



## Antidotes to dissimilar mentor–protégé dyads



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### ABSTRACT

The paper aims to clarify the relationship between individual and situational factors that relate to mentoring support. We propose that a) two individual factors, the mentors' altruism and protégés' core self-evaluations (CSE), b) one situational factor, mentors' perceived dissimilarity to their protégés, and c) the interaction of the individual and situational factors will relate to the overall mentoring support received by protégés. Results gathered from 196 mentoring dyads show that both mentors' altruism and protégés' CSE relate positively to the protégés' receipt of mentoring support, whereas mentors' perceived dissimilarity to their protégés relates negatively to the mentoring support protégés received. Furthermore, the relationship between dissimilarity and mentoring support is stronger for mentors with low altruism and for protégés with low CSE. The paper discusses factors important for fostering nurturing mentoring relationships in the workplace.

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## 1. Introduction

Recent research suggests that one of the strongest predictors of successful mentoring relationships is the degree of deep-level similarity felt between the mentor and protégé, with perceived similarity in personality, values, and attitudes being linked to the provision of more mentoring support (Eby et al., 2013). However, the importance of perceived deep-level similarity for nurturing mentoring relationships may present a difficult challenge when individuals believe that differences in deep-level similarity are barriers to a forming and maintaining successful mentoring relationships. To our knowledge, there is no research addressing the problem of how to improve mentoring relationships composed of dissimilar mentor–protégé dyads, leaving little guidance for managers.

The current study examined buffers of the negative relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support. We adopted an interactionist approach (Mendoza-Denton, Ayduk, Mischel, Shoda, & Testa, 2001) and conceptualized mentor–protégé dissimilarity as a key situational factor in mentoring relationships. Given the importance of both mentor and protégé dispositions for mentoring relationships (Turban & Lee, 2007), we incorporated both mentor and protégé dispositional factors, and tested whether these two factors moderate the dissimilarity–mentoring support relationship using paired data collected from both the mentor and the protégé. Drawing from the helping and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) literature (Carlo, Eisenberg, Troyer, Switzer, & Speer, 1991; Lester, Meglino, & Korsgaard, 2008), we identified mentors' altruism as an important personality trait that may “protect” protégés from poor mentoring support when mentors are dissimilar to them. For protégés' disposition, we argue that protégés with positive core self-evaluations (CSE, Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003) may actively manage their mentoring relationships and still receive mentoring support despite dissimilarities.

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## 2. Mentor and protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support

Kram (1985) suggests that mentors can provide protégés with *career functions* (sponsorship, coaching, exposure and visibility, protection, and challenging work assignments) and *psychosocial functions* (acceptance and confirmation, counseling, role modeling, and friendship). The similarity–attraction paradigm has been used as a theoretical underpinning of many mentoring studies that examine why protégés in similar mentor–protégé dyads receive more mentoring support from their mentors (Allen & Eby, 2007; Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Turban, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). The similarity–attraction paradigm suggests that individuals are attracted to those who share their values and perspectives, and that this shared similarity enables better communication and interpersonal functioning (Byrne, 1997). Therefore, similarity increases the possibility that an individual will receive validation for his or her own viewpoints, generating positive attitudes and behaviors toward the similar other (Kram, 1985). Furthermore, when an individual perceives others to be similar, the individual may feel a closeness that creates, “a sense of shared, merged, or interconnected personal identity” with the similar other (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997, p. 483). This sense of oneness leads people to perceive themselves in others (Neuberg et al., 1997, p. 510) and may foster helping behaviors.

A recent meta-analysis (Eby et al., 2013) reported that protégé perceived deep-level similarity was the strongest predictor of protégés' perceived career support ( $\rho = .38$ ) and psychosocial support ( $\rho = .48$ ). However, the available studies examining this topic were based on protégé perceptions of similarity (e.g., Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2005; Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Marelich, 2002; Turban et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2006). Given that the mentor is the individual who provides mentoring functions, we focused on the mentor's perceptions of mentor–protégé dissimilarity, which focuses on dissimilarity on values, beliefs, attitudes, and personality.

