that felt less harsh and sterile for both their students and themselves. Lisa noted that her florescent lights added to the brightness in her office, which she liked. While she does have lamps on busier days, she uses her office lights rather than lamps:

I have wonderful fluorescent lights. I guess I should say I have some lamps in here, too, that I usually keep on as opposed to the overhead lights. But lately things have been a little too chaotic, so I just flipped on my lights.

Veronica noted that due to the size of her office, without the overhead lights her office would get very dark, so she brought in three lamps for warmer lighting:

I have the overhead lighting on, and then I have actually three lamps, so I have this one behind me, another one on the other side of my desk and another lamp behind. So generally, I do try and keep just the warmer lighting. But it gets pretty dark in here without the overhead light. Sometimes I'll shut it off depending how long I've been in my office seeing students but usually I'll just keep it on.

Advisors who had office windows were less prone to using lamps except on darker, cloudy days. They took advantage of the natural light that came into their offices and kept their overhead lights off.

Windows

For those advisors that had a window, it was one of the first things they mentioned during their interview when I asked them to describe their office. Office windows were a part of room décor that advisors were very excited about when it came to the layout of their offices. Over half of the advisors interviewed for this study had at least one window in their office. Advisors were excited to be able to look out of their windows and see what was going on at their perspective university. Several of the participants mentioned that when days are filled with consecutive advising appointments with students, looking out of their window was a nice break. One advisor only had a nine-inch window but expressed her excitement about the ability for natural light to come in and the ability to be able to see what was going on outside of her office no matter how small:

When you walk into my office, I have one window it's about nine inches wide, that gives me a give me a little sliver what's happening outside. So, it's nice, I mean it's nice because it's something, it's a window.

For several of the advisors having a window in their office was a source of pride because to them it felt like a “real office.” Others were excited to utilize natural light rather than the florescent lights that come standard with offices. They also mentioned how natural light would lift their mood if it was a particularly tough advising day:

So actually, I can see toward the dining hall, so I can kind of see students going back and forth. Through another window I see the Hendrix Student Center. And then the other wall, that other window is the front of our building, Edwards Hall.

Yes, I do have a window in my office, I would say that makes a huge difference as far as lighting. When I was in chemical engineering, I did not have a window in my office.

Lainey was intentional about setting up her office in a way that the window was the first thing that students saw:

So, when they first come in the way that I have directed my office is the window, they will be facing the window, so they walk in the door, the window is right in front of that.

Truthfully, this is the nicest office in our entire office suite, so I feel very fortunate that I have this gigantic double wide window.

Willow mentioned that she loved the view from her office so much that she intended to never change her office space. The view from her office was such a point of pride that she even mentioned thinking about taking care of the landscape outside of the office window herself when facilities management was slower to do so:

The first thing they see is the window, and because it overlooks the little coy pond outside garden. That's literally the first thing everybody says, "oh, my gosh you have such a great view!" and then I tell them, "Yes, I'm going to die in this office." So aside from a messy office, that's what they see is the huge window in the garden outside.

Skylar, specifically mentioned that she likes her office to be on the "darker, moody side." She would often keep her overhead lights off but with an office window she didn't necessarily need to keep the lighting on.

School Paraphernalia

University paraphernalia was a popular décor item. Advisors displayed paraphernalia from the school they were currently advising at and/or their alma maters. This resonated with students especially if the advisor was an alumnus of the school they were working in or perhaps aspired to attend after their undergraduate work. One advisor, Taylor an alumnus of the University of Georgia, says, "Have a picture of the old Georgia football coach Vince Dooley because I am a big Georgia fan, and I have a picture of Uga that GA bulldog." He said this resonated with students who were interested in attending the law school there and would often initiate questions about the University of Georgia. One advisor noted, "I have a [University B] mug that says, "Orange isn't a color It's a way of life." While another stated, "Behind me, I have some shelves, which is mostly got books and some like [University A] kind of bling I guess." Two advisors were particularly proud of their alumna status at their schools. They completed their undergraduate studies at University A and University B and used that to their advantage when communicating with their advisees. Their alumna status was used as a lens into who they are as a person not just an advisor:

There I have a bunch of my [University A] and I'm also an alum from it, as well. I have a bunch of my [University A] stuff like towels and bags and just things that I've accrued over the years. I love [University A] that's visible as well, on top of my filing cabinet, on top of that, I have some New York Giants football paraphernalia and some Harry Potter. Okay, because those are two of my big interests personally.

So, there are a lot of pictures with me being an alum. I got a football that had my name engraved from my aunt. Yeah, I even have like a [University B] cover that goes over the tissue box like she got me that as well. So, it's very [University B] kind of like a glimpse of my life with the different pictures.

Some of the school para was not necessarily University branded items but items that related to programs that are offered at the schools such as Performing Arts, Game Design and Development, World Cinema and even Greek affiliations. One advisor who was a former theater major said:

I've got a painting that my aunt made for me, that she painted of a tiger. I have a picture from when I was in undergrad. I was lucky enough to be on the cover of Southern Theater Magazine, and that was actually a [University B] production.

