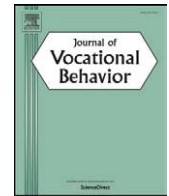




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Perceived similarity, proactive adjustment, and organizational socialization

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores how perceived demographic and attitudinal similarity can influence proactive behavior among organizational newcomers. We propose that newcomers who perceive themselves as similar to their co-workers will be more willing to seek new information or build relationships, which in turn will lead to better long-term adjustment. Results from a three-wave field investigation of newcomer proactive behavior show that newcomer perceptions of surface-level similarity to the rest of the work group in education and gender increased proactive adjustment behavior. Contrary to our expectations, perceived similarity in terms of age decreased proactive adjustment behavior—in other words, newcomers who were significantly different from their co-workers in age engaged in more proactive adjustment behaviors. Deep-level similarity in terms of work style was associated with higher levels of role clarity, but this relationship was not mediated by proactive adjustment behavior.

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1. Introduction

Adjusting to a new job can be a daunting proposition. Newcomers have to learn how to do their core job tasks, and they also need to find out what their co-workers consider normal and acceptable behavior. A great deal of research has shown that organizational socialization practices and the newcomer's proactive behavior improve the speed of the adjustment process (e.g., Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Miller & Jablin, 1991). However, socialization research has not paid much attention to the social context in which proactive behavior occurs (Johns, 2006). Although research suggests that organizational efforts to improve socialization are associated with greater proactive behavior from newcomers (Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006), little research has examined how the characteristics of the work group might influence newcomers' proactive adjustment. Additionally, Ashford and Black (1996) advised researchers to consider the organization's culture as an antecedent of newcomer proactive behavior.

We intend to demonstrate that certain types of perceived similarity affect proactive adjustment, and also that proactive behavior explains the effects of perceived similarity on important work outcomes among organizational newcomers. Fig. 1 provides an overview of our model.

Our three-wave longitudinal investigation makes a number of contributions to our understanding of perceived similarity and organizational socialization. First, we provide a preliminary integration of the currently separated literatures on relational demography and organizational socialization. Socialization research cannot yet answer questions about how diversity shapes the process of newcomer adjustment. Second, investigating newcomer adjustment also provides an opportunity for demography researchers to understand how differences amongst workers contribute to the *formation* of relationships. Proactive behavior may explain the effect of perceived work group similarity on individual newcomer adjustment, just as

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conflict or cooperation links diversity to performance at the group level. Third, unlike most previous research on socialization that has concentrated on newcomers proactively taking steps to fit in to the established norms of the workplace, we examine how newcomers' proactive behaviors can set the stage for them to engage in more self-starting and initiative-related behavior like citizenship and creativity.

1.1. Proactive adjustment behaviors

Based on previous research on proactive newcomer adjustment (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), we considered three proactive adjustment behaviors: feedback seeking, general socializing, and building a relationship with one's supervisor. These behaviors are related to higher levels of role clarity, organizational commitment, and social acceptance from co-workers (e.g., Gruman, Saks & Zweig, 2006; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). This focus on these social, interactive behaviors also fits the social nature of our theoretical framework.

1.2. Conceptualizations of perceived similarity

The organizational demography and diversity literatures often differentiate between deep- and surface-level characteristics (e.g., Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). Surface-level characteristics are those that are almost immediately observable and measurable in simple and valid ways. Deep-level characteristics, on the other hand, refer to members' attitudes, beliefs, skills and values which are communicated through behavior and verbal cues. Learning about deep-level characteristics occurs over time, after interaction. In the current paper, we consider similarity in both surface- and deep-level characteristics, expecting the same patterns of results to emerge.

Surface-level (e.g., demographic) characteristics are often used as self-relevant categories in the context of a work group (Tsui et al., 1992). Newcomers introduced to groups in which they are visibly dissimilar from their coworkers may be less likely to proactively seek out information and feedback or to clarify tasks because they feel less comfortable with people who are different from themselves and perceive less support from their coworkers (Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004). Surface level characteristics like age, education, gender, and race are easily observable, and influence individuals' self-categorizations (Harrison et al., 1998; Turner, 1987). Harrison et al. (1998, 2002) demonstrate that age, sex and race are important surface characteristics in making judgments of others. Education has been demonstrated to be an important characteristic in the demography literature as well (e.g., Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Kirchmeyer, 1995).

Though we expect that similarity in surface-level characteristics is likely to affect the proactive behaviors of newcomers, similarity in deep-level characteristics is also important. The importance of deep-level similarity has been demonstrated in recent research in a variety of contexts. For example, attitudinal similarity predicted protégés' satisfaction with mentors, even more so than demographic similarity (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Marelich, 2002). Additionally, Turban and Jones (1988) found that deep-level similarity was a stronger predictor of performance and satisfaction than was demographic similarity. Again, whether one seeks out information or builds relationships will likely be facilitated by how comfortable one feels with one's coworkers. Additionally, as these theories of diversity suggest that individuals are attracted to demographically similar others because they anticipate that their own attitudes will be upheld (e.g., Barsade et al., 2000; Byrne, 1971), we expect that surface level perceived diversity would predict deep level perceived diversity. In our study, this means that characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, and education level will be positively related to perceived deep level diversity.

Hypothesis 1. Perceived surface level similarity is positively related to perceived deep level similarity among organizational newcomers.