**H1.** Deep-level mentor–protégé dissimilarity is negatively related to protégés' perceptions of mentoring support received.

## 3. Mentor altruism and mentoring support

Mentor's dispositional altruism can predict mentoring support because altruistic individuals tend to show concern for others and engage in helping behaviors without strong situational and interpersonal incentives (e.g., company rewards, liking the protégé) (Allen, 2003; Bozionelos, 2004; Niehoff, 2006; Turban & Lee, 2007). Altruistic individuals are driven by feelings of sympathy, social responsibility, and perspective taking (Batson, Bolen, Cross, & Neuringer-Benefiel, 1986), and may experience strong feelings of guilt when seeing others who need help (Batson, 1987). Mentors with those characteristics are more likely to support their protégés without considering situational factors.

Four studies have been conducted to examine the role of altruistic-related personality traits in mentoring others (Allen, 2003; Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996; Bozionelos, 2004; Niehoff, 2006). Those studies provided some preliminary support that mentors' altruistic-related personality is an antecedent of mentoring others. However, these studies are either based on exclusively self-reported data (Allen, 2003; Bozionelos, 2004), do not directly examine altruistic personality traits (Allen, 2003; Bozionelos, 2004), or examine the mentor's *intention* to mentor rather than actual mentoring (Allen, 2003; Aryee et al., 1996; Niehoff, 2006). To address this research gap, we examined the relationship between the mentor's reported altruism and actual mentoring support reported by protégés.

**H2.** Mentors' altruism relates positively to protégés' perceptions of mentoring support received.

## 4. Protégé CSE and mentoring support

High potential individuals who take initiative to manage their careers tend to receive greater amount of mentoring support than others (Allen, 2004; Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 2000; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Turban & Lee, 2007). One way to identify high potential and high initiative employees is by looking at the employee's disposition. CSE encompasses individuals' fundamental evaluations about themselves, including their own abilities and perceived control (Judge et al., 2003). Four personality dimensions comprise CSE: locus of control, neuroticism, generalized self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Judge et al., 2003). High CSE employees are more likely than low CSE employees to be identified as protégés with high potential because they are more likely to accept challenging tasks, more committed to and persistent in their goal pursuit, and have higher job performance, job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012; Judge et al., 2003; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008).

Social support resource theory (SSR theory, Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane, & Geller, 1990) provides an important theoretical framework for understanding why high CSE protégés are more likely than low CSE protégés to obtain valuable workplace resources. Scholars (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 1990) have identified four types of resources: objects (e.g., car); conditions (e.g., good marriage, positive feedback), personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem), and intrinsic and extrinsic energies (e.g., physical ability, personal reputation). SSR theory indicates that social support, such as mentoring, is an important resource that individuals are motivated to obtain and reserve. Furthermore, individuals with resources have more leverage to obtain and reserve important resources at work (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 1990) and certain factors are instrumental in determining who has access to these resources. We argue that CSE is one personal characteristics type of resource that helps protégés gain and reserve support provided by mentors. Because high CSE protégés have insightful perceptions of the work environment (Chang et al., 2012; Judge & Hurst, 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008), they are more

effective in forming social ties and gain social support from others. The CSE trait relates positively to positive affect and job satisfaction (Chang et al., 2012), which are reflective of positive intrinsic energies. Furthermore, positive CSE individuals are more likely to capitalize on opportunities (Judge & Hurst, 2007), which can result in obtaining and reserving more resources. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that high CSE individuals not only have a greater level of resources relevant to personal characteristics but also are more likely to receive social support from other individuals. Based on the above rationale, H3 is:

**H3.** Protégés' core self-evaluations personality relates positively to protégés' perceptions of mentoring support received.

## 5. Mentor altruism and protégé CSE as moderators of the dissimilarity–mentoring support relationship

Individuals' behaviors are a function of the interaction between their personality traits and the environment. From an interactionist perspective, individuals vary in their personality, cognition, and motivation, resulting in different responses and sensitivity to environmental stimuli (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2001). We argue that mentor–protégé dissimilarity can be conceptualized as an important situational variable in the mentoring relationship, and that the amount of dissimilarity varies from one relationship to another.