Another advisor who felt it was important to connect with students in her program used her water bottle to open up conversations with her advisees by stating, "I have my water bottle full of stickers because a lot of my student's game. I game very minimally, and so I like to give them something, like a jumping off point." One faculty advisor who teaches film history stated, "Well, hopefully, the posters will do that right? Posters of films that I have taught so hopefully that that will do it." Lainey noted her Greek affiliation was a great conversation starter as well:

So, I have this, I was affiliated with a Greek affiliation. With Alpha Z Delta, so because of a chapter here at [University A]. Music being my major so the music note, and then they add those have also been sort of ice breakers for students coming in talking about Greek affiliations.

Advisors noted that these pieces made for excellent talking points during their advising appointments and often drew the students to topics outside of academics.

Wall Décor

Wall décor had several components: wall art, degrees, whiteboard or corkboard, and inspirational quotes. When describing wall décor that was hung on office walls, advisors mentioned items such art they painted, art they brought in, art that was given to them by students and, pictures that came from their children. Wherever their art came from advisors took the time to tell me the story behind the pieces.

Taylor had a map of the southern United States mounted on his wall. As a retired history professor his work centered on Native Americans in the south and so this map was very helpful in his line of work. Other artwork that advisors had their wall were used as conversation starters with advisees:

Well, they'll comment. They might comment on the artwork. I also have had students give me art. I've had that happens three different times, and then I would lean it, I would display it. I also have two maps, laminated maps. One was showing a trip I took to India, South India, and another showing a trip I took to Spain and France. It goes up on the wall, and you know students will look at those they may comment, and I'll say, you know these are some trips that I've taken.

Leona described wall art that she had received from students who took the time to create a work of art they created:

But I do have a painting done by students who are twins. So, they're pretty well-known around campus. And they're twins and one of them was more of a poet and the other one was a painter. And so, they painted me the sunset. And one, one painted it and another one put the words, "I advise students to dream big."

Tara used her children's artwork as room décor in her office. She had their work placed on a corkboard for students and guest to see. She mentioned their work with pride when describing her office and stated that at times, the artwork was used as a topic of conversation with students.

College degrees was another source of wall art within office décor. Some advisors didn't have any degrees hanging in their office for the simple fact that they never got around to having them framed or the degrees were packed away. Tatum states about her diplomas, "I don't. Okay, just because I never got them framed." While other advisors preferred to fill their walls with other forms of art. Barbara noted, "I don't know I'd rather have artwork on the walls."

Alternately, Linea thought that it was a good way to give students insight to her on a more personal level, "I have a few elements of personal I have my degrees, which I like I think is a pretty common one. I like to give my students insight to me, so I think that makes them more comfortable with me." Several advisors intentionally noted their degrees when describing their offices. Tara, an advisor who was a first-generation college graduate stated:

You know, I was in this I guess you'd call it a workshop, and someone brought up whether or not it was a good idea to have your diploma hanging in your office and that it

could be a sign of privilege and it could turn students away, right? If they walked into your office and they saw your diploma that they might feel like “oh you know this person thinks they're holier than thou” kind of thing. You know I thought a lot about that, and I really tried to reflect on am I harming students by having that in my office? And then I came to the conclusion that for me it's such a huge part of my identity as a first gen grad you know? That was such a big accomplishment, not just for me, but for my family that it's not really the diploma that's part of my identity but it's the accomplishment you know? And so, I've chosen to keep it but I can understand how advisors probably should consider how things like that may impact a student and whether or not they're going to feel comfortable coming to us.

Alternately, one advisor made the intentional choices not to hang their degrees on their walls:

I don't know if this has ever come up, but you know the degree in the office. I don't do that. I don't put the degree up. I don't know how comfortable or uncomfortable that would make students. Yeah, if it would be sort of daunting to see a degree. But don't take that chance, so I don't have my degrees up in my office.

He didn't want to intimidate students by having his degrees on the wall, feeling that it could be a source of intimidation within the advisor/advisee relationship while completing their journey through higher education.

Whiteboard and corkboards were also part of office décor with advisors. Whiteboards were utilized as “thankfulness board,” to write a “question of the day” or encourage students to be a “teacher for the day” and explain a math problem or theory they were working on:

In terms of the walls, I have a whiteboard right where the chairs, with the students sit and I use that whiteboard so that when students are struggling with their classes, I make them teacher of the day. They have to teach me either physics problems or math problems and be able to walk me through it. It's just to help them kind of figure out okay, well what concept am I struggling with? Am I able to articulate this? And if they can't, that's a really good sign that, okay well you need to meet with your professor. You need to meet with your tutor. What other resources can we put in place to help you.