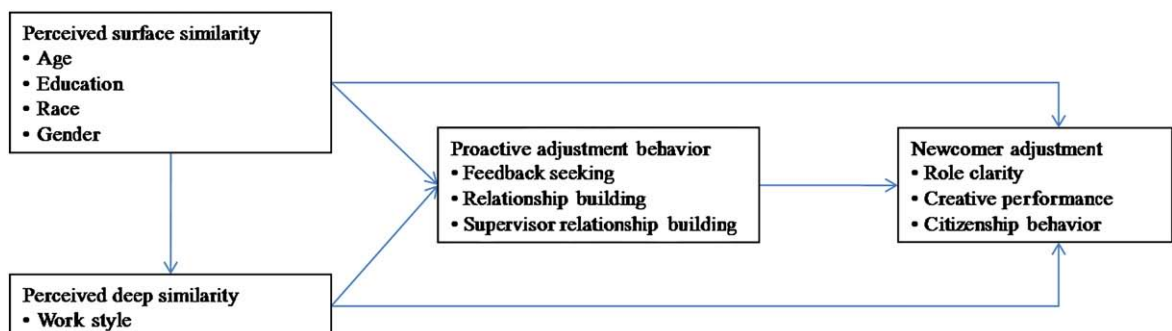


Fig. 1. A model of work group diversity and proactive behavior.

1.3. Perceived similarity and proactive adjustment behavior

Many researchers propose that the utility of proactive behavior will be assessed in terms of the likely costs and benefits (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morrison & Vancouver, 2000; VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000; Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999). The advantages of proactive adjustment for newcomers include a reduced chance of receiving sanctions for violating social norms, superior job performance, reduction in psychological strain, and ultimately, social acceptance (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Meta-analytic research supports the importance of proactive behavior, showing that newcomers who engage in proactive behavior have consistently higher levels of job satisfaction, role clarity, and other positive attitudes towards their work (Bauer et al., 2007).

Despite the potential advantages of proactive behavior, the costs may seem especially high for newcomers who are dissimilar from their co-workers. Whether one enacts proactive behaviors often depends upon one's impression management concerns (e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Schlenker (1980) described impression management as an attempt to control the images one projects in social situations. Asking questions, seeking help, and trying to build friendships can be construed as an admission of ignorance or dependency, creating an impression of incompetence in the minds of others. Individuals who are different from their co-workers may further reduce efforts to behave proactively if their efforts to become integrated with the new work group are met with resistance. Failure to engage in proactive behaviors like relationship building and feedback seeking will slow down the acquisition of norm-relevant behavior from one's coworkers, which may further the psychological distance between the newcomer and his or her work group.

Laboratory studies have shown that when the social environment supports feedback seeking, participants sought more feedback (Williams et al., 1999). Proactive behaviors require taking substantial social and professional risks. When seeking information about his or her performance, a newcomer is admitting a lack of knowledge. Feedback seeking also creates the potential for an ego-threatening evaluation of performance. Those who are significantly different from their co-workers might feel self-conscious about their status in the group, and therefore will be reluctant to attract the supervisor's attention. Some studies based on the concept of "tokenism" suggest that those who are in the minority in a work group will be apprehensive about their performance and stereotyped if their performance is not acceptable (Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007; Stangor, Carr, & Kiang, 1998). Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2. *Newcomers who perceive a higher level of similarity to their new work groups engage in more proactive feedback seeking.*

The notion that individuals who are similar to one another will form positive relationships, and that individuals who are dissimilar from one another will have difficulty forming relationships, is one of the most well-established findings in psychology (Fehr, 1996). For instance, similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) posits that individuals will seek the company of those who are more similar to them, and social identity theory predicts that individuals will more closely identify with those who are part of a similar social category (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Research has shown that individuals have less empathy and positive affect for members of their work group who are dissimilar (Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2007). Additionally, individuals who have different traits from their co-workers are less likely to engage in proactive helping behaviors (Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008), meaning that dissimilar newcomers may not establish close relationships. Newcomers seek out people with whom to build relationships to bolster their social networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Building a relationship with one's supervisor is likely even more important as a proactive adjustment behavior, as one's supervisor has direct impact over one's career success. Having individuals of high status in one's social network can be very advantageous to one's success (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001), but again, the confidence to incur the risk of rejection when attempting to build a relationship with one's boss may be boosted when one has similar colleagues on whom to lean on for support (e.g., Ibarra, 1993).

Thus, we expect that newcomers who perceive themselves similar to their work groups will be more likely to build relationships with their coworkers and with their supervisors.

Hypothesis 3. *Newcomers who perceive a higher level of similarity to their new work groups engage in more proactive general socializing (a) with their coworkers and (b) with their supervisors.*

1.4. Adjustment outcomes

Our final proposal suggests that adjustment outcomes can be explained by proactive adjustment behaviors, based on the premises that similarity increases proactive behavior, and that proactive adjustment increases newcomer adjustment (Ashford & Black, 1996; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). The adjustment outcomes that we examine in this paper are role clarity, organizational citizenship behaviors, and creative performance. Role clarity is a reactive construct, and serves as an indicator that the newcomer knows how the organization and its members conceive what he or she should be doing. Citizenship and creative performance, on the other hand, are more proactive work-related behaviors.

