**It takes a village: Commensality as an approach to getting research done**

Introduction. Commensality is being together around a table, sharing the pleasures of the table and eating together. Here, commensality frames the mentoring process that complemented the formal supervision of one Australian HDR candidate who was struggling to complete her research. The process of working with critical friends at campus coffee shops supported her through to submission of her thesis.

Aims. Our aim is to establish the value of the campus coffee shop as a place of commensality. We also present a model of additional mentoring support that can enable HDR candidates, in conjunction with their academic faculty supervisors, to achieve success.

Methods. This research is a reflective autoethnography by three key actors: the HDR candidate, and two critical friends. One acted as project management coach, and one performed as a writing process coach. Each perspective contributes to the development of this mentorship model.

Results. Rich insight from the three actors in this mentoring process provides justification for this model to be replicated in a more formalised HDR student mentorship program. These results are couched within the contextually safe space of the campus coffee shop, a place both within the bounds of the university, yet away from the traditional academic space. The combination of commensality and critical friends as a mentoring approach was vital to our HDR student’s successful thesis submission. Both the place and the role of each actor ensured this success.

Discussion. It is through writing that HDR students demonstrate their knowledge and research significance, and their degree is awarded on the quality of their thesis, so a process is needed to help students achieve positive outcomes. The commensal meeting of critical friends with HDR students has proven to be a strategy that leads to productive outcomes.