Corkboards were used to post photos, inspirational quotes, and other helpful information for students. Example of items that advisors posted on their board were photos, Ally stickers, safe zone stickers, thank you notes and inspirational quotes that were not part of wall décor.

Inspirational quotes were seen in many of the participants offices. Advisors noted that they put up these quotes intentionally not only for their students but for themselves as well, to help keep them going when it's been a particularly busy day or when they have had a difficult advising appointment. Particularly, Tara was intentional about describing an inspiring quote she often reads for motivation, "she needed a hero so that's what she became." Thinking outside of the box of inspirational quotes, one advisor used a popular comic series about aliens visiting earth to inspire students to achieve the end goal of graduation:

So, it's pretty much just a guy, he's an illustrator who draws [scenarios] if aliens came to our planet and they do human things and they try and say what's going on. He's pretty popular and I also like the fact that it's about graduation, and like getting students to the end goal.

Other examples of inspirational décor advisors used included motivational quotes, quotes about mental health, or comical quotes:

“Yes, and then, like some things like, [quotes] “sometimes I open my mouth, and my mother comes out,” and “all I need is my coffee, and mascara.” So just things that kind of just make me laugh and smile.”

Nylah mentioned that her students were grateful to read the words that she had posted in her office because many of them will come to her when they are starting to panic about classes:

A lot are type A and a lot of them are very structured, very orderly, and when something is not the way that they thought it was going to be, some of them have a big meltdown, and they don't know what else to do, where you know they need to go from there.

Her words of affirmation offered a way for the nursing students in her program to take in calming words during stressful times of the semester such as exams, midterms or clinicals. She also noted that, Students observe they really do observe, and I think your space needs to be very open. It needs to be very inviting. So, the student feels kind of feels comfortable too you know?”

Desk Décor

Desk décor was an important part of an advisor's office space. Advisors utilized this space to display family photos, décor that was not wall art such as mugs, sensory bins, pride flags or other conversation pieces and the lamps that were mentioned previously. Some of the family photos seen were wedding, graduation, family or pet photos . For example, Tatum had a picture of her dog that students loved hearing about, “...I had a picture of my dog, Suki, so he was in one of the pictures, and sometimes the students would be like, “Oh, what tell me about your dog?”

Just about every advisor had a least one family photo reflecting their significant other, children, parents, siblings, or pets. Linea felt photos were a good way to “humanize” an advisor. Several advisors mentioned that students don’t realize that advisors maintain daytime hours and are rarely available to meet students during evening or weekend hours. Students would often try to connect with advisors during off hours and advisors used their décor to remind them they have a life outside of work:

I do have one picture of me and my fiancé but that's kind of the pictures of me my family. I think it's important to show them, I know we say this and sounds so cringy to be like yeah, I’m a human too. But I think it's also nice to show them you know I get it. I get kind of what you're going through and what you may be experiencing, and I understand it, to some degree or like I’ll care.

There was an advisor who intentionally decided to keep her family life outside of the workplace so that students could focus on getting to know her in a way that would allow for better interpersonal communication:

...I do not have any pictures of my family, that was intentional. I wanted to be personal, but I didn't want to get too personal. I had, initially when I first had my first child, I did have a photo of her in my office, but I was like they don't care which sounds pessimistic. They have their own lives; they have academics they're worried about. They're essentially doing a full-time job and have their own personal circumstances surrounding that. I also like to kind of try my best to keep work and personal somewhat separate now which I wasn't able to do in Residence Life, and that was very important to me. It was a that was kind of the intention behind that.

Because of experiences in a previous position where the lines between work and home were blurred, she wanted to be able to draw the line in her current position as an academic advisor. She intentionally brought in décor that reflected her own hobbies and interests rather than showing her family.

Advisors also kept room refreshers such as diffusers. Kimberly stated, “I am all about the diffusers, and so that sense of calmness I feel like can really help.” Advisors noted that when students are regularly coming in for appointments that they would turn them off in case students were allergic or the smells were too overpowering. Bowls of candy or snacks, helpful information about career fairs, events happening on campus or study guides were also part of advisor’s desk décor. Advisor spoke about having several options for their students including pens, pencils, university information and snacks:

I can meet students where we're both sitting at this roundtable. I have handouts there; you know things like weekly schedules and semester grids. I might have a flyer like on the Career Fair that's coming up. I might get the latest copy of the Reporter Magazine and put it out there.

Mia noted that some students are dealing with food insecurity, and it was important to her (along with several other advisors) that she had snacks available for students. They also provided candy that could help calm students down:

So, I knew students were going to be in here, and I just wanted them to kind of, to feel comfortable. I think that was my biggest thing. So, I have, you know, ginger mints and regular mints, and I'll probably have chocolate in here, because things can just get stressful.

Alternately, Tara had a mini refrigerator in her office for personal use because she noted that advisors do spend so much time in their office:

I have a fridge. You know people, students and colleagues will come into my office and they'll say, "oh my gosh she decorated it so much." I'm really intentional because we spend so much of our time and our work in our office, that I need to feel at home. Yes, I need to feel like it's a place that I want to spend eight hours a day, you know, five days a week.

