

# When Curiosity is Generosity: The impact of social curiosity on advice giving

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## Background

**Curiosity has long been associated knowledge seeking, but is it also important for knowledge sharing?**

While general curiosity has been associated with learning, we propose that social curiosity or the desire to know what others are thinking, doing, or feeling will be important for teaching and advising. We argue that social curiosity can encourage advisors to understand their advisees' mindsets and guide advisors toward formulating higher quality advice.

**Hypothesis 1:** Advisors high in social curiosity provide higher quality advice compared to those low in social curiosity.

We also propose that as socially curious advisors seek information about how their advisees are thinking and feeling, they will be more likely to engage in perspective-taking. The increased awareness of how their advisees are understanding a situation will help advisors provide more relevant, helpful and personalized advice.

**Hypothesis 2:** Perspective-taking mediates the relationship between advisor social curiosity and advice quality.

## Study 1

**Design:** College upperclassmen provided general advice to college freshmen, which a group of college freshman advisees rate the quality of the advice.

**Results:** Advisor social curiosity is an important predictor of advice quality that is distinct from related constructs (having a growth mindset and an open personality).

Study 1: Advice Quality Regression Results

Fixed Effects	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Curiosity</i>						
Social Curiosity	0.17**	0.06	0.17**	0.06	0.16**	0.06
<i>Advisor Characteristics</i>						
Openness			0.01	0.06	0.01	0.06
Growth Mindset			0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
<i>Advisor Characteristics</i>						
School Year					-0.05	0.06
Age					0.10	0.07
Gender					-0.17*	0.07
Race					-0.05	0.06
					<0.01	0.06
N	190		190		187	
BIC	1509.28		1528.45		1537.23	
Marginal R2	0.03		0.03		0.05	
Conditional R2	0.51		0.51		0.53	

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Abstract

Although we typically associate curiosity with learning, we demonstrate that curiosity is a critical ingredient for effective teaching, advising, and mentoring. Across contexts ranging from short-term advising interactions to long-term mentoring relationships, we find both correlational (Studies 1-2B) and causal evidence (Study 3) that advisors with greater social curiosity are more effective: advisees rate their advice as higher in quality. We further unpack active listening and question-asking as critical behaviors that explain the relationship between social curiosity and advising quality (Studies 2A-2B). Asking questions about advisees sparks social curiosity amongst those who lack it, improving advisers' ability to perspective-take and ultimately benefiting advisees (Study 3). Taken together, we examine the critical role of social curiosity in the domain of advising and demonstrate that advisors who learn to be more curious serve as better teachers, advisors, and mentors.

## Study 2A

**Design:** Participants recalled a time they received advice and reported their perceptions of their advisor's social curiosity.

**Results:** We uncover the specific behaviors linked to social curiosity in real-world advising contexts: question-asking and active listening.