Evidence has already shown that proactive relationship building is related to increased role clarity for organizational newcomers (Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), and that feedback seeking is related to increased role clarity (Gruman, Saks & Zweig, 2006). Likewise, individuals' social networks—including their size and whether one has individuals of status in them—can affect role clarity (Morrison, 2002). Homophily (e.g., preference for similarity) in social networks is a pervasive

observation (Ibarra, 1993; Mollica, Gray & Trevino, 2003), so similarity can facilitate some of the proactive learning needed to enhance one's role clarity (e.g., Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Based on our expectation that perceived similarity will lead to higher levels of proactive behaviors, we believe that these proactive adjustment behaviors will mediate the relationship between newcomer similarity to the work group and role clarity.

Organizational citizenship behaviors are individual contributions that go beyond what one's defined tasks require, and that help or otherwise contribute to the overall organizational environment (e.g., Organ & Ryan, 1995). We examine only those organizational citizenship behaviors which are organizational in focus. Speaking well of the organization and being willing to defend and support the overall organization will likely be a product of how comfortable and supported one feels at work (Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). Additionally, newcomers would have difficulty completing those extra role tasks which are encompassed by OCBs if they have are not yet integrated into the organization. Integrating into the organization is facilitated via proactively seeking feedback to discern group and organizational norms and via building relationships with coworkers and supervisors.

Finally, creative performance is generating novel and useful ideas for the organization (e.g., Oldham & Cummings, 1996). As noted in George and Zhou (2002), creative performance often requires individuals be dedicated and persistent, even in the face of hard work and has been identified as a critical component of performance for organizations. Creative performance has been studied in conjunction with diversity (e.g., Thomas & Ely, 1996). Proactively seeking information can increase one's knowledge and understanding, consequently fuelling creative problem solving and innovation (Ruscio, Whitney, & Amabile, 1998). Since interpersonal conflict at work decreases creativity (Zhou & George, 2003), building good relationships with peer and supervisor reduces conflict hence may enhance one's creativity. Therefore, we expect that as newcomers perceive a higher level of similarity with the existing members, they will be more proactive in socialization, and thus be more creative on the job.

Hypothesis 4. *Proactive behavior mediates the relationship between newcomer perceived similarity to the co-workers and newcomer's organizational citizenship behavior, role clarity, and creative performance.*

1.5. Control variables

Ample evidence already shows that newcomers' personality traits influence their enactment of proactive behaviors. For example, those with higher desire for control seek more information, build networks, and negotiate job changes (Ashford & Black, 1996), extraverts and those higher in openness to experience seek more feedback (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), and individuals who are higher in dispositional proactivity build more relationships with their co-workers (Chan & Schmitt, 2000). Because personality might influence perceived similarity and our mediating and outcome variables, we included controls for extroversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience in our analyses.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Data were collected from a final sample of $n = 111$ employed adults who had recently graduated from a large public university in the southeastern United States. The campus career center provided us with two databases of upcoming graduates from a large, southeastern university who planned to graduate in Fall of 2006 and Spring of 2007 (not all students on the list actually graduated in the listed semester). Participants were told that upon completion of all surveys, they would receive \$20.00 in compensation. We sent out email invitations 1 month before graduation for the Time 1 Survey, which contained personality and demographic information, to 805 Fall 2006 potential graduates and 1,618 Spring 2007 potential graduates. Of those who were invited, 257 (32%) and 528 (33%) responded, respectively. Four months later (3 months after graduation), participants were emailed the Time 2 Survey, which assessed initial job-related data, including perceived similarity and proactive behaviors. Of the Time 1 respondents, 96 (37%) and 186 (35%) responded, respectively. Finally, 3 months later, we emailed the Time 3 Survey, which was identical to the Time 2 survey, and 66 individuals from Fall (69%) and 124 (67%) from the Spring samples responded.

Because of the high attrition rate (final usable sample of 111 out of 785 who completed survey 1), we analyzed the participants who left the study after the first survey. Seventy-nine of the initial respondents did not continue past the first page of the survey (identifying information). Of the 706 who remained, 200 stated that they were not graduating in the focal semester (and thus not seeking full time employment). Of the other 506 respondents at time 1, 113 stated their intentions to enter graduate school immediately after graduation. At time 2, 282 individuals of the 393 eligible respondents participated. Though we do not know exactly why 111 individuals dropped out of the study at time 2, we suspect that, aside from normal attrition, some did not have jobs and did not care to respond to tell us so and others did not graduate as planned.

Of the 282 respondents at time 2, 19 did not continue past the first page of the survey, and twelve indicated that they were entering graduate school after all. Of the remaining 251, 190 responded to the time 3 survey. Of these, only 111 usable surveys were completed, as some individuals noted that they were not employed at either times 2 or 3 and others did not complete the entire survey.

Analysis of the remaining sample as compared to those who quit the study revealed few significant differences—namely, the remaining sample was marginally more likely to be female and to be more conscientious than those who left (on whom we had

sufficient data). Additionally, an analysis of participants' majors revealed that education majors were less likely to drop out of the study and math majors were more likely to drop out. Ultimately, the final distribution of respondent college majors remained mostly consistent with the distribution at time 1 (e.g., predominately business and computer science/engineering—32% and 23%, respectively—with 10% in the social/behavioral sciences and 8% in the life/health sciences; the rest were scattered amongst journalism, education, agriculture and math, etc.).