Another common item that advisors had on their desk were sensory items. Advisors had students who were on the spectrum or just anxious about meeting someone new. One advisor was very excited to participate in this study because she intentionally created a "sensory space" for her students. She placed a sign on her desk stating, "sensory space, please feel free to utilize a fidget tool, just a sanitized after use" so that her students would know they were allowed to touch the items without. Advisors wanted to provide items that would help them focus or put them at ease. Some of the items advisors had available for their students included stress balls, poppits, and Rubik's cubes. Advisor noted that attending career fairs was a great way to start building a sensory collection, as many prospective employers used these types of tchotchkes to attract students to their tables. Veronica noted that she had collected over 30 different stress ball specifically so that she had items for her students to hold when they came into her office:

You can't see it, but I have a collection of these different like squeeze ball things.

I don't know the formal name or whatever. It is stress balls that's what they're called, so students will often pick these up and play with them and I've actually gotten them at

career fairs. They're always giving them away at the career fairs and so I've developed a collection of that.

Advisors were very intentional about making sure students who had higher levels of apprehension came into a place that would decrease that apprehension.

Desk Layout

For most advisors, the layout of their desks did not provide options for how they could arrange their offices. One advisor, Tatum, took matters into her own hands. She had enough space that allowed her to shift her desk to accommodate closer proximity to her advisees:

Because the way the previous person had it, the desk was set up so that the student would have to be on the other side of the desk, and that didn't seem very welcoming. It felt like you're saying, don't come any closer. You know it's easy it was an L-shaped and so I moved. It so it's in the corner. So, some someone could like it right come up and sit right next to me.

She felt that having no desk between advisor and advisees showed that she encouraged closer proximity, thus creating a more welcoming environment. There were some advisors who wished to have no desk between themselves and their advises (as see with an L or U-shaped desk).

Taylor noted that, "Ideally if it were me, we would get rid of some of those desk and sideboards and all that stuff, and I would just kind of have a little sitting area where we can sit down."

Another advisor didn't like that her desk was set up so that her back was to the door. She would

have liked to be able to greet her students face to face rather than having students come in and be greeted by her back. She noted, “the desk is configured as an L-shape; I cannot move it. Set up that way it's kind of weird because I have my back towards the door.”

Other advisors described their desk set up with no negative or positive tones. They had no desire to change the set up as they understood the furniture was generally permanent. Some advisors were concerned that the layout of the desk allowed the student first access to the exit the premises which raised safety concerns for the advisor if there was an emergency:

Because it's literally that small that I couldn't move my desk, even if I wanted to.

Theoretically when I came to this position, I would have preferred my desk to be closer to the door so that if there were an emergency, you know with a student that I would feel I guess safe, where I could exit the room, if I needed to. Now it's very much like the students sort of has the power of where the chairs are if I needed to get out. I'd have to somehow overcome that barrier. I know I'm like going into some random details, but just in terms of the layout.

They noted that they didn't feel comfortable knowing that they were blocked into their offices both by their desk and their student in the event of an emergency.

Seating

Seating is an essential part of an advisor's office. Both universities provided seating for the advisor's offices. Some advisors had different styles of seating and different amounts of seating for their offices. While the number of seats in each advisor's office was generally two, Leona was fortunate to have more than one type of seating in her office:

I have two orange chairs and a bold print that I inherited. But they're really funky. And then if you were to walk in and turn to face me, you're you'll see an orange couch, more like a loveseat that I've thought was a little bit, but it actually fits in because the walls are darker color.

Ann also had more than one option for her students to sit down by mentioning that she had two desk and also a bench for those students who wanted a little more proximity to her during their advising meetings. Brandy had to opportunity to choose the seating for her students and opted for chairs that matched school colors and where also outside of the box of your typical office chairs. She mentioned that they were accents chairs rather than desk chairs which, she felt made her office homier.

Another insight to seating for students was allowing space for students with disabilities to enter offices. Lainey became more conscious of having open space in her office that would accommodate her student:

I was particularly mindful of that because they do have a student in a wheelchair, so I needed to make sure I'm thinking of that in terms of accessibility and making sure that was as welcoming as possible for the student.

She explained that she had encouraged one of her advisees to attend the office hours their professor maintained. The student mentioned that they did see the professor, but it was somewhat awkward because their office was not able to accommodate the space that a wheelchair took up.

Plants

Plants are a small but popular décor item among advisors that many felt added a touch of "comfort" to their offices. Advisors talked about how much time is spent in their offices and

they wanted to make their space a “home away from home.” They felt that adding a plant to their office added to their offices in a simple but effective way. Advisors noted that plants gave a “comfort” and “hominess” to their offices. Almost half of the advisors interviewed had either artificial plants or live plants or flowers incorporated into their offices. One particular note, I made while interviewing participants was that none of the male advisors interviewed for this study had plants visible as nor did they mention plants as part of their office décor.

