Article

How and When Is Role Modeling Effective? The Influence of Mentee Professional Identity on Mentoring Dynamics and Personal Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

In this conceptual document, I present a critical model of mentoring that suggests that mentee professional identity influences how role modeling occurs and, as a consequence, shapes mentoring learning outcomes. The model suggests that the role modeling function of mentoring might not always be beneficial and that the degree to which a mentee has a well-defined professional identity will affect when role modeling supports personal learning, specifically, the outcome of personal adaptability. Although reliance on traditional, exchange-based modeling and emulation are helpful as mentees work to establish their professional identities, it is expected to produce less favorable and potentially detrimental learning outcomes as mentees begin to develop more well-established self-identities. Accordingly, this article contributes to the extant discussion on mentoring to suggest that mentoring relationships characterized by mutuality produce a path that better suits the learning needs of those mentees whose professional identities are better defined. The model is delimited according to phases

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of the mentoring relationship and asserts that this proposed effect is likely to become salient in the cultivation phase. I derive from these assertions a series of testable propositions that set the stage for future research and outline steps that mentor models may consider to meet their mentees' learning needs through authentic mentoring practices.

Keywords

mentoring, role modeling, mutuality, personal learning, professional identity

Why do employees seek mentoring? Although mentees may approach a workplace mentoring relationship for any number of personal reasons, decades of research on mentoring in organizations submits that receipt of mentoring support provides benefits that expand beyond context-specific learning outcomes, suggesting that long-term, context-free personal adaptability is an important career-developmental outcome of workplace mentoring (Lankau & Scandura, 2007). Toward this end, mentorship seekers tend to establish relationships from which they believe they can receive support that will serve to guide their growth through learning and competency development and cultivation of their professional presence (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). And they seek mentorship because high receipt of dyadic support has been shown to be largely positive (Allen, Eby, Poteat, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). However, especially in the case of the role modeling function of mentoring, these expectations are not always met. A small, but impactful body of literature has begun to consider conditions under which those "variables widely accepted as leading to desirable consequences" may actually produce null or negative outcomes (Bernerth, Walker, & Harris, 2016; Pierce & Aguinis, 2013, p. 313).

Ehrhardt and Ragins (2018) have noted the possibility of a *too much of a good thing* paradox in mentoring relationships. This suggests that if a mentee conceives that she or he is exposed to high levels of exemplary mentor modeling but that this modeling does not complement her or his specific learning needs, this could result in decreased psychological attachment to the mentor, which would precipitate her or his responding by withdrawing from the relationship. This concept is analogous to Ibarra's (1999) notion that some mentees require a degree of authenticity that may not be suitably addressed by assimilating prototypical models into their role modeling process. Accordingly, mentees are expected to adjust their behaviors if they perceive misalignments between their mentor and themselves, suggesting the need for

customized, authentic mentoring functions driven by fit with the mentee's identity as opposed to other perceived aspects of similarity.

Role modeling "is considered a marker of identification in mentoring" (Humberd & Rouse, 2016, p. 439), and as Gibson (2004) elaborates, while the

> traditional idea of a role model is that of a person in an influential role position, such as a parent, teacher, supervisor or mentor, who provides an example for individuals to imitate . . . , [r]ecent research has presented a different view of role models, as active, cognitive constructions devised by individuals to construct their ideal, or "possible" selves based on their own developing needs and goals. (p. 135)

With reference to the role modeling mentoring function, Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) argue that while role modeling is related to one's identity with work, the social validation that is produced through modeling comes from one's identity customization; this notion is consistent with Humberd and Rouse's (2016) conception that integration of one's present self-identity into the process produces higher quality mentoring outcomes than one that is more heavily reliant on similarity/fit. Thus, although professional identity—defined as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Ibarra, 1999, pp. 764-765)—is typically studied and theorized as a subjective career outcome resulting from mentoring (e.g., Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007), the proposed model offers a complementary, but different perspective that accounts for Pratt et al.'s (2006) conclusion that work and identity reinforce one another and that role modeling will interact with these processes to produce learning outcomes.

Personal Adaptability

Personal learning involves not only short-term, contextually bound skill development and relational/interdependent job learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), but also the longer-term, context-free career-developmental objective of personal growth and the capacity for personal adaptability—"the capacity to change [that] involve[s] learning how to develop a diverse set of role behaviors to respond effectively to constantly changing environmental conditions" (Hall, 2002; Lankau & Scandura, 2007, p. 97). Thus, personal adaptability suggests a propensity for change and the ability and willingness to meet the demands of dynamic situations (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004).

In this sense, adaptability is "defined in terms of developing appropriate behavioral responses to the environment" (Karaevli & Hall, 2006; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000, p. 361).

Adaptability is a requirement for today's work environment that enable mentees to not only gain new competencies, but also to promote confidence to keep up with demands for continuous change; it follows that personal adaptability has a clear relationship with outcomes including job and organizational performance, employability, and career success (Fugate et al., 2004; Lankau & Scandura, 2007; Pan, Sun, & Chow, 2011). Whereas personal learning has been previously construed as a hypernym referring to general outcomes of an identity clarification process (Higgins & Kram, 2001), a more direct link between identity growth and personal adaptability was elaborated by Hall (2002) who envisioned the two as aspects of learning that one applies over time. The conceptual model presented here adds to this relatively new link between mentoring and learning that moves beyond the traditional assumption that individuals necessarily learn through the modeling process. In so doing, this article meets Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks's (2011) call for investigations that provide insights into how personal adaptability may enhance the welfare of individuals engaged in mentoring relationships.

Theoretical Background

A Critical Perspective

Mentees, mentors, and organizations have all benefited from workplace mentoring (Allen et al., 2004; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Mentees in both formal and informal workplace mentoring relationships benefit not only from the receipt of career-developmental (vocational) mentoring support, but also from psychosocial support and role modeling (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). Prevalent theories in support of mentoring and its benefits include social learning theory (Bandura, 1986; Weiss, 1977) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), especially as they relate to expectations regarding the behavior–outcome relationship (expectancy theory, i.e., Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964).

However, a widely touted mechanism through which exchange is explained to affect the mentoring-to-outcome relationship involves mentee emulation of a model mentor's behaviors. Of all the mentoring functions, role modeling remains the most deeply embedded in this emulation model. Curiously, it is also the one mentoring function that has the greatest discrepancy with regard to career benefits for recipients. The purpose of this article is to present a

model of mentoring, which specifies conditions under which reliance on role model emulation may be helpful toward personal learning / adaptability outcomes and, more critically, those under which it may be detrimental toward this end—conditions that necessitate a role modeling relationship characterized by mutuality. The proposed model specifies the salience of this effect during the cultivation phase of mentoring (as compared with the prior phases of socialization and initiation) and for mentees who have more highly developed professional self-concepts. In so doing, this conceptual view contributes to our understanding of how individuals engage in and process role modeling across an ever-changing career-developmental landscape.

Of note, the critical perspective presented herein does not posit that mentees would choose to either engage or remain in a mentoring relationship with someone who models less-than-desirable work behaviors (indeed, in many mentoring relationships, mentees retain the ability to end the partnership). Nor does this perspective assume the occasion of negative role modeling whereby mentees observe and record instances of attributes that exemplify how *not* to behave (Gibson, 2004). Furthermore, this perspective differs from research that categorizes undesirable mentoring instances as marginally effective, ineffective, or dysfunctional (e.g., Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Rather, this cautionary account acknowledges "that mentoring is likely to be marked by both positive and negative experiences over time" and that a mentoring relationship may fail to meet a mentee's specific need without being psychologically damaging (Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004; Eby & McManus, 2004, p. 256), and submits the following consideration: It may be those mentor characteristics that appear most beneficial—relationships to which mentees may have every reason to remain committed—that could ultimately restrict personal learning and context-free adaptability.

Role Modeling as a Distinct Mentoring Function

Focusing on role modeling aligns with research that considers this function separately from psychosocial mentoring (e.g., Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Research in this area has shown that those employees who receive higher levels of role modeling tend to be more satisfied with their mentors (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001), and that role modeling is associated with high interpersonal comfort in the mentoring relationship (Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2005). Accordingly, it is not surprising that mentees select mentors who they perceive as role models (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentee selection of a role model may be described in part through identity theory, which posits that observers select models with whom they identify so that they may "assimilate aspects of the

role model's attitudes, behaviors, and values, and ultimately to occupy the role model's life situation" to enhance their sense of competence and identity in performing their professional role and meet their aspirational goals (Gibson & Cordova, 1999; Godshalk & Sosik, 2003, p. 122; Kohlberg, 1963). In mentoring relationships, role modeling takes place through and is considered developmental as a result of mentee observations of and interactions with the mentor (Kram, 1985).

Role Modeling and Career Outcomes

Mentee development may be defined as developmental guidance and support that contribute to professional growth and aid in organizational advancement (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Benefits associated with this form of development include learning how to navigate the organizational world and career enhancement. Although substantial research has provided evidence that career (vocational) and psychosocial support from a mentor produces career benefits for mentees, the relationship between role modeling and career outcomes is less clear. It has generally been argued that observing or interacting with role models "can be considered developmental in the sense that these are ties individuals have with other people who can enhance individuals' personal development and career advancement" (Dalton, 1989; Fagenson, 1989; Gibson, 2004, p. 138; Kram, 1985), and as a result role modeling is considered a tactic to successfully prepare employees to tackle job demands (Allen, Eby, Chao, & Bauer, 2017). However, evidence suggests that while role modeling may enhance context-specific skill development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), it may not necessarily have the same effect on career advancement, which requires context-free learning and personal adaptability. Despite theory suggesting that exposure to role modeling could positively influence mentee career outcomes (e.g., Rich, 1997; Scandura, 1997), these expectations have often not been met when put to an empirical test. Ultimately, mentoring scholars have submitted that, though role modeling may not be inherently related to career enhancement, there exist too few studies that have examined role modeling separate from other mentoring functions for us to develop a systematic conclusion regarding role modeling outcomes (Allen et al., 2004).

A handful of studies suggest that role modeling may indeed serve an influential role toward mentee attributions, satisfaction, and performance, but that these effects come about indirectly, mediated by such considerations as trust in the mentor (Rich, 1997), skill development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), and perceived organizational support (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010). As a result of the lack of direct evidence linking role modeling to mentee

outcomes, while focus on mentoring in organizations has flourished in recent years (e.g., Allen et al., 2017; Janssen, Vuuren, & Jong, 2016), investigations into potential consequences of role modeling have lagged behind in contemporary organizational research (e.g., Scandura & Williams, 2004). For example, a recent article forewent the opportunity to describe behavioral outcomes of role modeling, describing instead how key modeling components may serve an exogenous role in predicting career and psychosocial functions (Humberd & Rouse, 2016).