The final sample was made up of 24.6% non-White respondents and 75.4% White respondents; the sample was also made up of 65% females and 35% males. The average age of respondents was 23.4, with a median age of 22. The vast majority of participants did not have internships at their ultimate place of employment, and filtering out those who identified themselves as interns did not materially affect any of our results. Participants described themselves as holding a wide variety of jobs and job titles. The majority (26%) described themselves as working in the technology or engineering fields. Twenty percent (20%) stated that their jobs were in finance or accounting, and 13.6% held jobs in education. Nine percent (9%) each stated that their jobs were in hospitality or media/communications. The rest were in health care, utilities, non-profit sectors, retail, government, insurance, law, manufacturing, real estate or athletics. To ensure that we were indeed assessing newcomers to organizations, we looked at the tenure reported by participants at times 2 and 3. At time two, the majority of respondents reported that they had been working at their job between 1 and 3 months, and at time three, most reported that they had been working at their job between 1 and 6 months. No participants stated that they had worked at their jobs for longer than this time.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Perceived similarity

To assess perceived similarity in age, education, race/ethnicity, gender, tenure and work style, we used a scale derived from Kirchmeyer (1995) and Harrison, Price, Gavin and Florey (2002) on the time 2 survey. For all items, Respondents could select from 1 (no one is similar to me) to 5 (everyone is similar to me). Kirchmeyer (1995) was among the first to assess similarity by asking participants how similar they were to their coworkers on a number of criteria. In the current study, we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they felt that they were similar to the established work group in terms of age, education, gender, and race/ethnicity.

In 2002, Harrison and his colleagues revisited Kirchmeyer's (1995) conceptualization to assess "perceived similarity" by asking about a number of observable and non-observable characteristics. Their "deep level", or non-observable, characteristics included personal values, personalities, priorities, commitment to the school project, attitude about the project and goal about the project. Harrison, Price, Gavin and Florey (2002) summed all of these deep level characteristics into an overall "deep level characteristics" similarity scale. Because of our focus on work groups and work outcomes, we chose to analyze only the deep-level characteristics that related to how individuals complete their work. Thus, as Harrison et al.'s (2002) scale was created specifically for student project groups, we adapted the measure for a more general working population and summed only the work-related characteristics into a measure of work-style similarity. The three deep level characteristics we assessed were similarity in working style, career goals and priorities. Thus the measure of "work style similarity" encompasses three specific characteristics concerning the ways in which individuals approach their work.

Coefficient alpha reliability for the work style similarity scale is .72. Because these scales were also measured at time 3, we can also assess the test–retest reliability of these perceptual measures. The time 2–time 3 correlations for perceived similarity in age was $r = .58$, in ethnicity was $r = .71$, in gender was $r = .62$, in education was $r = .61$, and in work style was $r = .53$ (alpha reliability corrected $r = .74$). These correlation levels are similar to test–retest reliability for many conventional attitude scales (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Glomb, & Ahlburg, 2005).

We believe that perceived similarity measures have a number of characteristics that make them more useful as predictors in the organizational context than count-based measures, (what is sometimes considered "actual" similarity). Using counts of similar co-workers is a relatively weak predictor of work outcomes (Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt & Couch, 1980), whereas perceived similarity is more strongly predictive of work outcomes (Turban & Jones, 1988). The subjective perception of differences may be a more proximal predictor of employee outcomes (Harrison, Price, Gavin & Florey, 2002). Similarity (or dissimilarity) depends upon perception (Lawrence, 1997), and perceptual measures allow us to determine which elements of similarity are most relevant to newcomers (Harrison, Price, Gavin & Florey, 2002; Turban & Jones, 1988).

The low importance of demographic similarity in prior research may also be due to measurement problems with more supposedly objective similarity indices like counts of people. The definition of a work group or "co-workers with whom you interact regularly," is seldom straightforward. Because of this, perceived similarity may address how similarity affects behavior, while count-based measures describe a work group that is not necessarily salient to the individual. Count-based similarity measures also lump together very different proportional representations—one woman working with three men would be empirically similar to five women working with fifteen men, but the perceptual difference in perceived similarity between these situations would be large. For count-based measures of similarity, the definition of "similar" can vary from person to person and situation to situation. In an accounting firm where all respondents must have a CPA certification, similarity in education is based on attending the same school, whereas in a hospital, similarity in education might be based on certifications or areas of concentration. In other words, the saliency of group characteristics determines which social identity is activated. Perceived categories for racial and ethnic divisions also can vary greatly across situations, as definitions for racial and ethnic groups are constantly being redefined by society (Lee & Bean, 2004). By using perceptual measures, we are able to

allow respondents to make the comparisons and evaluations based on the most salient characteristics for them relevant for themselves.