The theory of objective self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) argues that an individual pays more attention to a particular source of information, his or her subsequent behavior will tend to be guided by that information. Therefore, for mentors low on altruism who tend to have low internal drive to help other individuals, their decision on mentoring a protégé will be largely dependent on situational factors, rather than the protégé's need for help. We argue that altruistic mentors have a strong internal drive to help protégés in need of professional or personal assistance, and that the strong internal drive to avoid feelings of guilt stemming from mentor altruism (Batson, 1987) will motivate the mentor to provide support to the protégé, regardless of situational factors, such as mentor–protégé dissimilarity (Carlo et al., 1991). We argue that mentor–protégé dissimilarity is one of the most salient environmental factors of a mentoring relationship, given that it is one of the strongest predictors of successful mentoring relationships (Eby et al., 2013). It follows that low altruism mentors will weigh this cue more heavily when they decide whether or not to provide protégés mentoring functions. Thus, the relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support depends on the mentor's altruism, with a stronger negative relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support for low altruism mentors.

**H4.** The negative relationship between mentor–protégé deep-level dissimilarity and mentoring support protégés received is stronger for mentors low on altruism.

Similar rationale based on the theory of objective self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) can be used to explain the interaction between deep-level dissimilarity and protégé CSE. High CSE protégés have a strong internal drive to actively manage their careers (Chang et al., 2012; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Liang & Gong, 2013) by engaging in behaviors such as finding social support (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 1990). Therefore, high CSE protégés will actively approach a mentor and work to receive the support they need, regardless of external information such as mentor–protégé dissimilarity.

Because high CSE protégés tend to be self-confident (Chang et al., 2012; Judge et al., 1998; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Liang & Gong, 2013), they may be less intimidated by dissimilar mentors or by the feelings of discomfort that may be present due to dissimilarity, compared to low CSE protégés. In contrast, low CSE protégés may turn to the external cue of mentor–protégé dissimilarity when seeking information about whether to actively engage in a mentoring relationship. That is, when requesting assistance from mentors, low CSE protégés will feel comfortable to do so only with similar mentors due to the interpersonal comfort (Cialdini et al., 1997) and positive attitudes and behaviors (Kram, 1985) that tend to be present in similar mentor–protégé dyads (Byrne, 1971, 1997). Thus, the relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support depends on the protégé's CSE, with a stronger negative relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support for low CSE protégés.

**H5.** The negative relationship between dissimilarity and mentoring support protégés received is stronger for protégés low on CSE.

## 6. Method

### 6.1. Participants

Data were collected from Executive MBA students attending a public university located in Northern Taiwan. Research assistants contacted potential participants and explained the purpose of the research project. Survey packages were distributed to protégés who identified their current ongoing mentoring relationship based on the definition by Allen et al. (2000). Each survey package contained a mentor questionnaire set (a cover letter, a mentor questionnaire, and a return envelope) and a protégé questionnaire set (a cover letter, a protégé questionnaire, and a return envelope). Protégé participants were instructed to distribute the mentor survey set to their mentors. To ensure confidentiality, the questionnaires were completed anonymously. Three-hundred questionnaire packages were distributed with 213 protégé and 207 mentor forms returned. After excluding returned surveys that had either missing data or an incomplete dyad, the number of dyads for analyses totaled 196. The average age of protégés was 30.31 years ( $SD = 7.34$ ), the average tenure in their current organization was 48.57 months ( $SD = 62.16$ ), the average length of the working relationship with their mentor was 32.87 months ( $SD = 39.26$ ), and 81 (41%) protégé participants were men. The average age of the mentors was

38.53 years ( $SD = 7.78$ ), the average tenure in their current organization was 107.24 months ( $SD = 84.94$ ), and 127 (64%) mentors were men. The industries where participants worked included information technology (28.43%), service sector (22.84%), finance (19.80%), manufacturing (11.68%), transportation (3.05%), and others (14.21%).