Bookshelves and Filing Cabinets

While these items were not pieces that the advisors chose themselves, they incorporated them into the office in a way that personalized each advisor’s space. Bookshelves were used to hold books the advisors were interested in. One advisor displayed her Harry Potter collection. Other advisors had books about law, comic, or professional development. One advisor purchased books because they looked aesthetically pleasing. She didn’t ever intend to read them; they were solely for decorative purposes. Bookshelves were also used to hold personal photos and memorabilia. Jonathan was moving his growing collection of film books from home to office because he now had wall to wall bookshelves that came with his office:

I put up my cards, things that you know people have given me so show I’ve been in this role. I’m a big reader so books on my shelf up here and some of them are related to higher ED but most are not, and if there's ever a student that wants to borrow a book or something that is fine, I would let them do that I’m sure.

One advisor had his books organized by color, which provided a visual aesthetic for anyone who entered his office. This was also immediately visible during our Zoom interview.

Leona used one of her bookshelves to display all the thank you notes among other things, she has received throughout her years as an advisor. She noted, “I have thank you notes and graduation announcements, student artwork, anything that I’ve received from students.” She mentioned the reason she likes to post them up is to show incoming students that she has helped all these students in the past and she is here to help future students.

Filing cabinets are office pieces that also played a role in office décor. As we continue progressing through the digital age, hard copy storage has become less of a necessity, however, there were some advisors whose programs still required hard copies of student records for at least five years after graduation or departure from a program. Advisors took the opportunity to use the cabinets as another way to further bring out the personality of their offices. Barbara decided to incorporate her décor with the filing cabinet by stating, “...but I have a big painting on the wall near a low-level filing cabinet with a chair next to it...” Mia had two cabinets in her office, and she also used the top of the cabinets to incorporate decor into her office which included a lamp and a picture of her daughter.

Décor and Relationship Development

As previously mentioned, Social Penetration Theory (STP) can be applied to many different relationships. The relationship between an advisor and an advisee is one such example of how STP can be used to explain how this type of interpersonal communication works. SPT summarizes that self-disclosure is essential within a relationship. Altman and Taylor argued that “Obviously, some disclosure is necessary *before* people can decide if they like one another; it may be necessary to stimulate the other person to reveal, or it may be designed to make the self

appear attractive” (p. 52). Room décor offers an environmental behavior that allows for the development of interpersonal communication between two people.

The breadth of the relationship is one of three factors of self-disclosure within STP. During interviews advisors often spoke of giving their advisees opportunities to talk about more than just academics. Barbara gives students opportunities for students to learn things other than their class schedules such as such as career fairs. Bri also gave her students opportunities to learn about topics outside of academic advising:

But also, I think some of the aspects of my conversations with students are not just academic, like here's your graduation requirements. It's not counseling, I'm always very careful to make sure that I don't slip into that role at all because it's not what I am. But there are sensitive conversations we have there are conversations that I think involve the student having to be vulnerable, and I think, making a space for them, or they feel comfortable and welcomed is important to lend itself to those conversations.

Jonathan gave another example of how office décor can lead to the breadth of a relationship. He mentioned how important it is for students to know who they are outside of the classroom:

It can be meaningful to students, right? They have a sense of who you are besides just advisor. You know they see that you love movies, for example. This is what you teach. They might ask you about your classes, and they could lead to other things besides just what I need to take from my classes next semester.

Linea agrees that room décor can provide for a breadth of topics which is important in self-disclosure:

I think it also helps them. Like I said I want them to have something to talk to me about outside of academics, and this kind of helps. I've had a few conversations with students about where I get these dice, because they're there for D and D for Dungeons and Dragons. Okay, and I think showing them that your academic advisor plays D& D you know? I understand what these things are. We can talk about this and that's cool you know I'm not going to think you're weird because you play it, because I play it. I think that definitely helps them start to relate to me kind of break down their barriers, a little bit because they're not scared of the academic advisor.

Resources that advisors provided double as décor and are opportunities for advisors to talk about a wide range of topics for student growth during their college years:

I have a lot of resources posted as well. So, on my door you'll see the co-op schedule in terms of their mock interviews, resume writing workshops, those types of things I've got a lot of motivational pieces around my office like, "exhale all the bullshit." You know you want them to understand you're an approachable person and you want to be able to have that door left open for them and I always tell my students if you don't know where to start, start with me and we'll figure it out together.

The depth of topics discussed within a relationship is another important factor within a relationship. It is an import part of peeling back the metaphorical "onion" mentioned in connection to STP. Advisors have opportunities to really delve into topics because they are meeting with students for the duration of their college career (at least three to five years). Mia is an example of the how she created a deep relationship with her advisee. Her advisees met at University A and dated throughout their college years and all the while Mia was their advisor. For example, she said,

“You know I’m actually, in March, going down to DR. One of my students who graduated four or five years ago is getting married.”