Despite these concerns, we did have count data for similarity based on demographics in our sample and were able to assess how these variables were relevant to our investigation. Respondents were asked how many individuals there were in their work group, and then asked how many of these individuals were female, and also how many were Asian, African, Hispanic, or White in ethnicity. To assess the relationship between our perceptual measures and these count data, we regressed perceived similarity on gender, proportion of females in the workgroup, and the interaction between gender and proportion of females. The results showed that whites were more likely to perceive themselves as racially or ethnically similar to their co-workers ($\beta = .65, p < .01$), but neither the proportion of whites ($\beta = .02, p = .78$) nor the interaction between white race/ethnicity category and proportion of whites was significant ($\beta = -.09, p = .19$). Neither female gender ($\beta = -.11, p = .24$) nor proportion of females had a main effect on perceived gender similarity ($\beta = -.15, p = .10$), but the interaction between female gender and proportion of females had a positive significant relationship with perceived gender similarity ($\beta = .27, p < .01$). Because of the perceptual nature of these variables, we also tested for a relationship between personality and perceived similarity across all categories, but none of these relationships were statistically significant. These results suggest that using perceived similarity measures assess something different than count-based measures of similarity, and in fact, may be more useful in the prediction of proactive adjustment behaviors.

2.2.2. Proactive adjustment

Our measures of proactive adjustment in the Time 2 survey were based on items by Ashford and Black (1996). Four items were used to assess information/feedback seeking (e.g., "To what extent have you sought feedback on your performance after assignments?"), three items assessed general socializing with coworkers (e.g., "To what extent have you participated in social events to meet people?") and three items assessed relationship building with one's boss (e.g., "To what extent have you tried to form a good relationship with your boss?"). The development of these scales is described in Ashford and Black (1996), along with evidence supporting the scales' internal consistency and discriminant validity. All items were answered with 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to a great extent) on the time 2 survey. Coefficient alphas for the proactive adjustment scales ranged from .85 to .90.

2.2.3. Outcome variables

All outcome variables were assessed in the Time 3 survey. Citizenship behavior represents making discretionary efforts above and beyond work requirements on behalf of the organization. As such, citizenship represents tangible evidence that a newcomer is acting as a fully integrated member of the organization. We focused on the citizenship towards the organization as a whole rather than interpersonal citizenship, largely because proactive adjustment and citizenship behavior towards individuals/other members are too similar to one another for the relationship to be of much theoretical interest. Creative performance represents proactive behaviors dedicated toward doing one's core work requirements in a new way that is above and beyond typical expectations.

Organizational citizenship behavior towards the organization was assessed with an 8-item scale from Lee and Allen (2002). Sample items for the OCBO scale include "express loyalty toward the organization," and "take action to protect the organization from potential problems." Coefficient alpha reliability for this scale is .87.

Role clarity was assessed using six items from the widely used Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) measure. Question ask respondents about their understanding of their role at work, and include items such as, "I know what my responsibilities are," and "I feel certain about how much authority I have." Coefficient alpha reliability for this scale is .87.

Creative performance was assessed with George and Zhou's (2002) 12-item creative performance scale. Sample items include, "often have a fresh approach to problems," and "suggest new ways of performing work tasks." Coefficient alpha reliability for this scale is .87.

2.3. Demographic variables and controls

Prior research has demonstrated that the personality traits of extraversion and openness to experience are related to proactive adjustment behaviors among newcomers (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). There is also a consistent relationship with neuroticism. Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness were assessed with John, Donahue, & Kentle's (1991) Big Five Inventory. Sample items for neuroticism include "is relaxed, handles stress well," for openness include "is curious about many different things," and, for extraversion, include "is full of energy."

Consistent with prior research and theory regarding the context of social behavior at work (e.g., Johns, 2006; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), we believe that task interdependence will be an important influence on newcomer behavior because interdependence offers both the opportunity to engage in proactive behavior and also may increase newcomers' motivation to engage in proactive socialization. As such, we assessed task interdependence by asking respondents to indicate on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, whether "Other employees of my group depend on me for information or materials needed to perform their tasks," and whether "Within my group, jobs performed by employees are related to one another."

We also controlled for the main effects of age and gender in our relationships to avoid spuriously attributing effects of similarity to these variables. The importance of main effects of age on co-worker reactions is an especially strong concern since our sample

was mostly recent college graduates and the relatively low level of work experience of much of the sample could potentially bias results. We did not control for differences in education because all participants were just graduating from college so this variable was the same for all respondents. All of these control variables were assessed at Time 1, with the exception of interdependence, which was assessed at Time 2.

In order to make sure that our results were not affected by a participant's major field of study, we ran a series of ANOVA analyses to look at whether a participant's major field of study affected our outcome variables. This ANOVA revealed no significant differences (*F*s ranging from .63 to 1.55, *ns*) by major. Post-hoc LSD analyses suggested no patterns of major-by-major differences on the study variables, except for those who majored in the social or behavioral sciences reporting less creativity than most of the other majors. Controlling for this specific major in regressions predicting creativity did not change our results, thus we did not include it in subsequent analyses.

3. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived surface level similarity would be positively related to perceived deep-level similarity. Perceived similarity in age ($\beta = .17, p < .05$), education ($\beta = .28, p < .01$), race ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) and gender ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) were all predictive of perceived similarity in work style, as was one's self-reported gender ($\beta = .18, p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported for all forms of perceived similarity measures. There were no main effects of personality traits on any perceived similarity measures; neither neuroticism ($\beta = -.16, n.s.$), extroversion ($\beta = .11, n.s.$), nor openness ($\beta = .02, n.s.$) were related to perceived similarity.