## 6.2. Measures

Because Traditional Chinese was the native language for all respondents, all items were translated from English into Traditional Chinese with the back-translation approach suggested by Brislin (1980). All items were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), except for mentoring support and demographic variables.

### 6.2.1. Mentoring support

Protégé participants responded to the 9-item Mentoring Functions Questionnaire (MFQ-9; Castro & Scandura, 2004), indicating the amount of overall mentoring functions they actually received from their mentors. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Researchers have demonstrated that the MFQ-9 has acceptable reliability, construct validity, and measurement equivalence across the U.S. and Taiwan (Hu, Pellegrini, & Scandura, 2011). An example item is “My mentor helps me coordinate professional goals.” Coefficient alpha in the current sample was .93.

### 6.2.2. Altruism

To measure mentors' altruism, we used the 8-item Altruism subscale under the Agreeableness dimension in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R, Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to Costa and McCrae (1992), altruism is conceptualized as an active concern of another individual's welfare by showing consideration and a willingness to help others. This conceptualization is consistent with the definition of the altruistic personality trait in the altruism literature (e.g., Batson et al., 1986; Carlo et al., 1991; van Emmerik, Jawahar, & Stone, 2005). An example item is “I try to be courteous to everyone I meet.” Coefficient alpha was .80.

### 6.2.3. Mentor–protégé deep-level dissimilarity

Mentor participants responded to six items concerning the perceived similarity between themselves and their protégés in the following aspects: personality, interests, work values, outlook on organizational issues, problem-solving approach, and personal values. These items were the same items used by Liao, Chuang, and Joshi (2008) to measure deep-level dissimilarity. We reverse-coded this variable such that higher values indicate greater dissimilarities. Coefficient alpha was .91.

### 6.2.4. Core self-evaluations

Protégés' core self-evaluations were measured using the 12-item scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). An example item is “I am confident I get the success I deserve in life.” Coefficient alpha was .80.

### 6.2.5. Control variables

Previous research suggests that demographic backgrounds and length of working relationships may relate to mentoring support (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Lankau et al., 2005; Tonidandel, Avery, & Phillips, 2007; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Relevant demographic indicators include protégé and mentor age, protégé and mentor sex, and length of working relationship. These variables were included as control variables in the regression analyses.

## 7. Results

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a four-factor model (mentor altruism, protégé CSE, deep-level dissimilarity, and mentoring support received) to examine the construct validity of the studied constructs. Results of the CFA suggest that, while the chi-square value was statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{(293)} = 973.70, p < .01$ ), other practical fit indices fell within acceptable ranges (SRMR = .08; NNFI = .90; CFI = .91; PGFI = .61; GFI = .74), except for RMSEA (.10), suggesting the four factor model presents an acceptable description of the underlying data. Results also support the convergent validity since all items had significant factor loadings (ranged from to .35 to .94;  $p < .05$ ) on the corresponding factors. We examined the discriminant validity with confidence interval of each pair of latent constructs and none of the confidence intervals included a value of one (ranged from .01 to .62), thus the discriminant validity was supported.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients, and correlations among study variables. We used hierarchical regression analyses to test all hypotheses (Aiken & West, 1991). To prevent collinearity issues, we centered the three predictor variables while testing the hypotheses (Aiken & West, 1991) and we controlled for all other product terms in the test of moderation. Results of hierarchical regression analyses (Table 2) provided support for H1 to H3 as the mentors' altruism ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ), mentor–protégé deep-level dissimilarity ( $\beta = -.25, p < .01$ ), and protégés CSE ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ) all related to protégés' perceptions of mentoring support received. H4 and H5 were both supported as mentors' altruism ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ) and protégés' CSE ( $\beta = -.16, p < .05$ ) significantly moderated the relationship between deep-level dissimilarity to the protégés the protégés' perceptions of mentoring support received. Furthermore, the direction of the beta coefficients suggested that the relationships were in line with our predictions. As shown in Figs. 1 and 2, in the low mentor altruism (1  $SD$  below mean altruism,  $\beta = -.26, p < .01$ ) and in the low protégé CSE conditions (1  $SD$  below mean CSE,  $\beta = -.25, p < .01$ ) the negative relationship between deep-level dissimilarity and the mentoring support

**Table 1**

Means, standard deviations and correlations of the study variables (N = 198).

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Protégé gender	.58	.50	–									
2. Mentor gender	.35	.48	.37**	–								
3. Protégé tenure	4.59	5.04	.07	.06	–							
4. Mentor tenure	2.69	2.74	.05	.09	.32**	–						
5. Length of working relationships	9.27	6.39	.12	.06	.61**	.34**	–					
6. Mentorship formality	.27	.45	–.14	–.25**	.18*	.04	–.03	–				
7. Perceived dissimilarity	3.07	.85	–.04	.03	–.11	–.06	.11	.11	(.80)			
8. Mentor altruism	4.62	.59	.04	–.04	–.04	.10	–.02	–.09	–.39**	(.80)		
9. Protégé CSE	3.82	.57	.08	.04	.19**	.15*	.25**	–.20**	–.18*	.12	(.91)	
10. Overall mentoring	3.56	.50	–.07	–.10	.11	.06	.12	.32**	–.35**	.29**	.17*	(.93)

Note. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Mentorship formality: 1 = formal, 2 = informal; Length of working relationships is calculated in months. Values in the parentheses are Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$ .\*\*  $p < .01$ .

perceived by the protégé are stronger than in high mentor altruism (1 SD above mean altruism,  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p = .23$ ) and in the high protégé CSE (1 SD above mean CSE,  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .18$ ) conditions.

## 8. Discussion

Consistent with an interactionist approach (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2001), our findings suggest that both individual factors, mentor altruism and protégé CSE, and situational factors, conceptualized here as mentor–protégé dissimilarity, are jointly related to mentoring support. Several key findings emerged from this study. First, mentor–protégé deep-level dissimilarity, mentor-reported altruism, and protégé-reported CSE related to mentoring support. Second, the relationship between deep-level dissimilarity and mentoring support was moderated by mentor altruism and protégé CSE. As expected, the relationship between deep-level dissimilarity and mentoring support was stronger when mentor altruism was low, showing that one way to compensate for the lower provision of mentoring support found in dissimilar mentor–protégé dyads may be the mentor's altruistic drive. Similarly, the relationship between dissimilarity and mentoring support was stronger when protégé CSE was low, showing that high CSE protégés

**Table 2**

Regression results for altruism, CSE, perceived similarity, and their interactions on protégé perceptions of mentoring support received.

	Overall mentoring		
	1	2	3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Controls			
Protégé gender	–.03	–.07	–.05
Mentor gender	–.02	.00	–.03
Protégé tenure	–.05	–.02	–.05
Mentor tenure	.02	–.05	–.04
Length of working relationships	.16	.16	.16
Mentorship formality	.33**	.31**	.31**
Predictors			
Perceived dissimilarity (PD)		–.25**	–.20*
Mentor altruism (MA)		.16*	.16*
Protégé CSE (PCSE)		.14*	.14*
Interaction			
PD $\times$ MA			–.18*
PD $\times$ PCSE			–.16*
MA $\times$ PCSE			–.09
F	4.43**	7.86**	7.51**
R <sup>2</sup> ( $\Delta R^2$ )	.12 (.10)**	.28 (.24)**	.33 (.29)**
Adj R <sup>2</sup> ( $\Delta \text{Adj } R^2$ )	.12 (.10)**	.16 (.14)**	.05 (.05)**

Note. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Mentor formality: 1 = formal, 2 = informal; Length of working relationships is calculated in months.

\*  $p < .05$ .\*\*  $p < .01$ .

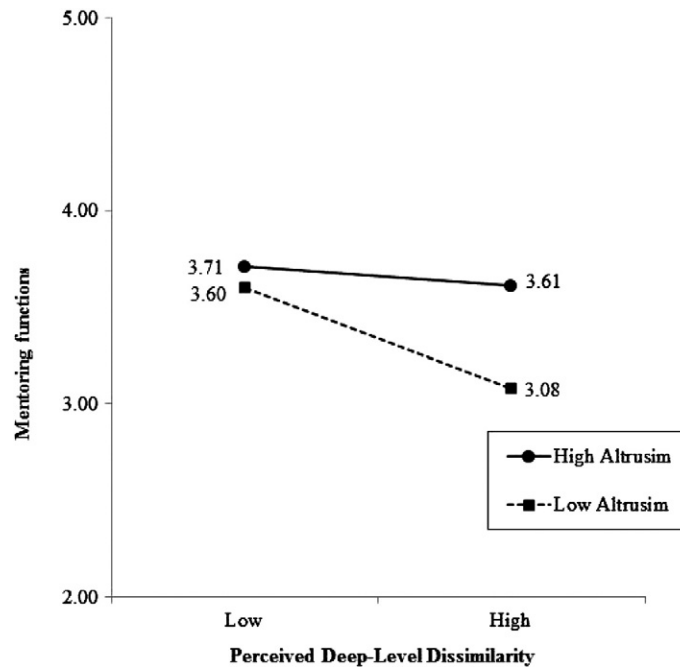


Fig. 1. The interaction between mentors' altruism and mentors' perceived deep-level dissimilarity to protégés on overall mentoring perceived by protégés.

may be "protected" from dissimilar mentor–protégé dyads, as they are motivated to receive the support they need from their mentors even when dissimilarity is present.

Results from the current study support the similarity–attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971, 1997) in mentoring research, as mentor–protégé deep-level dissimilarity related negatively to mentoring support reported by protégés. Indeed, perceived dissimilarity was the strongest predictor in our theoretical model. Previous findings on mentor–protégé dissimilarity were based on single-source data (Burke et al., 1993; Ensher et al., 2002; Turban et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2006), which is a threat to internal validity due to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Our study, using multi-source data, provides further evidence for the

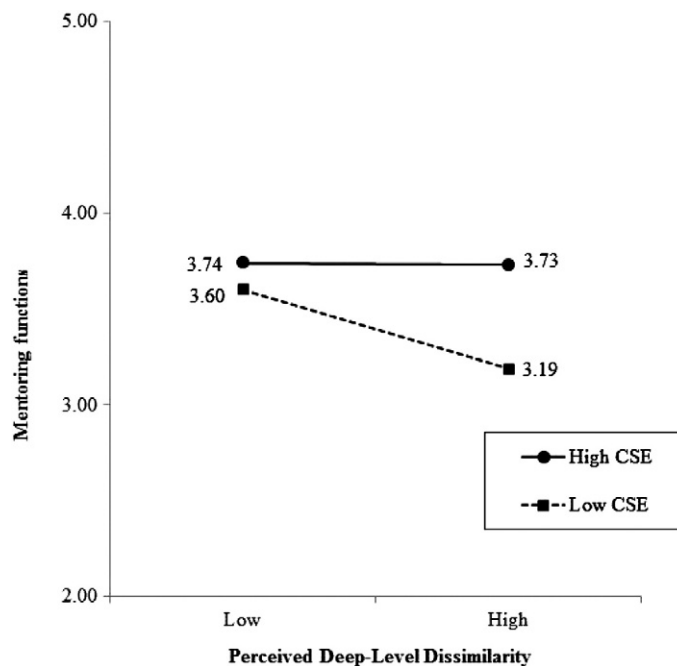


Fig. 2. The interaction between protégés' CSE and mentors' perceived deep-level dissimilarity to protégés on overall mentoring perceived by protégés.

internal validity of the similarity–attraction paradigm in the mentoring literature. Second, using multi-source rather than single-source data, our study is the first to show that mentor altruism relates to protégé-reported mentoring support, building on past literature which has shown that mentor altruism is related to personality traits similar to altruism and mentor-reported intention to mentor others (Allen, 2003; Aryee et al., 1996). Our findings extend this line of mentoring research by showing that altruistic individuals not only have greater intentions to mentor others, but that they also provide more actual mentoring to their protégés.