The tenuous relationship between role modeling and career outcomes may be due to several factors: (a) very few mentoring studies have parsed out role modeling from mentoring's psychosocial support function, and therefore, little work has investigated ways through which role modeling could be improved in practice despite its conceptual merit; (b) as its own construct outside of mentoring relationships, role modeling is rarely investigated in workplace settings, and the few studies that have done so have largely examined the outcomes of this support without providing substantial consideration for the processes through which it may affect those outcomes; and (c) largely as a result of this dearth of research, definitional variations of role modeling have yet to be cleared up. Table 1 depicts a summary of empirical investigations of role modeling on the recipient's career outcomes. The data are derived from the MetaBUS curation of collective research findings, which currently includes over 1,100,000 data points from the top 25 industrial and applied psychology and organizational behavior journals over the past 26 years (1992-2017; www.metabus.org; Bosco, Steel, Oswald, Uggerslev, & Field, 2015; Bosco, Uggerslev, & Steel, 2017).

A careful analysis of findings in which an investigated variable includes either the term "modeling" (850 cases, 70 of which involved role modeling and its relationship to employee careers) or ("model" without the term "modeling") (1,422 cases, of which only six dealt with the relationship between role modeling and employee careers) revealed that, of 14,081 curated articles at the time of this inquiry, 29 involve studies that investigate the relationship between role modeling and recipient career outcomes, resulting in a total of 77 relevant data points, or approximately 0.007% of the field's research.

Not surprisingly, the relationships that have been studied largely echo several of the reasons why people turn to mentors for modeling in the first place, as they seek learning (e.g., De Janasz & Godshalk, 2013; Finkelstein, Allen, & Rhoton, 2003; Hu, Jiang, Mo, Chen, & Shi, 2016; Kwan, Mao, & Zhang, 2010; Lankau & Scandura, 2002), individualized support (e.g., Ensher et al., 2001; Mitchell, Eby, & Ragins, 2015), and identity development (e.g., De Janasz & Godshalk, 2013; Dragoni, Park, Soltis, & Forte-Trammell, 2014; Lankau, Carlson, & Nielson, 2006; Mumford, O'Connor, Clifton, Connelly,

Table 1. RM Relationships With Career Variables From Extant Research.

Year	Reference	Conceptualization of RM	RM variable	Career variable	r
1993	Mumford, O'Connor, Clifton, Connelly, and Zaccaro (1993)	Exposure to and attempts to behave and exhibit emotional reactions similar to a variety of positive models	Role models	Personal adjustment	.14
1994	Fagenson (1994)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Promotion rate	–.18
1996	Dansky (1996)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Success	.43
				Salary	.30
1997	Scandura (1997)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Procedural justice	.25
				Organization commitment	.24
				Job satisfaction	.28
				Distributive justice	.24
				Career expectations	.19
1999	McNeese-Smith (1999)	"Being clear about standards and values, setting an example and breaking tasks down into attainable wins" (p. 245)	Leadership modeling the way	Productivity	.34
				Patient satisfaction	.04
				Organization commitment	.47
				Job satisfaction	.47
1999	Ragins and Cotton (1999)	RM as a mentoring function	Role model	Career interruptions	–.04
				Promotion rate	.05
2001	Ensher, Thomas, and Murphy (2001)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Reciprocity	.37
				Perceived career success	.12
				Job satisfaction	.06
2001	Nielson, Carlson, and Lankau (2001)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Work interference with family	.06
				Family interference with work	–.18
2002	Lankau and Scandura (2002)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Role ambiguity	–.18
				Skill development (learning)	.27
				Relational job (learning)	.20
				Job satisfaction	.29
				Intention to leave organization	–.07
2002	Paglis and Green (2002)	Effectively modeling the following leadership behaviors: "pushing change, seeking continuous improvement, stimulating new directions for the department, and persisting in efforts at improvement" (p. 224)	Superior's leadership modeling	Job autonomy	.26

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Year	Reference	Conceptualization of RM	RM variable	Career variable	r
2003	Aquino and Douglas (2003)	Aggressive modeling: Antisocial behavior is "learned and maintained in much the same way as any other behavior . . . Since employees are likely to look to their co-workers for signals that indicate how they are expected to behave in the workplace, the extent to which they choose to engage in antisocial behavior in response to identity threats should be influenced by their exposure to aggressive role models" (p. 198)	Aggressive modeling	Identity threat	.37
				Attitude toward revenge	.20
				Antisocial behavior	.26
2003	Finkelstein, Allen, and Rhoton (2003)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Reciprocal learning	.31
2003	Jaussi and Dionne (2003)	"when individuals see a behavior demonstrated, they learn through emulation . . . people will learn from observation and interaction with role models rather than simply having an innate ability to perform well in any given area" (p. 477)	Leader RM creativity	Follower creative performance	.04
2006	Allen, Eby, and Lentz (2006)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Voluntary participation	.17
				Training quality	.32
2006	Lankau, Carlson, and Nielson (2006)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Role conflict	-.21
				Role ambiguity	-.24
				Organization commitment	.33
				Job satisfaction	.41
2006	Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, and DeChurch (2006)	Modeling function of the Transformational leadership inventory (TLI): "Providing an Appropriate Model involves the leader setting an example for employees that is consistent with the values the leader espouses" (p. 26)	Modeling	Satisfaction	.29
				Performance	.19
2009	Zagenczyk, Gibney, Kiewitz, and Restubog (2009)	Relied on Gibson's (2003) definition of role modeling: "person(s) an individual perceives to be similar to some extent, and because of that similarity, the individual desires to emulate (or specifically avoid) aspects of that person's attributes or behavior" (Gibson, 2003, p. 592)	Role model relationships	Psychological contract breach	.47
2010	Baranik, Roling, and Eby (2010)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Turnover intent	-.40
				Perceived organization support	.49
				Organization commitment	.40
				Job satisfaction	.27
2010	Kwan, Mao, and Zhang (2010)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Work-to-family enrichment	.17
				Relational job learning	0.23
				Personal skill development	.28
2011	Kaptein, M. (2011)	"people learn what behavior is expected by observing the behavior of role models . . . employees often imitate the ethical or unethical behavior of their managers and supervisors" (p. 848)	Supervisor ethical RM management ethical RM	Observed unethical behavior	-.42
				Observed unethical behavior	-.42

(continued)

433

Table 1. (continued)

Year	Reference	Conceptualization of RM	RM variable	Career variable	r
2012	Chun, Sosik, and Yun (2012)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Organization commitment	.30
				Affective well-being	*.15*
2012	Hebl, Tonidandel, and Ruggs (2012)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Salary	*.08*
				Promotions	.27
				Job satisfaction	.20
				Job involvement	*.13*
2013	De Janasz and Godshalk (2013)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Satisfaction with mentoring relationship	.59
				Learning through e-mentoring	.48
				Increased skill self-efficacy	.39
				Increased concept application	.38
2013	Zhuang, Wu, and Wen (2013)	RM as a mentoring function	Host RM Home RM	Expatriate:	
				Work adjustment	.29
				Official adjustment	.31
				General adjustment	.32
				Expatriate:	
				Work adjustment	.41
				Official adjustment	.45
				General adjustment	.34
2014	Dragoni, Park, Soltis, and Forte-Trammell (2014)	"supervisor models effective leadership behavior—that is, he or she acts as a role model for how to effectively engage and motivate key stakeholders . . . demonstrate how to meet role demands . . . provide a rich and descriptive illustration of how to act" (p. 68).	Supervisor modeling	Self-perceived role knowledge	.24
				Self-efficacy	*.13*
2014	Kao, Rogers, Spitzmueller, Lin, and Lin (2014)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Resilience	.37
2015	Mitchell, Eby, and Ragins (2015)	RM as a mentoring function	RM	Professional commitment	.37
				Organization commitment	.42
				Relational self-construal	*.12*
2015	Wo, Ambrose, and Schminke (2015)	"individuals adopt or learn attitudes and behavior by modeling and emulating the attitudes and behavior of others" (p. 1852)	Role model influence	Perceived organization support	.52
2016	Hu, Jiang, Mo, Chen, and Shi (2016)	Modeling as a form of social influence from an individual salient to the recipient: "When an influential individual . . . performs one thing, it creates a normative influence on the focal individuals, which govern their motivations to conform to the action" (p. 101)	Leader's RM	Prosocial motivation	.30
				Social support for corporate volunteering	.32
				Learning from corporate volunteering	.34
				Job performance	.30
				Corporate volunteering	*.18*

Note. Italicized number represents coefficients that are either nonsignificant or contradict positive expectations. RM = role modeling; *r* = correlation coefficient.

& Zaccaro, 1993). The majority of these studies (18 of the 29 studies, or 62.07%) view role modeling from the perspective that it is a mentoring function, and although not depicted in Table 1, it is notable that in each of these instances, the role modeling function correlated positively and significantly with other mentoring functions. Furthermore, with only two exceptions (Hu et al., 2016 and McNeese-Smith, 1999), data for the role modeling and career variables were captured at the same time period; thus, we have very little idea of how role modeling affects employee career outcomes as mentees traverse the phases of a mentoring relationship. A notable percentage of this research (14.23%, or 11 of the 77 data points) has investigated relationships between role modeling received and the recipient's job performance or expectation of performance, though as discussed below there exists a lack of consensus with regard to these outcomes.

Lack of consensus. Table 1 also serves to summarize some of the lack of consensus surrounding the usefulness of role modeling toward employee careers. Of the 77 findings relating role modeling to the recipient's career outcomes, 15 are either nonsignificant or have a negative relationship with positive career associations; in other words, it may be estimated that 19.48% of the field's research does not find significant positive associations between role modeling and employee careers and in some cases negative relationships have been found, providing evidence that role modeling and the emulation of an identified exemplar can lead to negative career outcomes. These findings may be categorized into three areas: (a) objective measures of job performance (i.e., creative performance, salary, promotion rate, perceived career success, and patient satisfaction), (b) subjective indicators of success and capacity to perform one's job (i.e., career expectations, job satisfaction; job involvement, self-efficacy, self-construal, psychological contract breach, and intention to leave the organization), and (c) well-being and work–life balance (i.e., affective well-being; career interruptions; and work interference with family life). Together, these results imply that further conceptualization is needed to more fully understand how role modeling functions, and under which situations it may lead to beneficial or less-than-beneficial outcomes for recipients.