Hypothesis 2, which proposed that similarity would increase feedback seeking behaviors was not supported. Age similarity actually decreased the likelihood that newcomers would seek feedback ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$) and no other form of similarity was significant. Hypothesis 2, which proposed that similarity would increase relationship building exhibited differential results based on whether we examined coworkers or supervisor relationship building. Hypothesis 2 for general socializing with coworkers was supported for education similarity only ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) but not for any of the other forms of similarity. Hypothesis 3 for supervisor relationship building was supported for gender similarity ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), but again, age similarity decreased the likelihood that newcomers would build relationships with their supervisors ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$). Although not hypothesized, it is worth noting that all three proactive behaviors were predicted by extroversion, with coefficients ranging from $\beta = .21$ to $\beta = .26$ (Table 2).

Our final set of hypotheses predicted that proactive adjustment behaviors would be related to work outcomes. Table 3 shows the results for these regressions. OCBO was predicted by general socializing ($\beta = .28, p < .01$), and proactive supervisor relationships ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). Counter to our hypotheses, role clarity was not significantly related to any of the proactive behaviors. Creative performance was predicted by proactive relationship building ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), and proactive supervisor relationships ($\beta = .32, p < .01$).

The final hypothesis suggested that proactive behaviors would mediate the relationship between similarity and work outcomes. To assess mediation, we estimated the bias-corrected 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals around indirect effects. These results are shown in Table 4. Each estimate is based on 1,000 replications. Table 4 shows that the 95% confidence intervals for these relationships consistently did not cross zero, supporting the contention that proactive behavior mediates

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age (T1)	23.34	3.65	-																
2. Gender (T1)	1.65	.48	-.26	-															
3. Neuroticism (T1)	1.25	.58	-.18	.34	.85														
4. Extroversion (T1)	.46	.73	-.17	.09	-.32	.91													
5. Openness (T1)	1.91	.51	.01	-.11	-.02	.37	.75												
6. Interdependence (T2)	3.88	.69	.11	-.05	-.07	.07	.23	-											
Similarity in:																			
7. Age (T2)	2.80	1.07	-.02	.00	.10	.08	.05	-.05	-										
8. Education (T2)	3.47	1.20	-.01	.09	.01	-.01	.13	.11	-.05	-									
9. Race/ethnicity (T2)	3.81	.74	.12	-.13	-.10	-.10	-.02	.08	.02	.07	-								
1. Gender (T2)	3.50	1.12	-.34	.12	.08	.09	.01	.03	.22	-.09	-.02	-							
11. Work style (T2)	3.38	.56	-.04	.18	-.12	.21	.12	.15	.24	.31	.16	.33	.72						
Proactive behavior:																			
12. Feedback seeking (T2)	3.33	.97	.05	.10	-.09	.24	.20	.24	-.18	.04	.04	.02	.10	.90					
13. Relationship building (T2)	3.44	1.07	-.04	-.02	-.13	.19	.00	-.08	-.06	-.08	.00	.15	-.05	.33	.89				
14. Supervisor relationship (T2)	3.47	.89	-.08	.13	-.04	.26	.19	.25	-.24	.04	.14	-.04	.09	.52	.39	.85			
Outcome variables																			
15. OCBO (T3)	3.35	.73	.12	.04	-.11	.20	.12	.26	-.04	.11	.12	.03	.23	.37	.32	.49	.87		
16. Role Clarity (T3)	3.23	.70	.03	.06	.07	.11	.14	.20	-.03	.03	.07	-.13	.02	.22	.28	.43	.34	.87	
17. Creative performance (T3)	3.65	.70	.00	.13	.02	.05	-.02	.21	-.01	.10	.15	.09	.39	.07	-.03	.21	.13	.26	.87

Note: *n* = 111. Numbers on the diagonal represent coefficient alpha (internal consistency) reliability.

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Table 2
Predictors of proactive behaviors.

	Feedback seeking	Relationship building	Supervisor relationship
	β	β	β
Age	.10	.06	-.07
Gender	.13	-.01	.12
Neuroticism	-.01	-.08	.07
Extroversion	.21*	.23*	.26*
Openness	.11	-.05	.08
Interdependence	.19*	-.08	.21*
Similarity in:			
Age	-.21*	-.08	-.27**
Education	.05	.22*	-.07
Race/ethnicity	-.03	.01	-.06
Gender	.06	.05	.19*
Work style	.04	-.17	.07

Note: $n = 111$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. All regression coefficients are standardized (beta) weights, results are from seemingly unrelated regressions. Perceived similarity and proactive behavior were assessed at time 2. Demographics and personality were assessed at time 1.

the relationship between perceived similarity and our work outcomes. General socializing mediated the relationship between perceived similarity in education and both OCB-O and creative performance. Building relationships with one's supervisor mediated the relationships between perceived age (dis)similarity and OCB-O and creative performance. Finally, building relationships with one's supervisor mediated the relationships between perceived gender similarity and OCB-O and creative performance.

Because the proactive behaviors were not significantly related to role clarity, but there was a significant relationship from perceived demographic similarity to work style similarity, and from work style similarity to role clarity, we performed post-hoc mediation tests for these relationships. The results showed that in all cases, the 95% confidence intervals for these relationships did not cross zero. Therefore, perceived work-style similarity mediated the relationship between perceived demographic similarity and role clarity.

We performed two robustness checks for our results. First, we were concerned that count data might do a better job of predicting work outcomes than perceived similarity measures. To test for this possibility, we re-estimated all models, but included the proportion of females in the workgroup and the interaction between respondent gender and the proportion of females in the workgroup in our regressions, and the proportion of whites in the workgroup and the interaction between respondent ethnicity and proportion of whites. In neither case were the count data measures of similarity significant predictors of any outcome variables. These results support our choice of the perceptual measures over count measures of similarity.

Second, because our theory did not have strong a priori reasons for suspecting that different forms of similarity would be differentially predictive of work outcomes, we created an aggregate scale that combined all forms of perceived similarity as an omnibus formative indicator. Such an indicator would serve to represent a general sense of similarity to the work group, regardless of the reason. Results showed that this combined single measure of similarity was not predictive of any of the

Table 3
Predictors of work outcomes.

	Role clarity	OCB-O	Creativity
	β	β	β
Age	.04	.06	.02
Gender	.03	-.01	.02
Neuroticism	.11	.08	.15
Extroversion	.03	.01	.01
Openness	-.12	-.06	.05
Interdependence	.16	.13	.14
Similarity in:			
Age	-.08	.03	.08
Education	-.05	.07	-.02
Race/ethnicity	.07	.07	.02
Gender	-.01	.00	-.18
Work style	.47**	.13	.04
Proactive behavior			
Feedback seeking	-.09	-.05	-.06
Relationship building	-.04	.28**	.23*
Supervisor relationship	.19	.32**	.32**

Note: $n = 111$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. All regression coefficients are standardized (beta) weights, results are from seemingly unrelated regressions. Outcomes were assessed at time 3. Perceived similarity and proactive behavior were assessed at time 2. Demographics and personality were assessed at time 1.

Table 4

Indirect effects of similarity dimensions on performance outcomes, mediated by proactive behaviors.

Similarity dimension	Mediator	Outcome	Coefficient	95%CI
Education	General socializing	OCB-O	0.04	[0.00–0.14]
Education	General socializing	Creative performance	0.05	[0.00–0.15]
Age	Supervisor relationship	OCB-O	−0.09	[−0.20 to 0.02]
Age	Supervisor relationship	Creative performance	−0.09	[−0.19 to 0.03]
Gender	Supervisor relationship	OCB-O	0.06	[0.01–0.16]
Gender	Supervisor relationship	Creative performance	0.06	[0.00–0.14]

Note: $n = 111$. 95% CI = 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval based on 1,000 replications.

proactive behaviors. The single combined measure was predictive of role clarity, consistent with our results for work style similarity, although the more specific regression models we presented earlier provide more nuanced information regarding which forms of perceived similarity are most important in this context.

4. Discussion

Research on organizational socialization has investigated the importance of proactive behavior and personality of newcomers, and the influence of organizational tactics, but few studies have investigated how the social context of the new work group will shape proactive behavior. The neglect of contextual variables can greatly impede our ability to understand and predict behavior (Johns, 2006). The results from this investigation do suggest that organizational newcomers who perceive themselves different from their co-workers are less proactive in some instances, and that this decrease in proactive adjustment behavior is further related to lower levels of OCB and creative performance. However, our research also found that many forms of perceived dissimilarity were not significant predictors of newcomer proactivity. Our research contributes to the literature on diversity and person-organization fit by showing that proactive behavior is one potential mechanism linking similarity to superior fit. It contributes to the proactive behavior literature by identifying factors that do and do not impact proactive behavior. We also contribute to the diversity literature by showing how perceptions of work style similarity mediate the relationship between demographic similarities and role clarity.

In the introduction, we described the distinction between surface-level and deep-level similarity. Research on established work groups shows that deep-level similarity is associated with feelings of empathy and social support (Liao et al., 2004; Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2007), supporting the importance of deep level diversity among those who know each other well. Much research has shown that people who know each other well will have more powerful effects of deep level diversity, whereas new acquaintances will show stronger effects for surface similarity (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). The present study consistently found that surface level characteristics predicted proactive socialization behaviors. At least for the time period (i.e., 7 months between Time 1 and Time 2 assessment) covered by the current paper, it appears that the surface level characteristics matter most from the newcomers' point of view.

Deep level diversity, in the form of perceived similarity in work styles, did exert an influence on role clarity that was not mediated by proactive behavior. In fact, deep level similarity in work style was the only significant predictor of role clarity. The fact that deep level diversity was related to similarity in several surface characteristics shows that consistent with prior research (e.g., Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998), the two levels of diversity are not separate from one another, with similarity in surface characteristics serving as the backdrop to perceptions of deeper similarities. Future research might examine the process by which these surface level characteristics lead to perceptions of deep-level similarity.

Our unexpected finding that age dissimilarity increased proactive information seeking may be attributed to the characteristics of our sample. Respondents may have been using age as an indicator of experience or knowledge. Those who are considerably older might be seen as a good source of information and support because they have more knowledge built through experience, whereas those who are comparatively younger might be seen as having a greater amount of new information that is unfamiliar. These informational discrepancies would therefore seem to create complementary fit such that seeking feedback or building a relationship with a colleague of dissimilar age might confer greater benefits. Rollag (2004) also found that experience relative to the other members of one's work group was a better predictor of self-perceived newcomer status than was the actual level of experience. Newcomers who were mostly around others who were also inexperienced may have perceived that these individuals were also newcomers, so asking them for feedback would not be useful.