The current study adds to the growing body of CSE literature suggesting that protégé CSE is an important factor when predicting mentoring relationships (Chang et al., 2012; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). According to a recent CSE review article (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008), previous literature on the CSE–mentoring relationship only found a weak relationship between protégé's CSE and having a mentor in the workplace. Our study goes one step further and explores the moderating role that protégé's CSE plays on the relationship between mentor–protégé dissimilarity and mentoring support, showing that CSE is especially important for success in dissimilar mentor–protégé dyads.

Our findings support the idea that mentors and protégés are not passive agents in a mentoring relationship; rather, mentors and protégés can proactively work to improve a mentoring relationship (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2012), despite facing challenges such as dissimilarity. By taking an interactionist approach to mentoring relationships, we highlight the importance of viewing and studying mentoring as a dyadic relationship, which is comprised of two individuals and the interactions between those two people (Berscheid, 1999).

### 8.1. Implications

The findings of our study have implications for theory and practice. The designs of formal mentoring programs may want to take into account the deep-level similarity between the mentor and protégé, mentor altruism, and protégé CSE. In line with Kanungo and Conger's (1993) suggestion, mentors can be selected based on their altruistic tendency, desire to nurture, or moral judgment. Incorporation of selection tools for measuring such tendencies (e.g., psychological tests, leaderless group discussion, or role-playing) may be helpful, along with allowing both mentors and protégés to have a say in the mentor-matching process when assessing similarity (Allen & Eby, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Second, since external motivators are especially important for low CSE protégés and low altruistic mentors, caution should be used when pairing a low altruistic mentor with a low CSE protégé, especially if the two perceive high levels of dissimilarity. If such a pairing is unavoidable, the incentives should be provided for mentoring (Aryee et al., 1996; Ragins & Scandura, 1994, 1999), as well as training to mentors that lowers their perceived cost and increases their perceived benefits of being mentors (Ragins & Scandura, 1994, 1999).

### 8.2. Future research directions

Our study findings suggest several directions for future mentoring research. Although we adopted the similarity–attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) in this study, we did not examine mediating mechanisms such as liking or interpersonal comfort. Future research should examine the importance of liking and interpersonal comfort in the relationship between similarity and mentoring.

Another potential research direction involves the concept of fit within the mentoring dyads. Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) summarized two major types of fit: supplementary and complementary. In the context of mentoring, supplementary fit can be referred to as similarity between the mentor and the protégé, such as values, attitude, and goals, whereas complementary fit refers to the demands and supplies of the mentoring dyad. The perceived deep-level similarity examined in the current study can be categorized as a type of supplementary fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the context of informal mentoring, mutual identification is vital to developing the mentoring relationship because mentors and protégés often do not have a shared goal in their work and, as a result, do not have many opportunities to develop complementary fit. Consequently, supplementary fit, leading to interpersonal attraction and mutual identification, is critical to mentoring support received by protégés in informal mentoring relationships. Just as perceived deep-level similarity was examined in the current study, other types of fit deserve research attention across different kinds of mentoring relationships.

## 9. Limitations and conclusions

Several limitations should be noted. First, although our proposed relationships are theoretically sound, causal relationships cannot be warranted since the data were cross-sectional. Future research employing longitudinal designs that measure perceived similarity prior to mentoring support will provide stronger support for the similarity–attraction paradigm and eliminate any confusion about causality. Second, the use of a sample from Taiwan may limit the generalizability of the findings. We do not know of any research that suggests these findings would change across cultures, but there are well-known differences in cultural values (e.g., individualistic vs. collectivistic) between Taiwan and other countries.

## 10. Conclusion

Our findings provide valuable insights on how individual and situational factors can contribute to mentoring support. Given that mentoring is a common practice in business settings and may be dysfunctional (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2008), continued research efforts to delineate variables that are related to successful mentoring relationships will increase the understanding of the

mentoring process and intervention effectiveness. This, in turn, supports company leaders in facilitating positive mentoring and other prosocial behaviors within the organization (Kanungo & Conger, 1993).

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