MY MENTOR, MYSELF: ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF PERCEIVED SIMILARITY IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

by

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(Under the Direction of Lillian T. Eby)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the antecedents and outcomes of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships in a sample of 82 matched mentor-protégé dyads. Polynomial regression analyses indicated that mentor-protégé similarity attachment security was marginally associated with protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors, such that protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors were highest when mentors and protégés were similarly high or similarly low in attachment security. There were no effects of similarity in relational self-construal on perceived similarity. Path analyses indicated that perceived similarity was positively associated with protégés’ organizational and professional commitment, and these associations were fully mediated by relational identification. These findings suggest that the effects of actual personality similarity on perceptions of similarity may depend on the similar trait, and provide further evidence of the importance of perceived similarity to not only mentoring relationships, but also to organizations and professional bodies.

INDEX WORDS: Mentoring; Attachment; Relational Self-Construal; Perceived Similarity; Relational Identification; Organizational Commitment; Professional Commitment
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A considerable volume of research demonstrates that mentoring — a developmental relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced protégé (Kram, 1985) — plays an important role in employees’ work attitudes and behavior, as well as their career progression. Researchers have found that mentored individuals experience higher compensation, promotion rates, and job and career satisfaction compared to non-mentored individuals (e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Receiving mentoring is also related to important career-related and behavioral outcomes for protégés, including greater perceived career success and lower turnover intentions (Eby et al., 2013). In addition, mentoring has been linked to important organizational outcomes, including lower turnover (Payne & Huffman, 2005) and higher organizational performance (Allen, Smith, Mael, O’Shea, & Eby, 2009). Many organizations have implemented formal mentoring programs in order to capitalize on the benefits of mentoring (e.g., Khidekel, 2013); however, little is known about how characteristics of mentors and protégés jointly affect these positive outcomes.

Recently, researchers have called for more research on the dyadic and interactive effects of personality on mentoring relationships (Turban & Lee, 2007). In particular, Turban and Lee (2007) argue that protégés may be more attracted to and more effective with mentors who have similar personality characteristics. Mentor-protégé personality similarity is particularly important to examine given that protégé perceptions of similarity to their mentors is the strongest predictor of protégé reports of mentor support and relationship quality (Eby et al., 2013). However, researchers have not examined how the personality characteristics of both the mentor
and protégé may relate to protégé perceptions of similarity to the mentor. In addition, although perceived similarity is an important predictor of protégé perceptions of the mentoring relationship, researchers have not examined whether perceived similarity has positive downstream effects on protégés’ perceptions of their organizations and professions. As a result, there is little empirical guidance on how organizations and mentors can capitalize on perceived similarity to benefit both protégés and the organization as a whole.

Accordingly, the purpose of the current study is to further understand the antecedents and consequences of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships. Specifically, this study examines whether mentor-protégé similarity in two personality traits — attachment security and relational self-construal — relates to protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors. In addition, the current study extends research on perceived similarity in mentoring relationships by examining how protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors relates to protégés’ organizational and professional commitment. Finally, the current study examines relational identification — defining the self in terms of a particular role relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) — as a mediator of the association between protégé perceptions of similarity and commitment to their organizations and professions. The current study seeks to provide valuable information to organizations seeking to develop and benefit from effective mentoring relationships, and to help mentors and protégés better understand how their personal characteristics jointly affect the mentoring relationship.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Mentoring

Mentoring is a developmental relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced protégé (Kram, 1985). Workplace mentoring occurs within organizational settings and focuses on the personal and professional growth and development of the protégé (Kram, 1985). Over the past few decades, researchers have highlighted the importance of mentoring to employee and organizational outcomes. Receiving workplace mentoring is associated with a number of positive outcomes for protégés, including higher compensation, promotion rate, and job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2004; Chao, 1997; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Eby et al., 2013; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991). Researchers have also found that mentoring is associated with positive outcomes for organizations, including lower turnover (Payne & Huffman, 2005) and higher organizational citizenship behaviors (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000). Given the importance of mentoring to employees and organizations, it is critical for researchers to examine the antecedents of successful mentoring relationships.

In a recent meta-analysis, Eby and colleagues (2013) examined three groups of potential antecedents of protégé perceptions of mentoring: demographics, human capital, and relationship attributes. Generally, the authors found no associations or weak associations between most of these antecedents and protégés’ perceptions of mentor support or relationship quality. However, deep-level similarity—protégés’ overall perceptions of similarity to their mentors in terms of attitudes, values, beliefs, or personality—emerged as a consistent and strong predictor of protégés’ support perceptions and perceptions of relationship quality. Other studies have found
that perceived similarity is related to mentors’ perceptions of mentorship quality and learning (Allen & Eby, 2003), liking of protégés (Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005), initiation of mentoring relationships (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997), and mentoring provided to protégés (Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Turan, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). Researchers have also found that perceived similarity is related to protégés’ satisfaction with their mentoring relationships (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Marelich, 2002; Ensher & Murphy, 1997), intention to continue their mentoring relationships (Ensher & Murphy, 1997), and reports of mentoring received (Turan et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2006; Ensher et al., 2002). However, despite the importance of perceived similarity as a predictor of positive mentoring experiences, there is very little research examining predictors of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships. Thus, in order for organizations to capitalize on the strong association between perceived similarity and positive mentoring outcomes, researchers must identify 1) which characteristics of mentors and protégés are likely to predict perceptions of similarity, and 2) whether actual similarity between mentors and protégés on these characteristics predicts perceptions of similarity, which may in turn be associated with protégé outcomes.

**Perceived Similarity**

In mentoring relationships, perceived similarity — the extent to which a protégé perceives that he or she is similar to a mentor in terms of underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs (Turan et al., 2002) — is consistently one of the strongest predictors of positive mentoring experiences (Eby et al., 2013). In addition, protégé perceptions of dissimilarity, or mismatch, to mentors are among the most commonly reported negative mentoring experiences (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000). These results are consistent with the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), which posits that individuals are attracted to
those who are similar to themselves. According to Byrne (1971), we are attracted to similar people because they reinforce and validate our beliefs, attitudes, and behavior; the positive affect arising from this reinforcement results in positive feelings and attraction toward the similar person.

Despite the importance of perceived similarity to mentoring relationships, meta-analytic research finds that actual demographic similarity between mentors and protégés does not predict positive mentoring or perceived similarity (Eby et al., 2013). Rather, in workplace relationships, deep-level similarities in terms of similarity in values, personalities, and attitudes tend to have stronger effects on employee perceptions than surface-level similarities such as race and gender (Huang & Iun, 2006). Several studies have examined actual deep-level similarity in supervisor-subordinate dyads (Allinson, Armstrong, & Hayes, 2001; Ashkanasy & O’Connor, 1997; Huang & Iun, 2006; Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989; Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001; Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, & Couch, 1980); however, the results have generally been weak or inconsistent in predicting organizational or employee outcomes, particularly when examining personality similarity. Huang and Iun (2006) suggested that supervisor-subordinate similarity effects may be most apparent when the similar characteristic is work-related; for example, Meglino et al. (1989) found that workers were more satisfied and committed when their work values were similar to their supervisor’s work values. Additionally, few studies have found an association between supervisor-subordinate similarity on a deep-level trait and perceived similarity (see Huang & Iun, 2006 and Wexley et al., 1980 for exceptions). One reason for the inconsistent findings in this area may be that many supervisor-subordinate relationships are not sufficiently close for subordinates to gain adequate knowledge of their supervisors’ similar characteristics; for example, Meglino, Ravlin, and Adkins (1992) suggested that the effects of
value congruence were relatively weak due to the small amount of daily contact employees had with their supervisors. Thus, to the extent that workplace relationships are characterized by close contact, actual similarity may be a stronger predictor of relational and work outcomes. For this reason, Meglino et al. (1992) suggested that the effects of congruence might be stronger in work relationships that are characterized by close contact, such as mentoring relationships.

Given the strong and consistent associations between perceived similarity and mentoring processes, there is a need to explore the specific characteristics of mentors and protégés that may predict perceptions of similarity in mentoring relationships. The present study addresses this issue by examining whether actual mentor-protégé similarity on two relationally-oriented personality traits — attachment security and relational self-construal — predicts protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors. These two deep-level characteristics are particularly relevant to mentoring relationships, in that both assess general ways of viewing close relationships and the self. Given that successful mentoring relationships are often characterized by interpersonal closeness and an emotional bond between mentor and protégé (Wu, Foo, & Turban, 2008), characteristics that relate to how individuals experience close relationships may be particularly relevant to mentoring outcomes.

Similarity in relationally-oriented traits is especially relevant to psychosocial mentoring — an interpersonal form of mentoring support that focuses on developing the protégé’s sense of professional competence and identity (Kram, 1985). To the extent that mentors and protégés hold similar beliefs and preferences about close relationships, mentors may be better able to provide effective and relevant psychosocial support, and protégés may be more accepting of support given. For example, a mentor who tends to incorporate close relationships into her self-concept may be better able to provide effective support to a protégé with similar tendencies than
to a protégé who tends to distance herself from close relationships. A less relationally-focused protégé may perceive the mentor’s attempts at psychosocial support as overwhelming, and the mentor may perceive the protégé as disengaged and rejecting. This pairing may be unlikely to produce an effective mentoring relationship in which the protégé identifies with the mentor. Given the strong meta-analytic association between perceived deep-level similarity and psychosocial support in mentoring relationships ($R_{xy} = .49$), it is critical for researchers to examine how mentor-protégé similarity in approaches toward close relationships may relate to perceived similarity.

**Attachment**

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) posits that individuals form internal representations or working models of attachment based on their early experiences with caregivers. Although attachment may vary across relationship partners, research has found that attachment orientation is quite stable over time and that individuals can be reliably classified into prototypical attachment patterns (Fraley, 2002). Secure attachment is characterized by positive internal working models of the self and of others (Bartholomew, 1990); thus, securely attached individuals expect close others to be available and responsive, and believe that they are worthy of care from others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Likewise, securely attached individuals are more likely to provide appropriate caregiving in the form of social support than insecurely attached individuals (Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996). Relationships in which both partners are securely attached are both complementary (they confirm each partner’s positive expectations of themselves and others) and similar (both partners have similar working models of self and others; Bowlby, 1973; Klohnén & Luo, 2003). These complementary and similar positive expectations explain why secure-secure partner pairings are associated with the most
positive outcomes in romantic relationships (e.g., Banse, 2004; Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2005).

In the context of mentoring relationships, the securely attached mentor is likely to engage in appropriate caregiving in the form of career-related and psychosocial support toward his or her protégé, and the securely attached protégé is likely to both expect and accept the support provided. The mentor’s responsive and supportive actions serve to confirm the protégé’s positive expectations about how others should behave; likewise, the securely attached protégé’s willingness to receive caregiving confirms the mentor’s positive expectations of others. For these reasons, scholars have suggested that mentoring relationships in which both mentor and protégé are securely attached are likely to be the most functional (Germain, 2011; Gormley, 2008); however, researchers have not tested this assumption, nor have they examined the association between mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security and perceptions of similarity.

As described above, securely attached partners tend to confirm each other’s positive expectations of themselves and others. These similarities in working models, and subsequently behavior, suggest that secure individuals are likely to perceive themselves as similar to other secure people. In addition, securely attached individuals are more likely than insecurely attached individuals to engage in self-disclosure (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991), increasing the likelihood that an interaction partner will discover common values, interests, and beliefs, and thus perceive greater similarity. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that secure individuals will perceive themselves as similar to other secure individuals, who share similar working models, are similarly comfortable with interpersonal closeness, and tend to act in ways that encourage the development of close relationships.

Very little research has examined the association between perceived similarity and actual
similarity in attachment security; however, research suggests that perceptions of similarity may converge with actual similarity in attachment orientation. For example, Klohnen and Luo (2003) found that perceived similarity in attachment orientation fully mediated the association between actual similarity in attachment orientation and attraction in romantic relationships. Individual differences in attachment have also been examined in relation to mentoring. Allen, Shockley, and Poteat (2010) found that protégé anxious attachment was associated with less feedback seeking and less feedback acceptance in mentoring relationships. In addition, Wang, Noe, Wang, and Greenberger (2009) found that mentor and protégé attachment avoidance was associated with less willingness to mentor in the future, and that mentor avoidance was negatively related to protégé reports of mentoring received. However, this emerging area of mentoring research has not examined the effects of attachment security in the context of mentoring relationships, or similarity in attachment between mentor and protégé. This is an important contribution, as most adults have secure attachment orientations (e.g., Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994), and there is a need for organizational researchers to examine protective individual characteristics in addition to problematic traits (Roberts, 2006). Moreover, both mentor and protégé characteristics contribute to relational dynamics in mentoring, so it is important to consider actual similarity as a predictor of protégés’ perceptions of mentors. The current study will extend emerging research on attachment in mentoring relationships by examining how mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security predicts protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors.

_Hypothesis 1:_ Mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security is positively associated with protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors.
Relational Self-Construal

Mentor-protégé similarity in relational self-construal may also relate to protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors. Relational self-construal refers to the tendency to define the self in terms of close relationships (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Individuals with highly relational self-construals are more likely to perceive overlap between themselves and close others, and tend to perceive greater similarity between themselves and close others than do those with lower relational self-construals. Specifically, Cross, Morris, and Gore (2002) found that individuals with highly relational self-construals described themselves and a close friend similarly, and perceived their friends to have similar traits and abilities to themselves. Thus, there are clear theoretical and empirical links between relational self-construal and perceived similarity; however, researchers have not examined relational self-construal in the context of mentoring relationships.

At the dyadic level, individuals with highly relational self-construals are likely to think and act in ways that lead to cognitive closeness and mutual self-disclosure (Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006; Morry & Kito, 2009), which in turn may foster similarity perceptions. However, researchers have not examined whether individuals with highly relational self-construals perceive greater similarity to others who are similarly high in relational self-construal. Consequently, the present study will examine how mentor-protégé similarity in relational self-construal relates to protégés’ perceptions of similarity.

Hypothesis 2: Mentor-protégé similarity in relational self-construal is positively associated with protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors.
Relational Identification

Although perceived similarity is related to positive mentoring outcomes (Eby et al., 2013), it is unclear whether protégés perceptions of similarity to mentors relate to protégé work attitudes. Two work attitudes that have implications for both employees and organizations are organizational commitment – employees’ identification with and involvement in their employing organizations (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) – and professional commitment — employees’ identification with and involvement in their professions (Morrow & Wirth, 1989). Researchers have found that organizational and professional commitment are important predictors of withdrawal behaviors, including turnover and turnover-related intentions, absenteeism, and lateness, and other employee attitudes, such as motivation and job satisfaction (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Although researchers have found that mentoring is positively related to organizational commitment (Aryee & Chay, 1994; Baugh, Lankau, & Scandura, 1996; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Donaldson et al., 2000; Heimann & Pittenger, 1996; Orpen, 1997; Payne & Huffman, 2005); the mechanisms underlying this association are not clearly understood. In addition, researchers have not examined the associations among protégés’ perceptions of similarity to mentors and organizational and professional commitment.

Although researchers have not examined perceived similarity as a predictor of organizational and professional commitment in mentoring relationships, a few studies have examined subordinates’ perceptions of similarity to supervisors as a predictor of organizational commitment. Specifically, Meglino et al. (1989) found that employees and supervisors who perceived that management held similar values scored higher on organizational commitment. In addition, Gibson and Barron (2003) found that older employees’ perceptions of similarity to
organizational role models predicted organizational commitment. Despite this initial evidence, there is limited theoretical rationale to expect a direct relationship between perceptions of similarity and organizational or professional commitment. However, relational identification (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) offers a reasonable explanation for why perceived similarity may indirectly relate to these outcomes. Relational identification refers to defining the self in terms of a particular role-relationship. For example, a relationally-identified protégé would likely include the mentoring relationship as part of his or her self-concept. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) refer to perceived similarity as an antecedent to relational identification, resulting from the personalization process. That is, as the mentor and protégé interact, the protégé may come to see the mentor as a unique person rather than as a prototypical member of a social group. Greater insight into the mentor’s unique characteristics through personalization increases the likelihood that the protégé will recognize aspects of him or herself in the mentor, facilitating relational identification. Formally, I propose:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived similarity is positively related to relational identification.

Sluss and Ashforth (2007) propose that relational identification may generalize to identification with shared higher-order social groups and categories. Thus, a protégé who is relationally-identified with the mentoring relationship may generalize this identification to the organization as a whole, as both mentor and protégé share membership in the organization (Sluss, Ployhart, Cobb, & Ashforth, 2012). Likewise, a protégé’s relational identification may generalize to the profession that both the mentor and protégé share, resulting in higher professional commitment. The association between relational identification and organizational commitment is consistent with suggestions that mentors serve as organizational agents, and that interactions with mentors result in the development of perceptions about the organization
(Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Orpen, 1997). For example, Baranik et al. (2010) found that mentoring support received was related to perceived organizational support, suggesting that protégés generalized the support they received from mentors to the organization as a whole. In addition, one of the primary functions of a mentor is the professional and organizational socialization of protégés (Kram, 1985); as such, mentors often explicitly and directly act as agents of their organizations and professions. Thus, the present study examines relational identification as a mediator of the relationship between perceived similarity and organizational and professional commitment.

*Hypothesis 4:* Relational identification mediates the relationship between protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors and organizational commitment.

*Hypothesis 5:* Relational identification mediates the relationship between protégés’ perceptions of similarity to their mentors and professional commitment.

The present study addresses three major issues in the literature on mentoring and perceived similarity. First, given the strong associations between perceived similarity and mentoring outcomes, it is critical for researchers to examine relevant predictors of similarity in mentoring relationships. The present study addresses this issue by examining whether mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security and relational self-construal predict protégés’ perceptions of similarity. Second, the current study examines whether perceived similarity relates to two outcomes that have important implications for employees and organizations, namely, organizational and professional commitment. Third, this study addresses the need to test theories that propose associations between protégé perceptions of mentors and higher-order social groups by examining relational identification as a mediator of the associations among perceived similarity and organizational and professional commitment. The results of this study can provide
guidance to mentors seeking develop relationships that have reverberating effects on protégés’
perceptions of their organizations and professions. This study is also relevant to I/O and
management practitioners who are interested in mentoring as an avenue to deepen employee
commitment to their organizations and professions.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

A survey was sent to 2501 employees from two large state universities, one in the Southeast \( n = 1552 \) and one in the Midwest \( n = 949 \). Employees in salaried jobs with professional titles (e.g., director, manager) were targeted since mentors tend to be white-collar, managerial, or professional. Since student-faculty mentorships may be qualitatively different than workplace mentorships (Eby et al., 2013), employees classified as assistant professors, associate professors, full professors, and instructors were excluded from the sample. Survey packets were sent to employees’ work addresses through campus mail. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, mentor survey, and return envelope, along with a sealed envelope for the mentor to pass onto his or her protégé. The protégé’s sealed enveloped contained a cover letter, protégé survey, and return envelope. Potential participants were told that the study was designed to learn more about the advantages and disadvantages of workplace mentoring. Following Dillman’s (2000) suggestion, potential participants were contacted multiple times both before and after receiving the survey.

Targeted employees were instructed to return a completed survey if they were mentors, but to either disregard or return an unanswered survey if they were not mentors. Six hundred and fifty-nine individuals returned completed and unanswered surveys, yielding a general response rate of 26%. This is a conservative estimate of the response rate because mentors could not be targeted in advance and because many employees likely discarded surveys because they did not have experience as a mentor. Mentors were identified with the following question (adapted from

“One type of work relationship is a mentoring relationship. A mentor is generally defined as a higher-ranking, influential individual in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge and is committed to providing upward mobility and support in the protégé’s career. A protégé may or may not be in the mentor’s department or unit, and s/he may not be your immediate subordinate. Have you ever had a protégé? (yes or no)”

Of the 659 returned surveys, 218 indicated experience as a mentor. Eighty-two protégé surveys that could be matched with mentor surveys were received; of these, 75.6% \((n = 62)\) were classified as informal mentoring relationships (i.e., developed without outside assistance) by protégés. The majority of mentors were White \((n = 75; 91.5\%)\), and over half were women \((n = 49; 59.8\%)\). The average age of mentors was 45.19, and mentors had been employed at their respective universities for an average of 11.2 years \((SD = 8.39)\). The majority of protégés were White \((n = 72; 87.8\%)\), and nearly three-quarters were women \((n = 60; 73.2\%)\). The average age of protégés was 33.25, and protégés had been employed at their respective universities for an average of 5.42 years \((SD = 5.76)\). The majority of mentor-protégé dyads were racially similar \((85.4\%; n = 70)\), and 62.2% \((n = 51)\) of protégés were in relationships with mentors of the same gender. Mentoring relationship length averaged 2.56 years \((SD = 3.44)\), and most protégés reported that their mentors were either directly involved with their career development \((n = 37; 45.1\%)\) or that their relationship with their mentor was best described as one between two colleagues \((n = 27; 32.9\%)\). These definitions correspond to the cultivation and redefinition phases of the mentoring relationship, respectively (Kram, 1983).

Although the percentage of overall missing values was low overall \((3.38\%)\), about 20% \((n = 16)\) of the dyads had missing data on at least one of the study variables. As recommended
by Newman (2009), I employed a multiple imputation (MI) approach to missing data. MI involves estimating missing values based on the available data from all of the respondents for all of the variables, and is preferable to listwise or pairwise deletion because the latter techniques reduce statistical power and MI provides superior parameter and standard error estimates (Newman, 2009). Missing data values were estimated using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC). Based on Schafer’s (1999) recommendation, five imputations were employed. The results of subsequent analyses are based on the pooled results of these five imputations; when pooled estimates were not provided by SPSS by default, I used the average estimate across the imputations (Schafer, 1999).

Measures

**Attachment security.** Attachment security was measured using Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) Relationship Questionnaire (RQ). Participants were asked to rate their degree of correspondence to a short paragraph describing the secure attachment pattern using a 5-point scale: *It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don’t worry about being alone or having other accept me.* Higher scores indicate greater correspondence to the secure attachment pattern. Considerable research supports the construct validity and stability of the RQ as a measure of adult attachment (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

**Relational self-construal.** Relational self-construal was measured using Cross, Bacon, and Morris’ (2000) seven-item Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale. A sample item is “My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am”. Responses for each item range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .84 for mentors and .89 for protégés.
**Perceived similarity.** Perceived similarity was measured using the nine-item *mismatch within the dyad* subscale of Eby, Butts, Lockwood, and Simon’s (2004) negative mentoring experiences measure. Sample items include “The personal values of my mentor are different from my own” and “My mentor and I are different” (reverse-scored). Responses for each item range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Mismatch within the dyad is defined as “mismatches with one’s mentor in terms of personality, work styles, and values” (Eby et al., 2004, p.415). Thus, this subscale appears to be the opposite of perceived similarity (i.e., the extent to which a protégé perceives that he or she is similar to a mentor in terms of underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs; Turban et al., 2002). Since items are reverse-scored, higher scores indicate greater perceptions of similarity to the mentor. Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

**Relational identification.** Relational identification was measured using the three-item role model subscale of Ragins and McFarlin’s (1990) mentor role instrument. Sample items include “My mentor is someone I can identify with” and “My mentor represents who I want to be”. Responses for each item range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Role modeling is conceptualized as a form of identification with a mentor (Gibson & Barron, 2003; Kram, 1985; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Scandura & Ragins, 1993), whereby the protégé admires and strives to be like the mentor. Interestingly, Baranik et al. (2010) found that role modeling was the only form of psychosocial mentoring that related to protégé organizational commitment. Likewise, a recent meta-analysis found that that role modeling was the strongest predictor of organizational outcomes, above other forms of mentoring support (Dickson et al., 2013). This suggests that role modeling may play a unique role in generalizing mentoring experiences to the organization. Given that relational identification assesses the extent to which
individuals identify with a particular role-relationship (e.g., mentoring relationships), role modeling appears to be an appropriate representation for relational identification in mentoring relationships.

**Organizational commitment.** Organizational commitment was measured using Meyer, Allen, and Smith’s (1993) six-item affective commitment to the organization subscale. Because the respondents were employed at a university, the wording of items was modified to refer to “university” instead of “organization”. A sample item is “I do not feel “emotionally attached” to this university” (reverse-scored). Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

**Professional commitment.** Professional commitment will be measured using Meyer, Allen, and Smith’s (1993) five-item affective commitment to the occupation scale. Since Meyer et al.’s (1993) original scale referred to the nursing context only, the wording of items was modified to refer to career and professional commitment more broadly. Sample items include “I dislike my career” (reverse-scored) and “I am proud to be in this profession”. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

**Control variables.** Three potential control variables were included in initial analyses. First, I considered controlling for mentoring relationship length because previous research has found that it is related to the development of similarity perceptions (Allen & Eby, 2003; Lankau et al., 2005; Turban et al., 2002) and it is hypothesized to relate to the personalization process (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Relationship length was measured using protégés’ reports of how long they have been in their mentoring relationships in months. In addition, I considered controlling for racial and gender similarity within the dyad in order to account for the possibility that the effects of personality similarity are being driven by demographic similarity. Two
dummy-coded variables were created: one for racial similarity and one for gender similarity. Demographically similar dyads (i.e., both mentor and protégé identified as the same race or gender) were coded 1, whereas demographically dissimilar dyads were coded 0. I also considered controlling for source effects — that is, differences between the University of Georgia and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the main study variables. The University of Georgia was coded 1 and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was coded 2.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. There were no significant correlations between the hypothesized control variables and perceived similarity; therefore, these variables were not included in subsequent analyses. In order to examine similarity effects, I used polynomial regression with response surface methodology. This procedure avoids the conceptual and methodological problems associated with the use of difference scores as an index of similarity (Edwards, 1995; Edwards, 2001; Edwards & Parry, 1993). Polynomial regression also provides more information than moderated regression because it tests nonlinear effects and tests for both similarity and discrepancy effects (Shanock, Baran, Gentry Pattison, & Heggestad, 2010). The regression equations for perceived similarity are below:

\[ PS = b_{PS0} + b_{PS1}PA + b_{PS2}MA + b_{PS3}PA^2 + b_{PS4}MAPA + b_{PS5}MA^2 \]

\[ PS = b_{PS0} + b_{PS1}PR + b_{PS2}MR + b_{PS3}PR^2 + b_{PS4}MRPR + b_{PS5}MR^2 \]

where PS represents perceived similarity, MA and PA are mentor and protégé attachment security, and PR and MR are mentor and protégé relational self-construal. Following Edwards’ (1994) recommendation, both PA and MA were midpoint-centered in the analyses. Similarity effects were modeled using linear combinations of the polynomial regression coefficients resulting from the PS equations. These response surface tests assess the extent to which the surface varies along the congruence line (i.e., the line along which mentor and protégé personalities are equal) and the incongruence line (i.e., the line along which mentor and protégé personalities differ). In the present study, a similarity effect may be indicated by a significant positive linear or nonlinear slope of the congruence line. A positive linear slope would indicate
that perceived similarity increases as mentor and protégé attachment security or relational self-construal increase. A positive nonlinear slope may indicate a convex surface in which perceptions of similarity are highest when both mentor and protégé are similarly high or similarity low in attachment security and relational self-construal. Similarity effects may also be indicated by a negative nonlinear slope in the incongruence line; this would occur if perceptions of similarity decreased as mentor-protégé dissimilarity increased.

Results for mentor-protégé personality similarity as a predictor of protégé perceptions of similarity are presented in Table 2. Surface test values were tested and plotted using procedures outlined by Shanock, Baran, Gentry, Pattison, and Heggestad (2010). Figure 1 shows the response curve for mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security. As shown in Table 2, the four surface test values were nonsignificant at α = .05; however, $a^2$ was marginally significant and positive ($a^2 = .28, p = .058$), indicating positive curvature along the congruence line. This indicates a non-linear relationship between mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security and perceived similarity; as shown in Figure 1, protégé perceptions of similarity are highest when mentors and protégés are similarly high and similarly low in attachment security. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was marginally supported. Figure 2 shows the response curve for mentor-protégé similarity in relational self-construal. As shown in Table 2, all four surface tests were nonsignificant at α = .05. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

I tested Hypotheses 3-5 with a path model using OLS regression. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 3. In support of Hypothesis 3, perceived similarity was positively associated with relational identification ($\beta = .57, p < .05$). Hypotheses 4 and 5 were tested using James, Mulaik, and Brett’s (2006) recommendations for testing complete mediation. As shown in Table 3, the regression coefficient of the equation regressing the mediator (relational
identification) on the independent variable (perceived similarity) was significant ($\beta = .57$), supporting the first condition of mediation. The regression coefficients for the equations relating the mediator (relational self-construal) to the two outcomes (organizational and professional commitment) were also significant ($\beta$s = .39 and .36, respectively), supporting the second condition of mediation. Finally, the indirect effect of perceived similarity on commitment via relational identification was estimated by testing the product of the coefficients for significance using the Sobel test macro created by Preacher and Hayes (2004). Estimates of the indirect effect using the normal distribution were pooled across imputations. As shown in Table 3, the indirect effects were significant for both models ($bs = .18$ and .15, respectively). Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported.

Causal models also require testing whether variables that are presumed not be to have a direct effect on an endogenous variable are indeed unrelated to that variable (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 1982). Indirect paths between 1) attachment security, relational self-construal, and relational identification, 2) perceived similarity and organizational commitment, and 3) perceived similarity and professional commitment were estimated using disturbance term regression tests (Lance, 1986). A disturbance term regression test involves regressing the residuals from the direct effect equations on omitted variables; if the omitted variables are not significantly related to the residuals, the model is supported. In order to obtain path coefficients for the mentor-protégé similarity variables, I created block variables from the terms in the PS regression equations. Block variables are weighted linear composites created by weighting variables by the estimated regression coefficients for the variables in the block (c.f., Edwards & Cable, 2009). For example, the block variable associated with attachment security equals $b_{PS1}PA + b_{PS2}MA + b_{PS3}PA^2 + b_{PS4}MAPA + b_{PS5}MA^2$. Relational identification was then regressed on
the two similarity blocks. As shown in Table 4, all omitted variable pathways were nonsignificant at $\alpha = .05$. Thus, the data supported that the model was correctly specified.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the antecedents and outcomes of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships. Specifically, I examined whether mentor-protégé similarity in two relationally-oriented personality traits — attachment security and relational self-construal — predicted protégé perceptions of similarity to their mentors. I also examined whether perceived similarity had downstream outcomes on protégés’ commitment to their organizations and professions through increased relational identification with the mentor. These associations were explored in a sample of 82 matched mentor-protégé dyads from two large universities.

The results indicate that similarity in relational self-construal was not related to perceived similarity, whereas similarity in attachment security was marginally related to perceived similarity, such that protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors were highest when mentors and protégés were similarly high or similarly low in attachment security. These findings suggest that the effects of actual personality similarity on perceptions of similarity may depend on the similar trait. It may be that attachment security is more salient than relational self-construal in dyadic interactions, and therefore protégés are better able to detect similarity between themselves and their mentors in attachment security than in relational self-construal. That is, mentors’ levels of relational self-construal may not be as apparent to protégés as their levels of attachment security.

In support of this notion, research indicates that close friends and family can reliably classify individuals into prototypical attachment patterns (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), and that attachment orientations are associated with unique behavioral manifestations in close
relationships including caregiving and support seeking (Collins & Feeney, 2000). The caregiving system implicated in attachment orientations may be especially salient in mentoring relationships, given that the mentor’s primary function is to provide caregiving to the protégé in the form of psychosocial and career-related support. Thus, protégés may be more attuned to their mentors’ attachment orientations than their levels of relational self-construal. Moreover, relational self-construal may play a greater role in perceptions of similarity as a direct effect rather than as a joint effect; in the current study, protégé relational self-construal was positively correlated with protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors ($r = .28$). This is consistent with Cross et al.’s (2002) finding that individuals high in relational self-construal perceive their friends as more similar to themselves, regardless of actual similarity. Thus, individuals with high relational self-construals may be motivated to see themselves as similar to close others, regardless of actual personality similarity.

Interestingly, the results suggest that there is a marginally significant curvilinear relationship between similarity in attachment security and protégé perceptions of similarity, such that perceived similarity was highest when mentors and protégés were similarly high or similarly low in attachment security. These results suggest that there may be some benefits associated with pairing less secure individuals with equally insecure mentors. Less secure mentors may be better able to understand and empathize with their less secure protégés’ unique issues because they have experienced similar struggles. For example, a mentor and protégé who share negative working models of self may engage in discussions of how to manage low self-worth that may not occur if a less secure protégé were paired with a highly secure mentor. These types of interactions may increase the probability that a protégé will identify with a mentor, and in turn become committed to the organization and profession. Interestingly, the results indicate that
perceptions of similarity are relatively lower when mentors and protégés are both average in attachment security. This may indicate that a mentor’s level attachment security is more salient to a protégé when it is either high or low. When both mentor and protégé levels of attachment security are average, protégés may have a more difficult time discerning whether their mentors are similar to themselves.

The results of this study suggest that protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors may have important implications for protégés’ identification with their mentors, and consequently commitment to their organizations and professions. Thus, this study makes an important contribution to the mentoring literature by expanding outcomes of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships to include protégé commitment to higher order groups. In addition, this study clarifies relational identification as a mediating mechanism involved in the association between perceived similarity and organizational and professional commitment. To the extent that protégés perceive themselves as similar to their mentors, they are more likely to identify with their mentors, and may generalize this identification to the organization and the profession. These results provide further evidence of the importance of perceived similarity to not only mentoring relationships, but also to organizations and professional bodies.

This study has a number of theoretical implications. First, the results of this study challenge the assumption that dyads composed of two less secure individuals are likely to be dysfunctional. The finding that protégés who were lower in attachment security perceived greater similarity to mentors who were similarly lower in attachment security suggests that insecure-insecure pairings may have some benefits in terms of identification. However, there may also be drawbacks to this type of relationship, particularly if mentors and protégés spend their time together co-ruminating about their negative working models of themselves, their
coworkers, and their organizations. For example, Boren (2014) found that co-rumination with coworkers was associated with higher burnout and perceived stress; this may suggest that mentors and protégés who repeatedly discuss problems make those problems more salient, and thus more stressful. Future scholars should examine the conditions under which similarity in attachment orientation is functional versus dysfunctional in mentoring relationships.

This study also has implications for mentoring theory. Specifically, the results suggest that individual differences in personality have both direct and dyadic effects in mentoring relationships. Thus, it is important for future research to examine personality in the context of the mentor-protégé dyadic relationship, rather than focusing solely on the direct effects of mentor and protégé personality. This study also furthers mentoring theory by elucidating relational identification as a mechanism through which mentoring influences protégés’ perceptions of their organizations and professions. Future research should examine whether protégés’ relational identification with mentors also has implications for turnover intentions and behavior. Finally, the results of this study have theoretical implications for the broader relationship science literature. In particular, this study provides support for the applicability of the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) to mentoring relationships. However, it appears that the effects of actual similarity depend on the similar characteristic under investigation, and that perceptions of similarity have stronger effects on relational and perceptual outcomes than actual personality similarity.

The results of this study suggest that mentors and organizations should be concerned with maximizing perceived similarity in mentoring relationships. Although this study explored mentor-protégé personality similarity as one method of enhancing perceived similarity, there are likely other ways of providing protégés with opportunities to perceive similar characteristics.
between themselves and their mentors. First, it may be helpful for mentors to share personal information about themselves with protégés over the course of the relationship, particularly when these characteristics are relevant to the protégé. Although some of this information may not be directly work-relevant (e.g., family, personality), sharing personal experiences may help protégés perceive areas of similarity between themselves and their mentors, facilitating relational identification. Second, organizations can implement procedures to allow mentors and protégés to learn more about each other in the initial stages of the mentoring relationship. For example, mentors and protégés could both complete personality inventories and go through similarities and differences together, or could complete worksheets in which they jointly reflect on how their past experiences have informed their career progression. These rapport-building exercises may have important implications for protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors, and may have a dual benefit of helping mentors and protégés understand how their differences may play out in the mentoring relationship. Third, it may be important for mentors to minimize hierarchy between themselves and their protégés whenever possible. The interpersonal distance created by hierarchy is likely to inhibit the extent to which protégés can identify with their mentors, and thus their commitment to their organizations and professions. More research is needed on how specific mentoring practices can influence protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors.

Despite the benefits of similarity in attachment security for protégé perceptions of similarity and identification, dissimilar mentor-protégé pairings may have other benefits for protégés. For example, Helms (1984) describes a therapeutic relationship in which the client has less advanced racial identity development than the counselor as a progressive relationship, as the counselor can help guide the client toward a higher level of identity development. Applied to the present context, a progressive relationship in which the mentor has higher attachment security
and the protégé has lower attachment security may be developmental for the protégé, who may adjust his or her internal working models to become more positive as their mentors engage in supportive behaviors. These types of relationships may help less secure protégés’ career development and advancement. Future research should examine the extent to which dissimilar mentor-protégé pairings may result in changes to both mentor and protégé attachment orientations over time. Although adult attachment orientations are moderately stable, some research suggests that relationship events (e.g., marriage, breakup) and personal vulnerabilities (e.g., neuroticism, history of psychopathology) can induce changes in individuals’ attachment orientations (Davila & Cobb, 2003). Although past research has focused on primarily negative changes in attachment orientation, it is possible that individuals may become more securely attached if they have positive relationship experiences that drive them to adjust their negative working models. To the extent that mentoring relationships can provide these experiences, dissimilarity may have positive effects on protégés’ development.

This study has a number of limitations that need to be addressed. First, this was a cross-sectional study, and therefore causal claims are speculative and it is possible that reverse causality exists. For example, it may be that organizational and professional commitment engender identification with mentors, as committed individuals may be motivated to identify with mentors who can assist their professional development. Longitudinal research may help clarify the direction of causality in these associations. Second, although the personality measures were collected from different sources, perceived similarity, relational identification, and commitment were all collected from the protégé at a single time point. Thus, common method bias may have affected the parameter estimates in this study. However, it should be noted that protégé personality measures were not significantly correlated with most other self-
report measures, suggesting that the observed relationships are unlikely to be driven solely by common method bias. Third, the sample size in this study was relatively low, which may have affected significance tests by increasing the standard errors associated with the parameter estimates. Thus, although caution must be using in interpreting the marginally significant effect of similarity in attachment security on perceived similarity, the low power of this study makes it likely that this is a conservative estimate of the true effect. It is also possible that similarity in relational self-construal may have significant effects in a larger sample. Finally, these findings may not generalize to other types of mentoring relationships. This sample was composed of mentors and protégés who were employed in a university setting and who were predominantly involved in informal mentoring relationships. Thus, future research should examine these associations in different samples of mentor-protégé dyads.

Overall, the results of this study shed further light on the antecedents and outcomes of perceived similarity in mentoring relationships. Given the strength of perceived similarity as a predictor of mentoring outcomes, it is important to examine whether perceived similarity is more broadly associated with protégés’ attitudes towards their organizations and professions. The results of the current study demonstrate that perceived similarity is of considerable importance to organizations seeking to capitalize on mentoring relationships. Future research should further examine how characteristics of mentor-protégé dyads, and of the mentoring relationship itself, relate to protégé perceptions of similarity to mentors. Ultimately, the capability of a protégé to identify with a mentor may have lasting effects on a protégés’ commitment to an organization or career. In the words of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, “A role model in the flesh provides more than inspiration; his or her very existence is confirmation of possibilities one may have every reason to doubt, saying, ‘Yes, someone like me can do this.’”
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<td>5. Protégé Perceived Similarity</td>
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<td>6. Protégé Relational Identification</td>
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<td>11. Relationship Length(^a)</td>
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<td>-0.35*</td>
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Note: N = 82. Coefficients alpha are shown on the diagonal in parentheses.

\(^*p<.05\)

\(^a\)Due to missing data, n = 80 for gender similarity, n = 78 for racial similarity, and n = 79 for relationship length.
Table 2
*Mentor-Protégé Personality Similarity as a Predictor of Perceived Similarity*

<table>
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<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Attachment Security</th>
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<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>Mentor attachment security</td>
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<td>Protégé attachment security squared</td>
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<td>0.082</td>
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<td>Protégé attachment security X mentor attachment security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentor attachment security squared</td>
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<td>R²</td>
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Surface tests

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<td>a₁</td>
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<td>a₂</td>
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Note: N = 82.
a₁ = (b₁ + b₂), where b₁ is the unstandardized regression coefficient for protégé personality and b₂ is the unstandardized regression coefficient for mentor personality. a₂ = (b₃ + b₄ + b₅), where b₃ is the unstandardized regression coefficient for protégé personality squared, b₄ is the unstandardized regression coefficient for the cross-product of mentor and protégé personality, and b₅ is the unstandardized regression coefficient for mentor attachment security squared. a₃ = (b₁ - b₂), a₄ = (b₃ - b₄ + b₅).

*p < .05 †p < .10 (two-tailed)
Table 3
*Results of path estimates for perceived similarity, relational identification, and organizational and professional commitment.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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<td>0.606*</td>
<td>0.099</td>
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Tests for Mediation

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<tr>
<td>Professional Commitment</td>
<td>0.183*</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>2.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>0.154*</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>2.299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 82. b is the unstandardized regression coefficient, β is the standardized regression coefficient, S.E. is the standard error associated with the coefficient.
*p < .05 (two-tailed)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Security $\rightarrow$ Relational Identification</td>
<td>-0.684</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td>-1.729</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relational Self-Construal $\rightarrow$ Relational Identification</td>
<td>0.483</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>1.467</td>
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<td>Perceived Similarity $\rightarrow$ Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>1.029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Similarity $\rightarrow$ Professional Commitment</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 82$. $b$ is the unstandardized regression coefficient, $\beta$ is the standardized regression coefficient, S.E. is the standard error associated with the coefficient.
Figure 1. Mentor-protégé similarity in attachment security predicting perceived similarity.
Figure 2. Mentor-protégé similarity in relational self-construal predicting perceived similarity.