Leona felt that office décor opens the door to building a relationship with students that is more than superficial. She wants the student to be comfortable asking more profound questions:

And I want to be that person that people aren't afraid to ask a question of, even if it seems silly, because I understand the advising process can be very challenging. I mean, when it's early on, it's kind of checking boxes, getting the classes, but sometimes it molds into, “I don't know what I'm doing with my life.” I am uncertain. Can you tell me more about this class and how it benefited me, or I think I'm in the wrong place and I don't want to be seen as an imposter.

Tara was able to describe a time when her room décor was able to help a more reserved student talk about her future. Tara's advisee talked not just about graduating from college but personal goals she wanted to accomplish, like getting married and starting a family:

There was a student once that came to my office, and she's definitely someone that was more reserved, you know it was hard to break those barriers down to gain her trust and I had a picture of my kids that was on my desk and she said, “Oh, you have kids?” And I said, “Yeah!” You know we started talking about it and she's like, “I really want kids like when I graduate. I'd love to get married and have children.” That really started a whole conversation where, as silly as it sounds, that was like the thing that broke the barrier with her. Where, for whatever reason, because I had kids and she related to that I think she trusted me a little bit more, and she was willing, I think, to let me in and just start that relationship. You know, to go below the surface.

Another critical factor in self-disclosure is norm or reciprocity or giving someone information to get information from the person in the relationship. Advisors used their room décor to do just that. They used room décor to reveal their layers, whether it was family, hobbies, alma maters or a set of beliefs. Taylor wanted students to know his interests outside of academics so that students would be comfortable connecting with him as an advisor. He remembered hearing the term “renaissance man” and desired to have an interest in academics, literature, athletics, philosophy, and other topics. More importantly, he wanted his student to know he was interested in a variety of topics and not just “this mean ‘ole professor.”

Family photos and personal items are one way to allow for norm of reciprocity within a relationship. It allows a small window into an advisor’s life outside of academics. Advisors used the term “human ” many times since they felt that students only saw them as advisors and nothing else. One advisor wanted her students to know that she had a life outside of work. She also wanted to show her students the places she’s experienced. While someone else said:

I think the decor makes them also just recognize that I am also a human and an advisor. You know they can they see about me, and they can ask me questions if they are trying to figure out their own path. So, I would say, it's really important to make them hopefully feel welcome.

Another example of room décor that allowed for norm of reciprocity was information on LGBTQ+ that advisors would put on their desks. This information let students know that the office was a safe space or a space where students could feel comfortable asking for help or recourses:

I would definitely say even just this little LGBTQ Suicide Prevention thing. Ironically, I’ve had quite a few students come out or say that they're trans or that they haven't told anybody.

They feel pretty comfortable, I would say. I've had a lot of students come out and tell me that they are somewhere on the spectrum of LGBT+ and they haven't told people and they're nervous to tell people, or certain people. I'm always like, "oh my god I can't believe you're comfortable enough to share with me, I really value that." It is important to me to make that piece aware and I'm like, "do you want me to change your name, do you want me to call you something else?" Really asking about their pronouns and that stuff, but I have had a lot of students or like at the time my mom and I would you know when just getting more information, how do you think that's going to go or just kind of helping them with that navigating that piece.

Kimberly used her faith to connect with students. She understands that not every student will resonate with that, but for some students, it came as a pleasant surprise and showed another side of her as an advisor. She noted, "So, I know everyone is not into faith or religion, or things like that. But I do have like Scriptures around, and some students were like kind of surprised that kind of, you know, had them open up." Kimberly appreciated that she had the freedom to display her faith and that students resonated with the fact that they could have those discussions with her if desired.

Discussion

This study enhances the literature shown that the design and layout of an office is important in creating a quality experience for the advisee, by providing qualitative research on how academic advisors can create a welcoming space. This study illustrated, through interviews with current advisors, what advisors can do to create a space that will allow for self-disclosure on both the part of the academic advisor and advisee. Advising is an important piece of a student's

college journey as advisors are, for many, the first point of contact with the university. They can also help direct students to connect with other resources and events on campus that will provide the student with a whole college experience.

Social Penetration Theory (STP) informed this study by providing an explanation on how room décor can help to peel back the metaphorical layers of a relationship. Norm of reciprocity was shown when advisors took the time to let their advisees know more about themselves through personal photos, degrees, books, and wall art that they found inspiring. It was through these items that advisors hoped to gain a deeper insight into their advisees' goals and dreams to help guide them through their college career and on to postgraduate work or studies. An example of depth of relationship was displayed when one of the advisors interviewed spoke about developing a deep relationship with her advisees which resulted in an invitation to the advisees wedding. Advisors also used their décor to explore a range of topics outside of academics, such as family, hobbies, and favorite sports to grow the breadth of the relationship with their students.