Although we did not make any specific hypotheses regarding personality traits and their relationship to newcomer adjustment, it is worth noting that, consistent with prior research (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), higher levels of extraversion were related to proactive newcomer adjustment. The interaction between individual traits and contexts has been an ongoing question in socialization research (see, for example, Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005, or Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006). The consistent effects of individual dispositions as predictors of newcomer adjustment suggest that organizations can expect that extraverted newcomers will take steps to fit in more readily than those who are lower in extraversion. For jobs that require frequent social environment changes, like project work that requires shifting among teams rapidly, hiring individuals high in extraversion may be beneficial.

Our non-significant results are also of some interest. Although it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from null results, our findings are consistent with a body of research that has found that demography is often not an important predictor of work outcomes (see Harrison & Klein, 2007). Most importantly, the count measures of similarity were not significant predictors of any work-related outcomes. Secondly, perceived similarity in race/ethnicity was never a significant predictor of lower proactivity or worse work outcomes. Thirdly, perceived work style similarity was not a significant predictor of proactivity, OCB-O, nor creativity among newcomers. Finally, one of our predicted results regarding age turned out to be in the opposite direction from what was expected.

4.1. Implications for organizational practice

The importance of the adjustment process for organizational newcomers is widely recognized by managers, as evidenced by the wide variety of publications offering advice on “onboarding” newcomers (e.g., Bradt, 2009; Watkins, 2003). The majority of the proscriptive advice suggests that incoming employees need to be proactive from the start if they are going to actually make a difference in their new workplaces. The data from the current study suggest that advice to be proactive might well be augmented by encouraging managers to carefully attend to the proactive behavior of newcomers as a potential indicator of misfit. Employees who showing few signs of proactive adjustment may well have low levels of dispositional proactivity, but low proactive behavior may also be a sign of perceived dissimilarity to the rest of one's work group.

In today's organizations, employees are expected to not simply learn an already existing role, they are expected to anticipate organizational needs and work to improve the organization's outcomes even if it means going outside the standard job description (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). Our results related to citizenship and creative performance suggest that employees who are proactive in their socialization efforts will also show other forms of proactive behavior at work. By definition, proactive behavior is not something an organization can control, but it is possible for organizations to make certain that supervisors and existing employees reward innovative newcomers. When possible, organizations should set the stage for employee proactive behavior in the socialization process if they wish to see proactive behavior back on the job.

4.2. Limitations and future research directions

One key weakness of this study is the reliance on self-report data. Concerns about inflated relationships due to method variance are minimized by two choices. First, the measurement of most predictors and outcomes was not done at the same point in time. By separating the measurement of perceived similarity and proactive behavior from adjustment outcomes, it is less likely that transient mood effects can explain these relationships. We also controlled for personality dispositions in the form of neuroticism (dispositional negative affect) and extraversion (dispositional positive affect) that have been shown to relate to response biases (de Jonge & Slaets, 2005) or job attitudes (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). Because dispositional affect and moods form the most problematic sources of method variance, there is less concern that the residual relationships we find between self-reported proactive behavior and self-reported work performance are artifactual. There are also concerns that behavior like OCB may not be reliably observed by supervisors because individuals interested in impression management might only engage in very conspicuous OCBs but have a low total level of OCB, whereas those less interested in impression management will be less likely to perform conspicuous OCB even if they are genuinely very helpful (Bolino, Varela, Bande, & Turnley, 2006; Vandenberg, Lance, & Taylor, 2005). Since our predictor variables are theoretically related to impression management, other-reported OCB measures might be more problematic than a self-report.

Although our study did provide some insights into the role of diversity in the process of newcomer adjustment, there are several questions that remain to be answered in future studies. First, we did not collect information on the extent to which members of the work group provided social support and facilitation to newcomers. Individuals who are different from their co-workers may receive less support from others, and may continue to be viewed as outsiders. On the other hand, consistent with our findings for dissimilarity in age it may be that when newcomers are significantly younger than their co-workers, they may receive more support. Newcomer proactive behavior may well be a response to a positive social climate established by existing organizational members. Studies looking at the process of newcomer adjustment from the perspective of more experienced employees would help to identify how group characteristics influence newcomer adjustment.

The preceding discussion also suggests that there may be a need for more research that examines the role of social support in the newcomer adjustment process. Some extant research does suggest that a supportive work environment facilitates newcomer adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007). Thus, it might be the case that support could serve as a mediator between perceived similarity and work outcomes. Social support activities may partially have their effect by increasing newcomer positive affect, which would in turn enhance creativity (George & Zhou, 2007). Besides these direct effects of social support, it is also possible that newcomers will feel more able to engage in proactive behavior in a supportive environment, which will in turn increase provision of social support, setting the stage for a self-reinforcing process of increasingly positive socialization.

Our findings regarding the perceived similarity of newcomers to the work group also suggests that more research on the context of newcomer socialization is needed. Much of the research on newcomer adjustment has looked at socialization tactics as contextual variables, but other contextual factors should be considered (Johns, 2006). To date, researchers have seldom examined how social density, social structure, and social influence affect socialization. The present study has shown that the differentiation of group members from newcomers in terms of tenure, gender, race/ethnicity, and education can

influence socialization processes. Future research might investigate some of the behaviors from the work group that could further facilitate proactive socialization, such as providing social support and advice.

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