An Advanced Consideration of Role Modeling

A final contribution of Table 1 is that it provides detail relevant to the conceptualization of role modeling. Specifically, regardless of whether role modeling was conceptualized as a mentoring function (18 cases) or not (11 cases), past research on role modeling and mentee career outcomes has *exclusively*

defined the mentee's response to modeling from an emulation-driven per-spective such that the mentor models and the mentee emulates what they observe to be archetypical behaviors. This is evidenced clearly in Table 1's column *Conceptualization of Role Modeling*, in which the study either (a) distinctly identified emulation as the driving force behind the role modeling process or (b) conceptualized modeling as a function of mentoring, which relies on Kram's (1985) conceptualization that role modeling occurs "when the protégé recognizes aspects of his or her current idealized self in the men-tor and strives to emulate these aspects" (Mitchell et al., 2015, p. 4).

Although role modeling thus involves recognizing aspects of one's *ideal self* in a mentor and striving to emulate the mentor in an attempt to achieve this idealized future goal, what is left underconsidered is way in which mentee *attachment* to the mentor affects this process. Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) discuss the distinction between "three common processes of psychological attachment: personal identification, social identification, and value internalization" (p. 586). Drawing on the work of Kelman (1958), Shamir and his colleagues describe *personal identification* as an attempt to be (or to be similar to) another person by emulating and gaining the quali-ties of this individual who represents and exhibits desirable values, attri-butes, and identity. Considered in relation to role modeling, personal identification is then referent to a mentee's drive to arrive at a state of ideal *future self*—the mentee's attachment to the mentor rests on perceptions that the mentor exudes characteristics that will help the mentee attain this future-self goal. S*ocial identification* refers to defining oneself within the context of a social category; this contextually referent form of attachment is thus less aligned with the context-free outcome of adaptability on which this article focuses. Finally, *value internalization* involves incorporating self-conceived values as guiding principles, which suggests considerably different motivations toward action, influence, and commitment as com-pared with personal or social identification (Howell, 1988; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986); thus, attachment grounded in value internalization incor-porates a mentee's *present* self, and as discussed later, it is thus within this sphere that mutuality can serve an important purpose.

The emulation perspective prevalent in statements identifying the role modeling function fails to provide a comprehensive account of the types of attachment that a mentee may perceive in a mentor; thus, a more encompass-ing consideration of role modeling is necessary to account for these distinct psychological attachment processes: I propose that role modeling involves a mentee learning from someone who demonstrates exemplary desirable char-acteristics, behaviors, and knowledge, and that the degree to which the men-tee distinguishes the mentor's qualities as serving to provide models for

consideration that could promote her or his individualized needs is dependent upon their alignment with her or his professional identity.

This consideration serves several purposes. First, it aligns distinct forms of psychological attachment (personal identification and value internalization) to the objectives of learning, identity development, and individualized support, which encompass a considerable spectrum of objectives for which mentees turn to mentors to model. Second, it recognizes the long history that the diversity perspective has with role modeling research by acknowledging that what a mentee considers to be exemplary modeling will be tied to her or his individualized needs and identity; as I will discuss later, this outlook considers modeling from the perspective of deep-level diversity stemming from self-attributions and metaperceptions (a person's understanding of how others perceive them) about the relationship (Shectman & Kenny, 1994; Wood, 2013). Third, it accounts for mentee professional identity as a pivotal factor in determining whether the modeling is beneficial toward mentee learning/adaptability.

Professional Identity and Personal Adaptability

Fugate et al. (2004) differentiate professional identity from personal adaptability: While professional identity channels the notion of *who I am and who I want to be*, it is personal adaptability that allows one to realize this goal. From a mentoring perspective, this aligns with Humberd and Rouse's (2016) conceptualization of personal identification. Humberd and Rouse theorized that while identification during the initiation phase involves mentee projection (aka emulation) of a mentor, driven by notions of past and future selves, to produce high-quality mentoring outcomes identification during mentoring cultivation phase requires integration of one's present self, as well. This path involves mutuality, as the mentor begins to incorporate integration in her or his process as well, which propels a more informed modeling relationship that is less heavily reliant on similarity/recognition. Thus, consideration of how mutuality affects role modeling is consistent with Kram's (1985) discussion of a conscious modeling process through which role modeling can produce learning (as opposed to merely *knowing*) outcomes.

It follows that the usefulness of role modeling will depend on the state of the mentee's professional identity, and in the case that a mentee has a more less-defined identity, modeling would be useful regardless of whether it comes from a mentor with whom the mentee shares a relationship characterized by mutuality. When mentees have low professional identity, they are focused on building their future selves based largely on their own identification of their past self, while their current state is less known and understood

by them. It is once they begin to have a stronger sense of professional identity that they can begin to incorporate their present selves into the process, and thus benefit from a relationship that is characterized by mutuality. This is not to say that mutual processes would not provide benefits for mentees with less-developed professional identities; but rather that for these mentees, mutuality is less important; it becomes increasingly important as the mentee's professional identity becomes better defined.

For purposes of discussion, mentee professional identification may be simplified into two distinct stages: Those who have a high professional identity, and those who are in the process of working to ascertain a clearer professional identity. Self-identity is an important part of one's overall self-concept, which represents an individual's idea of self (including one's attributes) constructed from both beliefs about oneself and feedback received from others to date (Baumeister, 1999). Two notes are worthy of attention here: First, while professional identity may be described as an internalized conception of who one *is* referent to his or her profession, this notion of self is separate from one's role(s), which social psychology research views as a distinctly external factor (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Second, this distinction between high and low professional self-identity does not mean to infer that the concept is in any way static, but rather builds on the extant notion that clarity of one's current state at a given point in time does matter (Campbell et al., 1996). Concurrently, this distinction aligns with a divergence that has been discussed at length in higher education literature regarding the discrepancy between *assimilating* professional skills, norms, and values and *internalizing* them such that they are defined and adapted within the framework of one's own professional identity and self-image (Antony, 2002; Baker & Lattuca, 2010).

Role Model Emulation and the Case for Relationships Characterized by Mutuality

Usefulness of traditional role model emulation. Assimilation of professional skills, norms, and values aligns with the emphasis that early stage mentees place on modeling as they work to create a viable understanding of oneself (Gibson, 2003). To use Antony's (2002) terminology, a *neophyte* (an early stage individual whose professional self-identity is yet to be well defined) would benefit greatly by modeling that conveys content knowledge, informs about professional norms, and provides the grounding through which to adopt these acquired understandings in an attempt to adapt classic standards of excellence. Here, emulation referent to traditional role modeling would prove useful, as it aligns with Ibarra's (1999) theory in which individuals who are

working toward creating more fully elaborated professional identities benefit by experimenting with trial *provisional selves* that they identify through observation of role models. This traditional framework of mentor emulation is most useful for individuals who are near the beginning of their professional career or transitioning to a new career or substantively different role (Swann, 1987). However, our learning needs shift as we begin to develop a more defined identity as this self-definition informs our career and developmental goals. Although individuals tend to define career success through the lens of "self-referent criteria such as personal standards or goals," Higgins, Dobrow, and Chandler (2008, p. 209) build the case that "both self- and other-referent criteria" provide salient indicators that inform this definition. That is, we internalize both acquired skills and community norms into our own evaluation of our self-concept (Bandura, 1986), and it is this self-evaluation that intrinsically motivates us to pursue rewarding activities that align ourselves with the collective (Shamir et al., 1993). Accordingly, mentees who have well-defined professional identities "are better able to create and push toward goals," when interacting within constructed relationships (Kahn & Kram, 1994, p. 22). Together, this suggests that as mentees begin to develop more defined professional identities and strive to refine these definitions, they require role modeling from mentors with whom they perceive more specific and specialized attributes (Gibson, 2003).

Breaking free from an emulation-only perspective. Research suggests that mentees with well-defined professional identities desire to retain their own perceived identities in their development. In part, this drive stems from a desire to not lose one's self in the pursuit of excelling in a profession and, rather, a need for self-verification. This notion eschews the assumption that mentees are required to "replace their own norms and values with that of the field to which they aspire" (Antony, 2002; Baker & Lattuca, 2010, p. 808). Rather, mentees with well-defined professional identities will attempt to pursue an internalized approach by engaging in interactions with models who serve to confirm their values and sense of self (Swann, 1987) and enhance their existing notions of self (Gibson, 2003). Similarly, research on leader–follower relationships suggests that those individuals who have well-established professional identities strive for consistency between their self-identity and their actions (Shamir et al., 1993, p. 580, *emphasis added*):

> People are also motivated to retain and increase their sense of *self-consistency*. Self-consistency refers to correspondence among components of the self-concept at a given time, to continuity of the self-concept over time (Turner, 1968) and to correspondence between the self-concept and

behavior. People derive a sense of "meaning" from continuity between the past, the present and the projected future (McHugh, 1968), and from the correspondence between their behavior and self-concept (Gecas, 1982; Schlenker, 1985).

Together, these notions indicate that mentees with more highly defined professional identities would benefit from a more nuanced and personalized relationship from which to engage in modeling than that currently conceived under the traditional mentor emulation model.

Self-consistency through mutuality. Contemporary research considers developmental workplace relationships through a mutuality lens (Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012; Halbesleben, 2012); this perspective suggests that mutual understanding and expectations are a defining component of positive workplace relationships (Roberts, 2007). When considered in reference to role modeling relationships, a mentoring relationship characterized by mutuality aligns with a dialectical theory perspective, which posits that social relationships are fraught with contradictions: that is, as mentees' self-identities shift, the modeling they deem exemplary in pursuit of career development will likewise shift as they reanalyze their assumptions and identify alternative courses of action that align with their shifting understanding of self to preserve self-consistency and self-verification (Cosier, 1981). Furthermore, the mutuality perspective aligns with the contingency approach to mentoring (e.g., Higgins, 2007) to account for the perspective that bigger is not necessarily the better. As Dobrow and her colleagues note, taking a mutuality lens recognizes the reciprocity that characterizes mentoring relationships and interactions (Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, 2008; Haggard et al., 2011). Applied to the role modeling function of mentoring, the mutuality perspective suggests that the degree to which learning outcomes are positive is contingent upon the needs of the mentee (Higgins, 2007). Although this perspective has become influential in consideration of developmental networks (e.g., Dobrow et al., 2012), these authors anticipate the importance of mutuality to come about predominately within mentoring dyads as individual mentors and mentees mutually account for one another's viewpoints to develop higher quality relationships.