The six reoccurring themes found through the interviews conducted as part of this research were supported previous literature. Those themes included: lighting, school paraphernalia, wall décor, desk décor, plants, bookshelves and filing cabinets. These themes provided detailed descriptions of how advisors are providing warm, welcoming, and safe environments for their students. As mentioned earlier in the results, there were two broader categories of décor: intentional décor and unintentional décor. By tying both intentional and unintentional décor together, advisors demonstrated that they provided a space for both students and themselves that allows for interpersonal communication. As the relationships progress, students begin to understand that their advisors will not only provide guidance for graduation but

are also available to help with their physical needs, such as food, school supplies, or university needs such as information on career fairs or ways to get involved on campus.

Several of the themes presented in this study were ones I anticipated to find based on the previous research discussed regarding office décor of counselors and advisors. For example, nearly every advisor mentioned lighting. Many advisors did not use the overhead lighting and preferred softer lighting created by bring in lamps. Personal photos were also used throughout advisors' offices. They were used as office décor on office walls, bookshelves, windowsills, and desks. Office windows were another topic that was described naturally as part of the office decor more than expected. Those that had windows pointed them out with pride and joy. They were excited to be able to look out and see the goings on of their respective campuses. Those that did not have windows either did not mention it or pointed it out in a rather glum way that they did not have natural light in their office. In a study about regarding offices with windows verses offices without window, Heerwagen & Orians (1986) noted that employees prefer to have windows so that they can view the environment outside of their offices and have access to sunlight. The results of their study also showed that those who did not have a window in their office made up for it by utilizing more wall décor.

Another topic supported by the literature was, why advisors decorated their offices. While advisors noted that the main reason they decorated their offices was for the benefit of their students, they also noted that their offices are a second home because of the number of hours spent on campus. Advisors noted that a typical work week is 35 to 40 hours per week with most of that time being spent in their offices with students. Advisors wanted their spaces to be an environment they enjoyed working in so that they could present their best to advisees. They

wanted their offices to be a place they could reflect and reset if they were having a hectic day or a challenging advising appointment with a student. Much like the reasons we decorate our home, we want the place we spend a lot of time in to reflect our tastes and level of comfort.

Times have changed since much of the previous literature had been published, therefore there were two specific topics that did not appear in previous literature but provided new, important insights. First, several advisors mentioned having sensory items available as part of their desk decor for students on the spectrum as part of their desk decor. Cox, et al. (2107) note that there are about 16,000 students in the United States that enter college with a form of autism. Advisors took the time to meet the needs of this specific group of students. They made sure they were providing a space that allowed for ease of communication and the decrease of apprehension between advisor and advisee by having items available for students to hold so that they would not lose focus during their meeting times.

Second was desk layout in connection with safety. Several female advisors noted that the way their desk was positioned did not provide for a safe space for the advisor. Students had first access to the exit in the office or had the ability to block the exit and this made some advisors uncomfortable. In their study on campus safety and female faculty and staff, Fletcher & Bryden (2009) stated that “females are more fearful for their personal safety within the university setting than their male counterparts” (p.182). This was consistent with my finding as it was only the female advisors that brought up issues of safety within an advising appointment. One solution can be for university administration can partner with advisors by installing panic buttons to advisors’ desk to ease the apprehension advisors may feel when dealing with a student who might make them feel unsafe.

Limits of this study

There were several limits to this study. One is the use of a teleconferencing platform (Zoom) to conduct participant interviews. While this application provided transcripts of all the interviews, I was not able to see each participant's office for myself. Through the computer camera I was only able to see parts of their offices and I had to rely on the descriptions of each participant as they described their office rather than seeing the entire office in person and recording the details myself. Second, the participants of this study were made up of primarily female academic advisors. Having a more evenly balanced group of men and women might have given different results. One study previously mentioned that women were more concerned how warmly an office was decorated while men were more concerned about receiving quality services (Sanders et al., 2019). Another limit of this study was that 19 of the academic advisors were professional advisors, while two of the academic advisors were faculty advisors. This means that in addition to advising, faculty advisors also had teaching responsibilities that might pull them away from the concerns of advising. It is possible that having interviewed more faculty advisors may have given different results. Additionally, there was very limited qualitative research on the impact of office décor in the academic setting. Many articles focused on office décor within counseling relationships rather than higher education relationships.

Future Research

One area of research that should be investigated in the future is how advising and room décor were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. When universities had to send students home during the height of the pandemic, academic advisors had to make the shift from in-person advising to online advising via applications such as Google Meet or Zoom. How did advisors adjust their

virtual office to accommodate students and make them feel welcome? Alternately, looking at room décor through the lens of a student is another topic for future research. A qualitative study can be conducted by interviewing students and learning what their thoughts or reactions are to room décor in their advisor's office. Learning what constitutes a warm and welcoming environment from the perspective of the student is another way to look at the connections between an advisor and advisee. Another area of future research can focus topics that was not supported by the literature. How advisors can implement office décor to accommodate neurodiverse students, including those on the autism spectrum, to help them have a more successful college advising experience. One other future area of study can concentration on a qualitative study of the physical safety of academic advisors on college campuses.