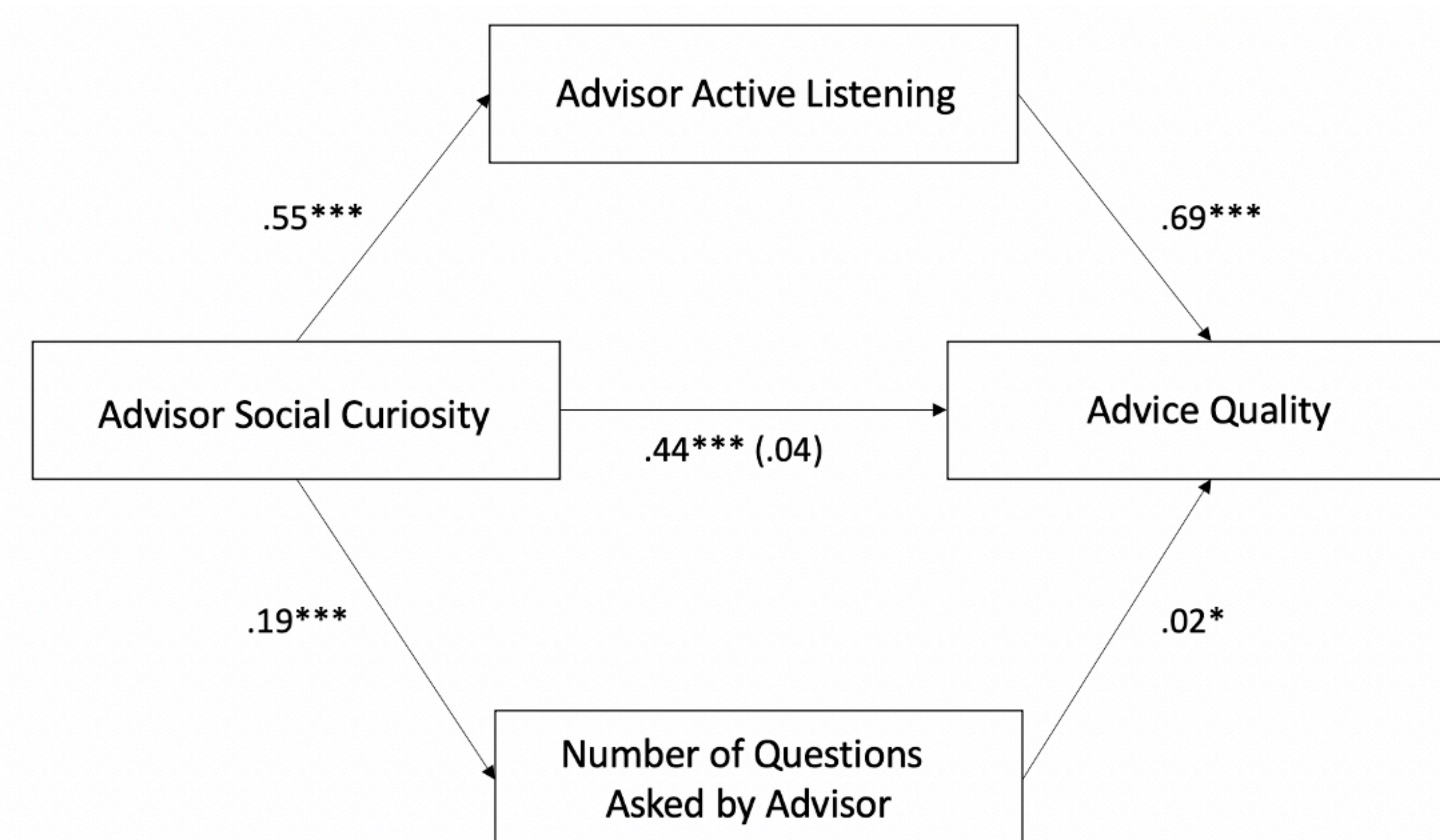


Figure: Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between advisor social curiosity and advice helpfulness as mediated by advisor active listening and question-asking behaviors. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Study 2B

**Design:** We use a longitudinal design in which full-time workers identified good and bad advisors as well as their perceptions of their advisors' social curiosity (at Time 1), and then provided information about their conversation behaviors (at Time 2).

## Study 2B (cont.)

**Results:** By asking participants to decompose their typical conversations with their advisors, we found that socially curious advisors were more effective due to greater question-asking and listening.

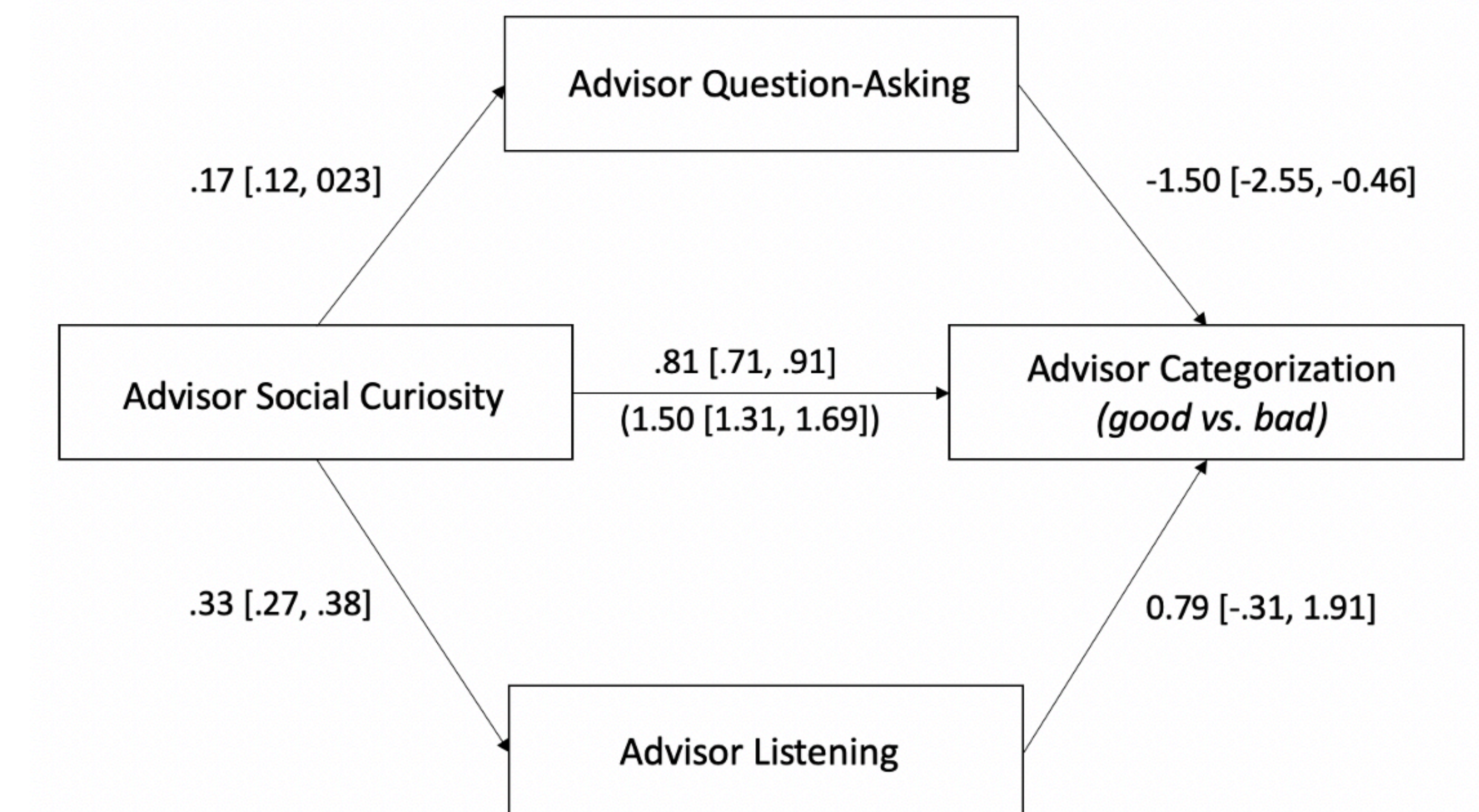


Figure: Regression coefficients for the relationship between advisor social curiosity and advisor categorization as mediated by advisor question-asking and listening behaviors. Credible intervals in brackets.

## Study 3

**Design:** We experimentally manipulating advisors' state social curiosity and ask them to provide advice on how to develop computer programming skills. Then a group of coding novices rate the quality of the advice

**Results:** We find that social curiosity is malleable: engaging in behaviors that are typically expressions of social curiosity (i.e., asking questions) helps advisors with lower levels of trait social curiosity, enabling them to produce higher quality advice. We demonstrate that perspective-taking is a critical pathway explaining the link between social curiosity and advice quality.

## Discussion

Across four studies, we find that when advisors are socially curious, or curious about how people think, feel, and behave, they give higher quality advice. When advisors are in a socially curious mindset, they ask more questions and listen more to their advisees (Studies 2A-B), as well as engage in more perspective-taking (Study 3), enabling them to formulate advice that their advisees view as more helpful.

## Zoom Link

<https://hbs.zoom.us/j/94004518359?pwd=Nmp3SEFFc1MxRWpta3Z0YXhDbXJZQT09>

Meeting ID: 940 0451 8359

Passcode: 901430