Mutuality is a tenet of high-quality exchange, as it implies that the value of the relationship is driven by opportunities for both parties to contribute to the exchange (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Mentoring relationships are based on trust and respect, and when mentors allow for mutuality of influence, the level of interpersonal trust and overall relationship quality will increase (Deluga, 1994). High-quality connections between mentor and mentee characterized as

having a high degree of mutuality are likely to bring about greater amounts of enrichment, self-awareness, and self-esteem (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Although mutuality in the relationship promotes bilateral growth (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007), for the purposes of this article, I will focus on how this relationship characteristic encourages the experience of modeling required by a mentee with a well-defined professional identity. It enables the mentor to better know the learner (Dobrow et al., 2012), which results in clearer agreement about the mentee's intentions and attributions and thus how modeling may be interpreted. Mentees "vary regarding the types of and amount of support they expect, and ultimately seek out" from their mentors, which highlights the link between mentoring effectiveness and matching the mentee's specific developmental needs (Dobrow et al., 2012, p. 222; Higgins, 2007). Accordingly, the current state of a mentee's professional identity is an important provision that affects the usefulness of modeling toward mentee learning. Unfortunately, however, neither mentees nor mentors tend to be very accurate with regard to identifying mutual mentoring partners (Welsh, Bhave, & Kim, 2012).

Higgins (2007) makes the case that mentees should seek mentoring that best suit their current situation and career goals. It follows that those mentees who have ill-defined professional identities—those whose pursuits are more heavily grounded in their notions of past and future selves (Humberd & Rouse, 2016)—would benefit from choosing exemplary prototypes as models so that they may learn the archetypical behaviors associated with the advancement and development as they begin to form impressions about how to succeed in their career. Accordingly, these mentees would benefit from traditional modeling that is grounded in the practice of emulating archetypical characteristics and behaviors. In so doing, low professional identity mentees are furnished an opportunity to try out a series of provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) as they learn to cope and adapt to new ideas and performance demands; by modeling the way for mentees to experiment with these conditional trials, mentors serve as a resource for personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

For those mentees who hold more clear understanding of their own professional identity, such emulation fails to account for and integrate this present-self-identity—and thus not only does it fail to meet their learning goals, but it sets up a more convoluted identity. Provisional selves are adequate insofar as mentees have "not yet fully elaborated professional identities" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Mentees with well-defined identities, on the contrary, require more highly specialized developmental opportunities that build on their existing sense of self, rather than newly obtained identities. This allows for authentic development, but requires mutual understanding from both parties. Mutuality

cultivates authenticity, as a dialogue of shared experiences and vulnerabilities challenges the hierarchical structure of the relationship and promotes a process of excavation of and inclusion of the self (Berkovich, 2014).

Conceptual Model and Propositions

Figure 1 depicts anticipated personal learning/adaptability outcomes across the phases of mentoring relationships for mentees with respectively less-defined and more-defined professional identities as they experience role modeling from (a) a traditional emulation perspective and (b) from within a mentoring relationship characterized by mutuality.

The model presented in Figure 1 has three primary components: Mentee state of professional identity definition, phase of the mentoring relationship, and characteristics of the role modeling relationship (resulting in role modeling, i.e., either emulation- or mutuality-driven). Perceptions of self-identity have been suggested to drive efficacy beliefs and motivation to engage in developmental experiences (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009). Those mentees with less-defined present professional identities are expected to experience greater fluctuations to their identity as a result of their social interactions. Argyle (2017) offers support for this notion by explaining that individuals who have a stronger sense of identity achievement are often less vulnerable to manipulation, and that one's self-esteem shifts more when the individual has a lower sense of ego identity. Thus, those with less-developed identities are more likely to experience identity diffusion, providing greater opportunity for their personal learning to shift as a result of role model emulation.

The Path of Traditional Emulation-Driven Role Modeling

The tradition of model emulation has a long history in organizational scholarship, as those who serve as role models tend to be viewed positively and imitated by others (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Gibson's (2003, 2004) clarification that role modeling resides as a cognitive construction within the mind of the mentee emphasizes both identification with the mentor and the mentor's social role; and as confirmed in the conceptualizations of role modeling provided in Table 1, this perspective is echoed by mentoring scholars who define role modeling as an attributional reaction by the mentee (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003). Thus, especially when exposed to modeling deemed archetypical and provided by a successful mentor who fits the mentee's perceptions of a prototypical leader, mentees are likely to view these observations as imitation-worthy best practices. This assumption, grounded in social learning theory
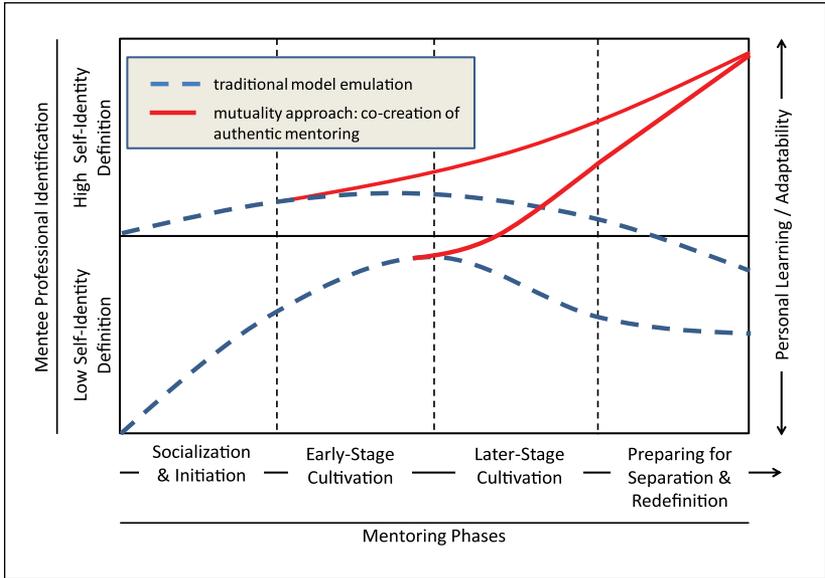
Figure 1. Personal learning/adaptability benefits of role model emulation and mutuality for mentees with low and high professional self-identities across phases of the mentoring relationship.

(Bandura, 1986), suggests that mentees faced with high-quality modeling are likely to attempt to reproduce this observed conduct with the hope that doing so could produce similarly beneficial outcomes.

Mentees develop a sense of obligation to an individual to whom they ascribe modeled leadership, feel beholden to this model, and perceive an expectation to reciprocate (Bernerth et al., 2016). Reciprocation manifests as emulation, and such imitation of a role model is enhanced when the model has high power (Weiss, 1977)—hence, those leaders who mentees perceive as candidates most worthy to take on as mentors (those who fit the employee's prototype schemata) are the likeliest to be imitated (Chiu, Balkundi, & Weinberg, 2017). Social learning theory predicts imitation in mentoring relationships, as its central tenet expresses that learning comes about through simple observation and replication of others (Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014).

Socialization and initiation. Mentees seeking to identify mentors with whom to initiate a role modeling relationship may experience higher levels of role modeling when they have opportunities to either directly observe or receive advice and commentary from an individual who they consider to have high

levels of career mastery (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003), and this attributional process occurs regardless of the mentee's career stage or degree to which their professional self-concept is defined (Gibson, 2003). Thus, from the mentee's perspective, those mentors whose actions have been met with vocational rewards are perceived to model highly desirable work behaviors and would appear to serve as worthwhile and preferable mentors.

As displayed visually by the dashed paths in Figure 1, mentees characterized by both highly and less developed self-concepts are expected to learn similarly from mentor emulation in the early phases of the relationship—socialization and initiation. Kram (1983) suggests that mentees are less cognitively inclined to view their mentors as role models until they reach the cultivation phase of the relationship, as that is the phase in which the interpersonal bond and trust begin to strengthen. This makes sense, as trust-building has been described as an important link through which mentors become influential role models to mentees and positively influence their work attitudes (Henderson, 1985; Kram, 1996; Scandura & Williams, 2004). Until this occurs, mentees are more likely to rely on the mentoring relationship primarily for more generic role and social cues as opposed to deeper-level adaptive lessons to which they would be more receptive only after the mentee cultivates a relationship in which she or he views the mentor as someone whom she or he admires and respects (Baranik et al., 2010). Although mentees with more highly defined self-identities may begin with a greater level of perceived preparedness than lower-self-concept mentees, individuals fitting both characteristics would likely gain somewhat equal advantage from such modeling behaviors in these originating phases (Filstad, 2004). Gibson (2003, p. 591) draws on social psychology's notion of *construals* to drive home the point that role models provide vital functional support during socialization by "helping individuals create, experiment with, and define" their identities, providing nuance to our general understanding that model emulation has a positive effect on socialization (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Therefore, Figure 1 depicts a more pronounced curve representing the benefits of traditional model emulation for low self-concept mentees during these initial phases.

> **Proposition 1:** In early mentoring phases of socialization and initiation, traditional emulation-driven role modeling will produce mentee personal learning and adaptability for mentees with both highly defined and less-defined professional identities.

Cultivation. Cultivation, the phase most commonly associated with mentoring (Kram, 1983), is the phase during which the greatest amount of mentoring

typically occurs (Humberd & Rouse, 2016). For illustrative purposes to portray the temporal nature of cultivation, Figure 1 expands the cultivation phase to include early and later stages, as well as preparation for the following phases of separation and redefinition. Once the relationship reaches the cultivation phase, mentees with highly defined and less-defined professional identities will begin to experience dissimilar adaptable learning when exposed to traditional role modeling in a relationship not characterized by mutuality. Although both sets of mentees are expected to ultimately meet developmental needs in a manner that follows an inverted U-shaped curve as they emulate role models across the cultivation phase, the distinction between their experiences as diagrammed in the model are far from subtle. Keeping in mind that the shape of the curves in Figure 1 are purely illustrative (in reality, the shape will be determined by personal factors such as mentee goal and developmental expectations, dyadic factors specific to the relationship between mentor and mentee, and other situational factors), the general expectation here is that mentees with low professional identity definition will develop broadly from role model emulation in the early stage of cultivation before this effect begins to level off, whereas this level of growth in early cultivation is not anticipated for those whose professional identities are more highly defined.

Although mentees with less established professional identities benefit from traditional role modeling (in an attempt to attain an envisioned future identity), more specialized attributes become of greater importance as individuals establish increasingly developed present-day professional identities (Gibson, 2003). Accordingly, whereas low professional identity mentees could expect to thrive as they try out new behaviors modeled after their mentors, those mentees with more highly defined identities could experience frustration as they battle with the understanding that, though the modeling resource may be otherwise adequate, it may not be the *right* one for them (Cardus, 2014).

For those mentees with low professional identity definition, observing and emulating role models enables these neophytes to engage in a process of role prototyping and identity matching through which they consider and practice a range of observed effective personas and determine the feasibility and attractiveness of each (Ibarra, 1999). As explained by Gibson (2003), "role models are important to creating possible selves, because these selves are constructed by individuals through observing salient others" (p. 593). This notion is consistent with the sociocultural perspective of learning, which suggests that interactions in a practice setting affect and are influenced by a learner's very identity (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003); that is, as low professional identity mentees begin to the process of internalizing their acquisition of modeled ideal norms and values, they accept or resist a series of possible

selves as they determine how to successfully navigate and appropriately adapt to their professional lives (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Packer & Giocoechea, 2000).

Those mentees with less developed professional identities tend to place greater importance on the role modeling function of a mentoring relationship, as role modeling serves not only to convey role expectations, but also to guide identity development (Gibson, 2003, 2004; Kelman, 1961). When mentors serve as exemplars, mentees form and code model actions into rules of behavioral conduct to guide future behavior (Bandura, 1986). In addition to role models conveying such items as the skills, standards, as well as more implicit norms and style associated with a role (Ibarra, 1999), they also help the mentees to define aspects of their professional identities (Erikson, 1968), which the mentees then begin to build confidently by emulating role model attributes. Thus, model emulation remains important to those mentees who seek to add new attributes to their repertoire to further learn and adapt through development of their self-schemas (i.e., mentees with less established professional identities). Opportunities to interact with a model who serves as a behavioral and identity-inducing exemplar increase a low self-identity mentee's desire to develop a sense of professional identity that is similar to that of the mentor (Jung, 1986), and so for these mentees, the role modeling experience will align with their personal learning/adaptability ambitions.

> **Proposition 2:** Throughout the early stage cultivation phase of mentoring, traditional emulation-driven modeling will produce mentee personal learning and adaptability in neophytes (mentees with less-defined professional identities).

Traditional role model emulation is likely to create dissonance, however, in mentees who have established professional identities. One reason for this is what Stryker and Burke (2000) refer to as *identity competition*, whereby one's lucid commitment to a self-identity would conflict with the commitments associated with a competing highly salient archetypical identity generated by the role model (Burke, 1991; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Accordingly, identity competition may cause mentees to "perceive that they need to shed past identities . . . that appear to conflict with the adoption of the new identities," creating discord between the mentee's learning goals and their notion of authentic self (Baker & Lattuca, 2010, p. 819). In this fashion, the mentee's robust professional identity can serve as a constraint to the developmental capacity of sociocultural interactions such as role modeling (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003), paving the way for an approach, which for simplification of discussion, dichotomizes individuals with highly and less-defined identities.

According to Baker and Lattuca (2010, p. 822), failure for developers to provide validation to high professional identity mentees will hinder their learning, as with the following example that makes the case that traditional role model emulation can have negative effects:

> Although successful participation in the practices of a community can be a catalyst for ontological change, identity change is not inevitable. Provisional selves, to use Ibarra's term, do not necessarily become actual selves. Baker Sweitzer (2007) interviewed doctoral students who were not sure that the values they were being asked to adopt were in line with their personal values. These same students were also aware that publicly voicing this difference could result in loss of one's supervisor's—and financial—support. Accordingly, many students noted the need to "play the game," at least while enrolled in the program. Others have also noted similar issues related to identity conflict and development when there is a mismatch between program . . . goals and that of the [learner] (Hall & Burns, 2009).

This emotive dissonance stemming from the mismatch between one's concept of self and observed archetypical models of excellence may be likened to what Ibarra (1999) terms *true-to-self* mentees. Ibarra's research indicates that when confronted with alternate possible selves, those mentees who favor authenticity (mentees who have a robust understanding of their professional identity) could feel "prevented . . . from displaying their *true* character and competence" and face an "inability to convey an image that is consistent with a salient self-conception," and would as a result receive limited growth and adaptive learning from traditional emulation of these provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999, pp. 780-781). This limitation is evidenced in Figure 1 by the soft peak and eventual downturn of traditional model emulation on learning and adaptability for mentees with highly defined professional identities.

Regrettably, there are several reasons why both a mentor and mentee would allow the continuation of a relationship in which the mentee's unique learning needs are not adequately met. A mentee's salient needs for adaptation may remain subconscious and unknown to the self (Pincus, 2004) and the cultivating phase of the mentoring relationship may continue to operate in a manner that provides consciously *desired* yet underdevelopmental skills and attributes. In this situation, a mentee would *not* likely perceive that she or he is no longer learning from the relationship, nor would she or he feel as though the mentor is unresponsive to her or his needs (Kram, 1985). Rather, the cultivation phase continues wherein both parties may believe the cultivative relationship remains entirely beneficial. This perspective aligns with research that suggests that individuals continue working to develop their

self-identities throughout the entirety of their careers and life spans (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Furthermore, self-knowledge and the ensuing perception of professional identity are crucial toward realizing one's career potential (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005), and a mentee with a more advanced sense of identity awareness will be prepared to draw on her or his perceptive strengths to adapt as necessary within a career context (Hall, 2002). The case can be made, however, that the esteem of individuals who have a clearer sense of professional identity may be less easily swayed through traditional modeling, and that those mentees with clearer professional identities would be less likely to view emulation as useful toward their learning and adaptability needs. This argument echoes DeRue and colleagues' discussion of negative spirals in the leadership identification process, as a mentee has the option to either grant the mentor with a leadership identity (a positive spiral) or not (a negative spiral; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Following this process, leadership behaviors that are not positively reinforced in the relationship are less likely to be replicated in the future, resulting in disengagement from the social learning environment. Applied to mentoring dyads as depicted in Figure 1, whereas a mentee with a less defined professional identity would grant model status to a mentor who exemplifies prototypical, emulation-worthy model characteristics, this granting is expected to deteriorate as the mentee's professional identity becomes more clearly defined.

Driving home this point, Erde (1997) argues that while role model emulation may be desirable to enable mentees to gain a sense of role specification, more self-aware mentees could better innovate and develop reasoned positions without emulating a model. Under this interpretation, imitative learning locks a high self-identity mentee into a way of learning that does not offer the flexibility necessary for individually considerate adaptability. In other words, emulation fails to developmentally challenge highly self-aware mentees to incorporate their own strengths to adapt to the needs of today's rapidly changing business environment in which roles may change or otherwise be contested (Warnick, 2008).

> **Proposition 3:** Traditional emulation-driven modeling will not result in personal learning and adaptability for mentees who have highly defined professional identities upon entering the cultivation phase.
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> **Proposition 4:** As mentees develop more highly defined professional identities, reliance on traditional emulation-driven modeling in mentoring's later-stage cultivation phase becomes detrimental toward personal learning and adaptability.

The Path of Cocreated, Mutuality-Driven Modeling

The emulation model is limited in that it isolates the mentees from the similar others whom they selected to help them build accurate self-appraisals (Singer, 1981). In essence, it reverts to the unidirectional assumption of role modeling whereby an individual acts alone to experiment and put into practice adaptations of professional behavioral attributes. Thus, the assumption of individualist experimentation ignores the *dyadic nature of nurture* (e.g., Weinberg & Locander, 2014) from which we may posit that effective role modeling within a mentoring relationship calls on the mentor to cocreate mentee learning and growth along with the mentee.

Thus, whereas emulating behavioral archetypes will help provide identity-building scaffolding for those mentees who are working to define their professional identities, the adaptive development of those whose identities are more robustly defined will require a more personalized relationship for role modeling to produce positive learning outcomes. Sluss and Ashforth (2007), in their discussion of how we define ourselves through work relationships, point to the relevance of individual-level motivations through which one's definition of self reflects the independent and autonomous motivations for people to seek development through highly personalized relationships. Although these authors note that interactions between individuals do tend to become more highly personalized over time, this notion has only become acknowledged in the mentoring literature as a form of relational identification that contributes to mentee perceptions of similarity to a mentor (Mitchell et al., 2015). That is, whereas mentees internalize admired characteristics of the mentor into their own self-identities (Kram, 1985), those whose identities are already well-defined will benefit from a less stereotype-based interaction and role modeling process in which the mentee is viewed as "a unique person rather than a prototypical member of a social group" (Mitchell et al., 2015, p. 4). This concept is akin to what has been referred to as synergistic comentoring, "in which members coalesce, *sharing* goal responsibility" (Deptula & Williams, 2017, p. 392). Thus, the concept of a personalized relationship affecting the experience of role modeling is not inconsistent with the traditional definition of the role modeling mentoring function and its prerequisite for mentees to be professionally attracted to and identify with a mentor; rather, it brings to light the manner through which a mentee's definition of identification shifts as his or her self-identity construal becomes more clearly defined.

In this section, I will build the case that role modeling within relationships characterized by mutuality—a reciprocal, interpersonal process—can bring about greater personal adaptability, especially for those mentees with more

highly defined professional identities who are better prepared to contribute to the development of their learning (Kahn & Kram, 1994). Mutuality has four dimensions—mutual benefits, influence, expectations, and understanding (Ragins & Verbos, 2007; Roberts, 2007), and below I will discuss how each of these dimensions uniquely contributes to the learning outcomes of mentees with well-defined professional identities.

Mutual benefits. By relying on dyadic cocreation, mutuality suggests a constructionist approach the role modeling function that considers that mentorship fully obtains as a social process encompassing relational interactions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). This social process comes about as mentees and mentors engage in what Ragins and Verbos (2007) describe as a relational approach to mentoring that is grounded in communal, as opposed to purely exchange-based interactions. Agreement and bonding serve as requisite and evolving process that enables the mentoring relationship to cultivate a socialized and developmental, as opposed to instrumental, relationship (Howell, 1988; Humberd & Rouse, 2016). This type of socialized interaction "recognizes the crucial role of followers' self-concepts in cultivating the developmental relationship" in a way that provides mentees with a means to express their values and professional identities (Howell & Shamir, 2005; Weinberg & Locander, 2014, p. 398), and contributes to expansion of mutual understanding and expectations (Roberts, 2007) that account for and integrate the mentee's present self-identity into the modeling process.

Influence. Mutuality is ideally suited to improve role modeling for mentees who have a more developed sense of professional identity, as it requires recognition of, appreciation of, and consistent authentic engagement with one's inner-life beliefs (Bezy, 2011). Doing so requires a highly developed sense of self, which enables the mentoring pair to engage in open dialogue that is congruent with their respective authentic self-identities. Cocreation of this type empowers the members to develop a personalized partnership through which the mentor has the opportunity to know the mentee at a level that is sufficiently intimate so that together they identify opportunities for behavioral modeling to which the mentee should be exposed as an important part of her or his learning development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). The mentee in this situation would then be more likely to perceive the mentor's shared interest and dedication to learning, which could improve the quality of role modeling's learning and adaptability outcomes (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003). Accordingly, it is within mentoring relationships characterized by coreflection and cocreated agreement that mentees could experience the type of role

modeling that manifests in such a way as to meet Lankau and Scandura's depiction of modeling that provides opportunities for mentees to further develop their competencies. Furthermore, cocreated relationships are suited to foster *individually* meaningful experiences, resulting in a role modeling process that promises to enhance personal learning outcomes (Herman & Gioia, 1998; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

Expectations. A modeling process within a mentoring relationship distinguished through mutuality begins with dialogue. Discursive practices have the power to constitute identity (Kuhn, 2008), and thus it is through dialogue within the dyad that mentoring processes may account for the construction of a mentee's identity (Devos, 2004, 2010) Weinberg and Locander (2014) discuss the significance of discursive construction toward the production of authentic, co-created modeling and urge the importance of "both parties [approaching] the interaction with openness to dialog and reflection aimed at gaining a better understanding of their own and their partner's inner beliefs and authentic senses of self" (p. 398). By doing so, the pair is more likely to engage in a meaningful dialogue that produces comprehensible and impressible modeling that importantly can provide developmental support for learning needs that may remain below one's consciousness (Puchalski & Romer, 2000).

An extension of dialogue, mentee feedback-seeking behaviors and acceptance of feedback are crucial toward establishment of a developmentally productive mentoring dyad (Allen, Shockley, & Poteat, 2008), and mentors who consider their mentees' cognitive models as they themselves model feedback-driven dialogue are more likely to better understand the mentees' unique authentic-self needs. Ultimately, mentors can establish an encompassing climate within the relationship by role modeling inclusive conduct for their mentees (Boekhorst, 2015). The self-regulation involved in this type of conduct is associated with authentic processes, and are likely to become contagious across the dyad as a result of role modeling and social information processing (Lyubovnikova, Legood, Turner, & Mamakouka, 2017; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). As the resulting inclusive and reflexive climate is likely to spur mentee voice behaviors, including feedback-seeing conduct, ensuing dialogue in the relationship will set the stage for a relationship characterized by authentic, cocreated progress.

Understanding. Qualitative analysis of mentees' most positive mentoring experiences suggests that mentees flourish when they receive personalized feedback and intellectual challenges from mentors that contributes to a breadth of skill development (Eby & McManus, 2002). Argyle (2017) makes

the case that "greater discrimination between attributes of one's self-conception" arises when a social actor reacts to receipt of critical feedback (p. 338). Critical feedback regarding one's emulation of modeled attributes requires digging below the surface of a social identity and relies upon a deep-level understanding of the underlying attributes of the subject. In the case of a mentor–mentee relationship, this suggests that for a mentor to expose the mentee to highly personalized challenges and opportunities for feedback, the mentor must first accumulate a deep appreciation for and understanding of the mentee and her or his professional identity. Such opportunities for feedback, therefore, require "numerous voice opportunities to foster a sense of uniqueness and belongingness" for the mentee to equip the mentor with the information necessary to expose the mentee to appropriate opportunities and settings that effectively meet her or his unique learning needs from which she or he may learn to adapt accordingly (Boekhorst, 2015, p. 259).

A mutuality-driven, cocreated mentoring relationship is highly suited to nurture learning through modeling: While acknowledging mentee self-identity (e.g., Howell, 1988; Mumford, Dansereau, & Yammarino, 2000), it simultaneously incorporates the mentor's perspective into the process (e.g., Dobrow et al., 2012), thereby expanding understanding among both parties. Thus, it is within a relationship characterized by mutuality that mentoring pairs may cocreate and attain what Ragins and Verbos (2007) describe as the relational tail of the mentoring spectrum, which is associated with close bonds, interdependence, and mutual growth.

> **Proposition 5:** Modeling within a mutuality-driven, cocreated mentoring relationship will result in mentee personal learning and adaptability for mentees with well-defined professional identities.

Model summary. The process whereby mentees with less-defined professional identities experiment with different selves and strategies based on traditional role modeling emulation is helpful to meet context-free personal learning/adaptability objectives. However, once they have achieved a clearer professional identity, role model emulation serves to dilute the mentee's definitional self-identity as she or he calls into question the appropriateness of tackling tasks in a manner exhibited by the mentor as opposed to one that suits their professional identity definition. The framework is delimited such that it anticipates that during socialization and initiation of the relationship mentees with varying levels of professional identity definition would use this opportunity to understand themselves in reference to/as compared with the mentor, without having yet entered the phase during which they would feel obliged to emulate. This obligation grows as the relationship becomes more

developmental in nature (i.e., the cultivation phase). During this phase, mentee personal learning/adaptability experiences a diminishing return on emulation-heavy modeling. Whereas this is likely to occur later into the cultivation phase for mentees who are in the process of developing a stronger professional identity, this effect arrives more quickly for those who have a strong sense of authentic professional self, and it is here that mutuality becomes important: Rather than teaching new possible ways of being, modeling within a mutuality-driven mentoring relationship serves to advance a shared developmental plan inclusive of the mentee's present self-identity.

The model presented in Figure 1 serves to unpack the relationship between adaptability and identity, suggesting that personal adaptability is a function of one's professional identity, the degree to which the mentoring relationship is characterized by mutuality, and the phase of mentoring in which the pair is operating. By focusing on the dynamics within a single mentoring dyad, this conceptual framework in a way supports the case that unless very specific conditions are met, a single mentoring relationship may not adequately meet an employee's diversified learning needs and points to the inflection points at which mentees might consider taking on additional mentoring relationships. Figure 2 suggests a path-analytic diagram through which future research could test this premise as it applies to the cultivation phase in which the greatest fluctuation in outcomes as a result of personal (identity) and relationship (mutuality) characteristics are expected to occur.

Toward Authentic Mentoring

The drive for mentees with better-defined professional identities to pursue modeling consistent with their self-identity gives way to a more authentic form of mentorship to begin to unfold, a process through which the pair must work together so that the mentor can *selectively* model and the mentee may *selectively* imitate (Ibarra, 1999) specifically those attributes for which emulation may best suit their needs and situation. This alternative path, driven by a relationship characterized by mutuality and cocreation, is anticipated to produce greater learning and adaptability benefits for mentees in the cultivation phase (regardless of the mentee's current state on the self-concept spectrum) than if the pair were to remain on the course of traditional model emulation.

Mutuality requires authenticity (Weinberg & Locander, 2014), and thus this model adds to Gooty, Gavin, Johnson, Frazier, & Snow's (2009) call to assimilate theories of authentic and transformational leadership (TL) to better understand how leaders' role modeling can produce positive career resources. Mentees and mentors will engage in a more fulfilling modeling relationship
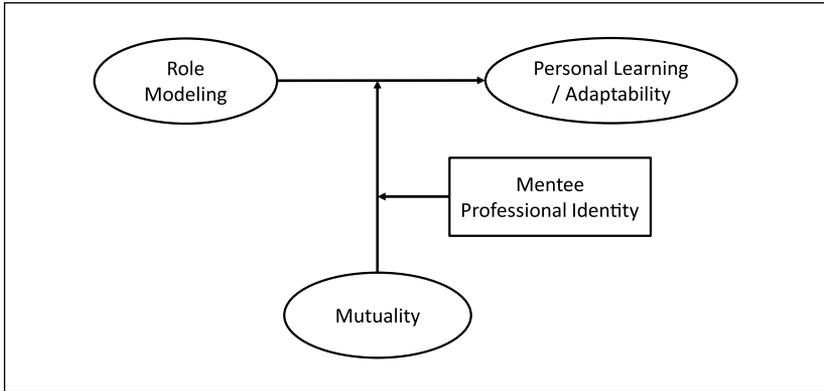
Figure 2. Path-analytic diagram depicting cultivation-phase expected interactions.

when the relationship is defined as authentic and transformational. Authentic leaders, for example, bring to the relationship both self-awareness of their own values and cognitive processes along with acknowledgment of the same in their followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Thus, for a mentor to act with authenticity, she or he must be attuned to her or his influence on those she or he seeks to guide and readily able to anticipate the views of this other (Taylor, 2010).

Self-awareness is a component of authenticity through which leaders reflect upon their strengths, weaknesses, and values to attain clarity that ultimately guides their approach to and behavior within the dyad (Kernis, 2003; Luthans, Norman, & Hughes, 2006). However, it is also worth noting that this effectiveness simultaneously requires the mentor to comprehend her or his own self-resources—an internal valuation process that determines the extent to which the mentor could adequately regulate her or his modeling to meet the needs of the mentee, and ultimately induce a more fulfilling and positive dyadic relationship (Ilies et al., 2005). The mentee, too, plays an important role in this process, as it remains her or his prerogative to engage in an intelligent critique of the exemplar's modeling to determine and communicate, which attributes and experiential exposure best suit her or his developmental needs (Warnick, 2008). From this perspective, it is clear that authentic mentoring practice requires a mutuality frame of reference.

This notion fits with a conceptualization of mentoring that has linked mentor role modeling to the TL concept of idealized influence (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Scandura & Williams, 2004) owing to role modeling's defining characteristic as a manifestation of mentee attributions of the mentor as a role

model, rather than just considering modeling as behaviors in which mentors engage. Such authentic practice involves clear alignment with and engagement of mentee self-identities (Shamir et al., 1993). Furthermore, it complements the aforementioned notions of individualized (i.e., Ensher et al., 2001; Herman & Gioia, 1988; Mumford et al., 2000) and personalized (i.e., Eby & McManus, 2002; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) support to echo TL's element of individualized consideration.

Participation in a community rarely occurs without some degree of imitation, and so authentic role modeling serves to strengthen the mentee's ties to the existing community, thereby fulfilling the mentee's needs associated with context and connectedness to both the external collective and also to her or his complete inner self (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Mutuality allows for modeling authentic, dialogue-driven, co-created practices through which mentors may account for mentee self-identity while creating meaningful developmental learning opportunities. Lyubovnikova et al. (2017) draw on social learning theory to explain how authentic leadership modeling will signal that self-regulation and reflexivity is valued and supported in the relationship. Thus, by modeling deliberate and reflective behaviors, a mentor could provoke critical dialogue centered on learning objectives and progress, thereby fostering information-sharing, learning, and ultimately, mentee adaptability (Gersick & Hackman, 1990). Following this authentic approach thus lends itself to produce what Warnick (2008, p. 114) explains as the difference "between a composer who copies Beethoven's symphonic form line for line and one who gives a valuable interpretation of Beethoven's symphonic form," with the latter resulting in a personalized and authentic adaptation of creative achievement as a result of rational deliberation. Thus, imitation that aligns with self-knowledge has the capacity to create new meaning; the rational deliberation that comes about as a result of participation in authentic mentoring, therefore, sets the stage for productive personal adaptation outcomes.

Challenges to Cocreated Mutuality and Authentic Mentoring Practice

Mentors and mentees face several challenges in codeveloping a mutuality-characterized authentic modeling relationship. Foremost among these may be the challenge of surpassing the impulse to feel the strongest professional attraction to those whose surface-level diversity attributes echo one's own characteristics. And this is likely to take time. Diverse individuals often experience substandard access to and benefits of mentoring as a result of diversity dynamics (Chandler, Kram, & Yip, 2011). However, although previous

research has found that mentees, and particularly female mentees, perceived receiving more role modeling from same-sex mentors (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990), a longitudinal investigation of this phenomenon in mentoring relationships has shown that the variance in mentoring received as a result of cross-sex differences dissipate a few months into the mentoring relationship (Weinberg & Lankau, 2011). Despite this conclusion, maintaining an authentic identity can remain difficult, especially for women and other members of marginalized groups. Owing to a "combination of stereotype threat and second generation bias," women face the challenge of attempting to remain authentic while crafting identities that are congruent with their aspirational professional selves (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016, p. 18). As these authors elaborate, women tend to transfer aspects of previous successes and the female gender role into their current professional states as opposed to identity work focused on experimentation through model emulation. By aligning mentor and mentee objectives, modeling characterized by mutuality may serve to reduce the identity threat that this process could otherwise exacerbate.

More generally, demographic diversity in the dyad can create complications to learning outcomes as it would provide a context in which assumptions associated with one's existing identity could be challenged (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). As a result, mentees, especially ones from marginalized groups, "may judge that certain expectations . . . do not reflect their personal and cultural values or identities," (Baker & Lattuca, 2010, p. 822). This brings attention to the importance of metaperceptions in role modeling relationships. The relationship as a result embodies not only the mentee's and mentor's perceptions of themselves, but also how they perceive the other and one's perception of what this salient other thinks about her or him (Shectman & Kenny, 1994). Metaperception informs assessment of oneself, one's learning and adaptability needs (in the case of the mentee), and one's capacity to provide an appropriate model serving those needs (in the case of the mentor). This "assessment is a co-created process that incorporates a mutuality perspective" and requires members of the mentoring relationship to "concurrently engage in self-assessment" (Dobrow et al., 2012; Weinberg & Cleveland, 2017, p. 28). It is thus through this metaperceptual mechanism that deep-level similarity serves to drive role modeling's helpfulness toward learning, but as discussed by Weinberg and Lankau (2011), it takes time for a mentoring dyad to move beyond a surface-level focus and reach this point. Yet, taking the time to develop a dialogue-heavy, intentional interrelationship is necessary to avoid mentoring's "history of reproducing social inequalities" (Chandler et al., 2011, p. 549).

Finally, an authentic mentoring perspective challenges mentors to take on a role of meeting mentees' complex needs in a highly personalized

manner—one that has previously been posited to only be made plausible through a developmental network of multiple mentors. One line of reasoning from social learning literature suggests that the tendency to imitate solutions one identifies as similar to one's own approach may allow for innovation diffusion by empowering mentees "to take advantage of social information while preserving the usefulness of previously-acquired information" (Rogers, 2003; Wisdom & Goldstone, 2011, p. 231). However, as expanded upon earlier when introducing the concept of a cocreated approach, mentees who experiment with various adaptations of emulation should not be neglected to do so alone without support. Indeed, a leading reason one pursues a workplace role model in the first place is often to seek assistance in navigating and adapting appropriately to one's professional journey. As elaborated by Ragins and Verbos (2007), too often

> mentors are viewed as fostering independence and individuation (measured through advancement) rather than interdependence and mutual growth (measured through personal growth and self-knowledge). This view ignores the reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships, and takes a hierarchical and perhaps stereotypically masculine approach to the relationship. (p. 95)

Through authentic co-creation, a mentoring relationship will be characterized by mutuality, enabling the pair to engage in a process that serves a greater purpose than purely one of self-fulfillment.

Discussion

Extant research has left us with an imprecise understanding of how role modeling functions in mentoring relationships. Donald Gibson laments the dearth of role modeling–focused studies in his 2004 contribution to career theory and provides the following elaboration:

> While research on the related concept of mentors has grown rapidly . . ., the construct of role models remains a popularly used but vaguely defined notion. Everybody knows what a role model is, and this has somehow diminished its usefulness as a construct with descriptive and explanatory power. (p. 135)

We do know that the presence of a mentor matters, perhaps more so than the extent of psychosocial and career support provided (Allen et al., 2004). Thus, as mentor presence matters toward influencing mentee career benefits, and mentees are influenced by mentors whose abilities and likeness they admire, then what mentors do in these relationships outside of the providence of vocational and psychosocial support is worth contemplating.

Although some research suggests that a mentor-centric approach may allow us to better understand this phenomenon (e.g., Eby & McManus, 2004), the model presented herein shifts the conversation to a more dyadic perspective that accounts for mutuality and the cocreation of beneficial role modeling precedents.

Accordingly, this research contributes to the emerging stream of literature that suggests that understanding the mentor or mentee's perspective alone provides an insufficient avenue to determine the effectiveness of mentoring and modeling content, as the mentor's capacity to understand and meet the mentee's unique developmental needs and the context-relevant contingencies surrounding the relationship play equally important roles toward this end. Although mutuality is not a new concept in mentoring research, this article presents the first instance in which it is considered as necessary toward the role modeling mentoring function. Whereas past conceptualizations have gone so far as to consider role modeling from the perspective that it involves *no* degree of relationship mutuality (e.g., Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007), the conceptual model posited herein suggests that it serves as a key characteristic of a relationship in which modeling may best serve mentees' developmental needs, especially for those mentees who have well-defined professional identities. This rationalization comes about through a synthesis of previously disparate theories into a framework for understanding role modeling in the context of mentoring relationships. By doing so, this research contributes to the literatures on mentoring, learning, social exchange, and authentic leadership.

To build these connections, this article has advanced the consideration of mentee attachment to the mentor with regard to role modeling, highlighting the important role that the construct of identification plays in the effectiveness of role modeling toward personal learning outcomes. Accounting for facets of psychological attachment enables us to more fully understand the necessary characteristics of identification and perceived similarity that have been touted as important toward role modeling success. On the surface, a simple emulation-based model makes sense both from the perspective of a mentee or (in the case of a formal mentoring program) program administration, as many challenges faced by mentees are not unique and chances are that the mentor has dealt with similar concerns along the way (Bardach & Patashnik, 2015). However, such imitative learning in a mentoring relationship follows traditional exchange norms that fall short of producing "growth, learning, and personal and professional development" (Ragins, 2005; Ragins & Verbos, 2007, p. 96). Accordingly, the posited framework outlines circumstances under which we may expect traditional role modeling to be useful and when shifting to a mutuality approach may be more appropriate.

Role Modeling Bridges the Career–Psychosocial Mentoring Divide

From the conception of workplace mentoring research and still carried out in many mentoring studies today, role modeling has typically been viewed as a subset of the psychosocial mentoring function. Yet, references to the career-referent nature of the modeling function (e.g., Fagenson, 1994) suggest some level of calibration between role modeling and the career-support function of mentoring. Thus, this begs the question about the degree to which role modeling might align with career mentoring as compared with psychosocial. The concepts presented earlier suggest that if role modeling is approached authentically through a mutuality lens, then it serves to align the personal counseling nature of psychosocial support with the developmental focus of career mentoring.

Thus, consideration of role modeling within a mentoring relationship characterized by cocreation and mutuality introduces dialogue that begins to bridge the career–psychosocial gap. This consideration assists in rectifying varying viewpoints regarding the purpose of role modeling: For instance, although professional identity development and competence improvement may be considered psychosocial-referent aspects of modeling (Kram, 1985), career-related self-efficacy, and the freedom and opportunity to pursue skill development have both been considered aspects of career support (Cotton, Shen, & Livne-Tarandach, 2011; Dobrow et al., 2012). And career behaviors have been categorized as a potential new subfunction of role modeling (Murphy & Kram, 2010). Considering mutuality-driven modeling as an authentic approach to mentoring also clears up some of the aforementioned questions regarding mentor- versus mentee-centric approaches. Previous research acknowledges the important characteristic that mutual dependencies play in social exchange relationships (e.g., Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012), and it is in this tradition that the dyadic modeling perspective presented herein accounts for the continuous interplay between mentoring partners and the personal contexts in which they are embedded. Hence, it blends the notion of "learn the ropes, and prepare for advancement" (associated with mentoring's career function) with development and confirmation of the mentee's "sense of professional identity and competence" (associated with mentoring's psychosocial function; Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 111).

Alignment of Framework to Extant Mentoring Research

The proposed model includes several relevant aspects that align with and expand our conceptualization of mentoring. First, the model presents mentee

professional identity (categorized as low and high self-concept) as a contributing factor that explains noted learning variations across mentoring relationships (Chandler et al., 2011). It describes a mutual, cocreated relationship that accounts for the roles of both mentees and mentors as active agents who shape the dynamics of the mentoring relationship and influences role modeling effectiveness (e.g., Chandler, Hall, & Kram, 2010; Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003). This notion is consistent with theories of development that suggest that mentees whose professional identities are more developed "are better able to create and follow their own agendas and to engage in mutual and interdependent relationships with others" (Chandler et al., 2011, p. 531).

The mutuality-driven role modeling solution, with its focus on relational processes and behaviors, contributes to our understanding of how dyadic relationships may manifest productively. Mutuality of exchange, while considered a common attribute of mentoring definitions over the past 25 years (Haggard et al., 2011), has to date not been considered in relation to role modeling. Establishment of mutuality in dyadic role modeling relationships becomes increasingly important as mentees establish more well-defined professional identities, as does the requirement for mentors of high self-identity mentees to provide a diversity of resources and perspectives especially in the case of a mentee who has limited access to other developers. The proposed model provides a new perspective of mentoring processes and interactions that sheds light on what Chandler et al. (2011) describe as the *black box of mentoring*, ultimately providing a better understanding of how and when mentoring, and role modeling in particular, can have a positive impact.

Limitations

Although the model presented herein discusses professional identity as differentially perceived by one mentee as compared with another, it is worth acknowledging that one's self-identity is not static. Rather, self-perception varies as individuals experience, consider, and interpret their relationships with and responses to ongoing experiences in their daily lives. The model accommodates this, but future developments building on the concepts presented here should account for mentee self-identity dynamism and opportunities for mentors and the relationships in which the two are embedded to operationally react. It is also worth noting that throughout this article, I use the term *professional identity* instead of referring to a more general sense of self-concept; this allows us to account for the multiple identities that individuals invoke in various social circumstances (Gecas, 1982; Ibarra, 1999). Furthermore, the model assumes role modeling as a part of an interactive dyadic mentoring relationship. By focusing on role modeling by mentors, my

conceptualization of role modeling is contextually constrained, unlike some conceptualizations of a type of modeling that may exist without the presence of such dyadic interaction. Future research could more explicitly explore whether the developmental effects associated with model imitation differs for low and high self-identity individuals who follow distal models, and, if so, whether this pattern changes temporally. Furthermore, by proposing that professional identity definition influences the effectiveness of role modeling outcomes, this article provides further reason to support Lankau and Scandura's (2007) call for research that considers which developmental behaviors contribute to identity growth. And importantly, as Pratt et al. (2006) point out, investigations of professional identity should consider parsing out the degree to which members in these workplace relationships turn to work to satisfy meaningfulness in their lives, an aspect that the present model does not directly incorporate.

Implications and Future Research

Figure 2 provides a limited guide through which researchers may consider the relatively straightforward moderating implications that mutuality and mentee professional identity are expected to have on the role modeling–learning relationship during mentoring's cultivation phase. However, the conceptual model presented in Figure 1 suggests a broader temporal landscape that requires moving beyond this anticipated multiple-interaction model. Specifically, the curved paths in Figure 1 suggest a relationship between role modeling and personal learning/adaptability that differs from the linear association previously conceptualized or the null results habitually found in empirical investigations of role modeling and career outcomes. Along the mentoring continuum, the model considers opportunities through which the relationship may change from one that is positive to one that is asymptotic or negative, and vice-versa, owing to the interplay of what may be considered two continua that simultaneously influence the relationship—the stage of mentee professional identity development and the phase of the mentoring relationship. Doing so implies what Pierce and Aguinis (2013, p. 326) refer to as "a special case of the more general moderated relations"; specifically, this model considers the continuum of mentoring phases and builds the case that mentees with clear professional identity definitions require mutuality as soon as they reach the cultivation phase and that those with lower self-concepts benefit from traditional modeling in their early cultivation. Nonetheless, the preciseness of where these inflection points reside in these nonlinear relations requires further theoretical and empirical attention. More generally, and building on recent models from identification theory (e.g.,

Humberd & Rouse, 2016), further research is needed to determine how mentors and mentees identify others with whom they could agreeably establish a cocreated mentoring dialogue. In aggregate, exploration of additional classifications of individual mentees, mentor models, and the dyadic relationship in which the two reside will guide development of contingencies and rules to enable more nuanced application of the concepts discussed herein.

Validating and applying the conceptual model. Mentee adoption of modeled attributes relies on a dual process of recognizing prototypical excellence and acknowledging the fit of the modeled attributes to one's self. To be effective, this process requires dialogue between mentee and mentor so that the latter may be attuned to the former's developmental learning objectives and the current state of her or his professional identity. Mutuality in the mentoring relationship allows both partners to identify opportunities for development. However, a challenge to empirically validating this perspective is that mutuality involves incorporating both the mentor's and mentee's involvement in the role modeling process. To do so involves collecting data from both parties to determine the "impact of alignment and misalignment of expectations" (Dobrow et al., 2012, p. 237), and hence the degree to which the modeling may be deemed appropriate to meet the mentee's learning and adaptability needs.

Fortunately, management literature provides some guidance on how to cocreate the high quality, mutually conscious relationships described herein as necessary to activate authentic developmental practice within the mentoring dyad. Positive organizational scholarship literature encourages active engage ment in the relationship to understand one another's intentions and agree about the roles that each member is expected to play (Dobrow et al., 2012; Dutton, 2003). Furthermore, Weinberg and Locander (2014) developed a protocol through which mentor and mentee perspectives are both incorporated into the developmental initiation process, meeting Dobrow et al.'s (2012) call for incorporating both parties' frames of reference when determining the degree to which a relationship satisfies developmental concerns. Interviews with mentoring dyads who provide and receive role modeling could prove useful to explore the experienced differences between traditional model emulation and modeling in a context of relational mutuality, especially if conducted across various phases of the mentoring relationship.

Extant mentoring research suggests that mentee demographics and proactive behaviors influence the support one receives from a mentor (Chandler et al., 2011). This suggests that to receive support tailored to meet her or his requirements, a mentee with a clear professional identity must be comfortable advocating for herself or himself what she or he needs in terms of modeling

from a mentor; advocating for oneself is a skill that a highly self-identified protégé will need to develop. Equally, mentees need to recognize their sense of professional identity definition so that they can determine how they feel about the option to keep trying out new selves as opposed to working with the strengths of the self they currently have and understand. Future research is needed to provide guidance for mentees and mentors to navigate this self-acknowledgment process. In terms of practice, tools may be developed through which mentees may better develop congruence between their professional role and authentic selves. In an organizationally sponsored mentoring program, this could be considered a function of the program director who monitors the program (Eby & Lockwood, 2005) and serve as a third-party resource to intervene (Murphy & Kram, 2014).

It is worth reaffirming that while the proposed model suggests an inverse relationship between traditional role modeling and personal learning/adaptability outcomes as mentees develop clearer professional identities, this notion is conceptually distinct from what has been discussed in the literature as negative mentoring experiences (e.g., Eby et al., 2004; Eby & McManus, 2004). With that said, the introduction of a mutuality perspective and its influence on role modeling provides a few indications for what mentees could do to improve their resilience to modeling that is detached from their sense of professional identity or otherwise unfavorable. Applying DeRue et al.'s terminology, a negative spiral may manifest if a mentor who models prototypical behaviors observes a lack of mentee emulation of this modeling, prompting the mentor to withdraw from the process. And, as per the ensuing discussion above, a mentee is unlikely to grant role model status to a mentor whose modeling fails to agree with the mentee's sense of identity. Simply put, this can be remedied through open discussion. Mutuality relies on a microculture of dialogue, and cannot exist without conversation centered on meaning and purpose to cultivate the interconnection necessary for personally beneficial development to materialize (Weinberg & Locander, 2014). This contributes to informed metaperceptions among members and suggests a shared responsibility for the mentor and mentee to develop a cycle of interdependence through which a mentor comes to understand the mentee's professional identity, the mentee recognizes the fit of modeled examples with her or his own perceptions of self, and the ensuing sequence will motivate the mentor to provide further investments to the relationship (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008), triggering a positive spiral.

Variability in role modeling may be necessary to respond to a mentee's sense of professional identity and facilitate her or his developmental objectives, and this variability may be hindered were the mentee to follow or emulate a single role model (Higgins, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). Thus, an insufficient

role modeling experience with a traditional mentor could be balanced out by an otherwise healthy developmental network (Dobrow et al., 2012), especially as the support of an entire developmental network is associated with career-related self-efficacy (Higgins et al., 2008). Developmental networks can be far-reaching, and thus it remains important to consider potential challenges to developing mutuality-driven role modeling relationships with mentors who come from within the mentee's organization (i.e., individuals with varying functional expertise who reside at various hierarchical levels within the organization) as compared with those from domains outside of the mentee's workplace (Murphy & Kram, 2010).

Considered as a dyadic process unique to each relational pairing across the network, cocreation of a relationship characterized by mutuality would likely not differ very much across these environmental constraints, with one exception: the viewpoints and goals that come about in within-organization mentoring relationships, when examined both conceptually and empirically, should be considered nested within the goals, culture, and other organizationally referent characteristics. That is, while external mentors may engage mentees in supportive relationships unrestrained from undue workplace influence, within-organization pairs may perceive pressure to engage in goal setting that conforms to organizational norms.

Conclusion

Although the present research outlines a manner through which mentors may begin to work with their protégés to produce a true-to-self modeling experience, this rationalization paves the way for a more thorough consideration of *authentic mentoring*—a term not yet coined and a concept not yet adequately explored. Ultimately, while the present research puts forth a conceptual contribution that "bridge[s] existing theories . . . link[s] work across disciplines . . ., and broaden[s] the scope of our thinking" to introduce a new theoretical lens through which we may approach mentoring (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 128), further development is necessary to construct a theory of authentic mentoring at work. Doing so necessitates specification of authentic mentoring as a unique construct distinct from but within the nomological network of extant conceptualizations of authentic leadership and related constructs including leader-member exchange, TL, and mentoring.

For years, we have ridden a wave of unrelenting positive attributions about mentoring and we continue to recommend traditional mentoring practice as solutions to various organizational needs. Until now, we have not yet critically examined the option that what appears to be positive mentoring may in some cases may prove unhelpful or even detrimental. In so considering, this research

begins to consider at which juncture(s) role modeling may encounter context-specific inflection points (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013) across mentoring phases to arrive at context-free outcomes. It is my hope that by providing a critical standpoint that draws on a cross-section of interdisciplinary perspectives and integrating these perspectives within the sphere of general consensus regarding mentoring and role modeling, this research will serve to inspire future work that will incorporate a dyadic, cocreated, and mutuality-driven perspective to role modeling to obtain positive learning outcomes from this vital mentoring function.

Ultimately, this research links to and implies conceptual and practical associations outside of its obvious embeddedness in mentoring and dyadic relationships; in so doing, it ushers critical considerations for workforce learning and development and other assumptions based on the typical *more is better* assumption stemming largely from our over-reliance on linear modeling. Indeed, it remains plausible that the strongest development may come about in the absence of a traditionally imitable scaffold, for "every young farmboy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow" (Hesse, 1984).

Tremendous advances to mentoring research have come about in recent years in consideration of the context of multiple mentoring relationships. This research has explored and provided us with, among other things, a greater understanding of the role of developmental networks in shaping mentee professional identity and the outcomes of mentoring relationships. However, it is important that as these advances are made, we not lose sight of the trees for the sake of the forest. That is, while we have begun to advance our understanding of how the collective produces developmental and learning outcomes, there remains more to be known about how a mentee's relationship with each developer contributes to this broader landscape. It is my sincere hope that in reexamining how professional identity affects cognitive perceptions of role modeling and influences the mentoring process, the ideas presented herein produce new mechanisms of thought through which we may begin to unpack how professional identity formation may shape the more micro processes of mentoring (i.e., disclosure, identification, conversation, and learning) and the levels at which they are examined.

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*indicates a study that was included in Table 1.

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Group & Organization Management 44(2)

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