Finally, this study can be useful for the person who is just entering the world of advising and looking for guidance on how to connect with their advisees in making successful interpersonal connections and guiding their student to graduation. Additionally, advisors who have been in the advising profession for some time can use this study as a source of information to refresh an outdated office. They can learn what advisors are doing in real life to create successful interpersonal communication with their advisees. Examples of office décor and how that décor can help create productive relationships were stated throughout this study.

Useful tools such as sensory bins, thankfulness boards and appointing a "teacher of the day" are some of the useful outcomes seen from this study. This study agreed with the previous literature showing that warm lighting, plants, wall art, etc. are important when forming relationships with another person in an office setting. Previous research has given advisors theoretical ways in which they can advise their students. However, this study contributes to the

landscape of academic advising through the lived-in experiences of current academic advisors and how they use their physical environment to connect with student.

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Appendix A

RE: introduction

To: Jessica Garcia

You replied to this message on 6/23/2022 4:31 PM.

This message is being sent to Primary Academic Advisors, NTID Counselors and HEOP Counselors on Main Campus

Dear Colleagues,

I am sharing an invitation on behalf of a RIT graduate student conducting research regarding academic advisor office spaces. Please see the information below regarding an opportunity to participate in this advising research project.

Thank you,
Jemi

Hello,

My name is Jessica Garcia, I am a graduate student at the Rochester Institute of Technology in the School of Communication, and I am conducting a study to complete my master's thesis in Communication. I am seeking academic advisors to participate in a study regarding office décor. The purpose of this study is to (1) describe how academic advisors intentionally set up their office spaces and (2) to find out if said office space has any bearing on how students connect with their academic advisor. Participants in this study will participate in face-to-face interviews which will include 5-10 open-ended questions and will last 30-60 minutes. The interview will take place via Zoom and will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of each interview. Interpreting services can be arranged upon request.

If you would like to participate in this study, please e-mail me at jg4746@rit.edu.

From: Jessica Garcia <jgarcia6@clemsun.edu>
 Sent: Wednesday, June 22, 2022 4:23 PM
 To: [Redacted]
 Subject: RE: Introduction

Jemi,

This is great! I do agree that I am in the clear for the IRB.

Thanks again for your help! I look forward to hearing from interested folks!

Jessica Garcia CLEMSON UNIVERSITY
 Advisor/Recruiter
 College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities
 105 Strode Tower
 864.656.4484
jgarcia6@clemsun.edu

Invitation-Advisor Research Project

JG Jessica Garcia

Consent Form.docx
20 KB


Hi [Redacted]

As you know, I am a graduate student at the Rochester Institute of Technology in the School of Communication, and I am conducting a study to complete my master's thesis in Communication. I am seeking academic advisors to participate in a study regarding office décor. The purpose of this study is to (1) describe how academic advisors intentionally set up their office spaces and (2) to find out if said office space has any bearing on how students connect with their academic advisor. Participants in this study will participate in face-to-face interviews which will include 5-10 open-ended questions and will last 30-60 minutes. The interview will take place via Zoom and will be recorded to ensure the accuracy of each interview.

Would you be interested in participating? If so, I have attached a consent form which gives more detailed information regarding my research. If you are interested, please digitally sign the consent form and we can schedule an interview anytime in August.

Sincerely,

Jessica Garcia CLEMSON UNIVERSITY
 Advisor/Recruiter
 College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities
 105 Strode Tower
 864.656.4484
jgarcia6@clemsun.edu



Appendix B

Title: “How do academic advisors design their office space to be more inviting?”

Date/time of interview:

Participant e-mail address:

Interviewer: Jessica Garcia

Meeting platform: Zoom

Consent form number:

Consent for use of name: Real Pseudonym: _____

Consent to record: Yes No

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today! I would like to know how academic advisors design their space to be inviting to their advisees.

PAUSE [allow interviewee to respond]

“I have a few questions to guide our conversation in so let’s get started:

1. Can state your job title?
2. How long have you been an advisor?
3. Are you a professional advisor or a faculty advisor?
4. Can you describe your journey in becoming an advisor?
5. How long have you been in your current space?
6. Can you provide a physical description of your current office?

Follow up question (if these are not discussed in their descriptions):

How about the lighting? Are their windows in your office?

What color are your walls?

What about seating for your advisee?

How long have you been in this office?

7. When you were decorating your office, did you have an audience in mind? If so, whom?
8. Can you describe a time when something in your office related to one of your students?
9. Did that item(s) allow you to break the ice with the student? That is did the student disclose more information about themselves personally and their college and career goals either immediately or over the course of your advising relationship?

10. How do you think an advisor's office décor plays a role in building a relationship with an advisee?

Appendix C

Example of data analysis:

