

Advisee-Advisor Communication: An Exploratory Study Examining Interpersonal Communication Variables in the Graduate Advisee-Advisor Relationship

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The objective of this study was to investigate graduate students' perceptions of their graduate advisors' communication (competence, credibility, and nonverbal immediacy), and how these perceptions impact advisees' perceptions of learning, effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship, and advisors' degrees of mentoring. Advisee perceptions of her or his advisor's competence and caring/goodwill accounted for 43% of the variance in advisee cognitive learning. Advisee perceptions of her or his advisor's caring/goodwill accounted for 39% of the variance in advisee perceptions of the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship. Lastly, this study noted that the linear combination of advisee perceptions of advisor credibility and communication competence accounted for 55% of the variance in an advisee's perception of the amount of mentoring an advisee received from her or his graduate advisor.

KEY CONCEPTS advisor-advisee communication, nonverbal immediacy, graduate student, mentoring, creditibility

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Mentoring, as a concept, goes back thousands of years to Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. Homer tells the story of an elderly and wise sea captain named Mentor, who gives Odysseus's son, Telemachus, guidance while his father is gone on his long journey. In modern times, the word "mentor" has been used to refer to a relationship where one individual with more knowledge and experience aids another individual who has less knowledge and experience (Richmond, Wrench, & Gorham, 2001).

Today, we see a mentor as "someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone" (Bell,

2000, p. 53). One type of mentoring is the graduate advisee-advisor relationship. In essence, graduate advisors help their advisees learn about the academic field, the university setting, research, ethics, and many other important aspects related to being an academic professional. To date, in the instructional context little research has been conducted in the area of advisee-advisor communication, and most of the research has focused on undergraduates rather than graduate students (e.g., Althaus, 1997; Gorham, & Millette, 1997; Scott & Rockwell, 1997). The current study examines interpersonal communication variables and graduate advisee-advisor relationships.

Advisee-Advisor Relationships

The advisee-advisor relationship is a crucial element in graduate education (Luna and Cullen, 1998). The influence of a great advisor on a graduate student can be life changing. A great advisor can instill the ethics, drive, and skills to be both a great teacher and researcher. Conversely, a poor advisor can have adverse effects on her or his advisee's academic future and personal life. In one dramatic case, Harvard University chemistry student, Jason Altman, committed suicide as a result of the pressure in graduate school. In his suicide note, he blamed his advisor. His advisor, a Nobel winning chemist, was not new to advisee suicide. Including Altman, Altman's advisor has had three graduate students commit suicide (Schneider, 1998). While blaming the advisor for suicide does not make sense because suicide is an intensely personal act, this event clearly depicts the intensity and importance that an advisee-advisor relationship can have. As with many graduate students' jokes, advisee-advisor relationships are more important, stronger, and longer than most marriages. As this joke illustrates, graduate advisors have a long lasting impact on their students' lives and careers. In a study conducted by Ulku-Steiner, Kinlaw, and Kurtz-Costes (2000), the researchers found that advisors impact an advisee's career commitment both during and after graduate school.

Faghihi (1998) discovered that advisees' relationships with their graduate advisors were significantly related to the advisees' dissertation progress. Students who regarded their advisors positively progressed along faster in the dissertation process when compared with those students who regarded their advisors negatively. Additionally, Peacock (1996) found that a supportive and beneficial advisor affects the time it takes to complete a dissertation, while Tanako (1999) noted that graduate advisors serve as instrumental information sources and as motivators for intellectual growth. Another area of research has examined the perceptions advisors and advisees have of their interaction roles. Witters and Miller (1970) analyzed the relationship between advisors' and advisees' roles and expectations and concluded that advising is the fundamental component for the advisees' educational experience in graduate school.

Previous research has also examined the impact of biological sex on the advisee-advisor relationship. Some researchers examining advisee-advisor relationships have attempted to examine sex differences in relation to the advising process. Kjerulff and Blood (1973) found that male graduate students viewed their conversations with their advisors as more relaxed and friendly than did female graduate students. Further, the researchers found that male graduate students' communication increased when they found their advisor less helpful. In addition, male graduate students noted that the more interesting the advisor, the more time was spent with the advisor beyond the normal office hours. In another study, Garrett-Schau and Busch-Wilde (1991) found no significant differences based on the sex of the advisee or advisor nor an interaction

effect (advisee sex by advisor sex) when examining psychological and professional mutual support, comprehensiveness, advisee professional development, and researching together. While male and female advisees may perceive the relationship in different ways, both perceive this relationship as positive.

Overall, when it comes to the advisee-advisor relationship, Applegate, Darling, Sprague, Nyquist, and Anderson (1997) suggested that advisors focus on the students' needs in order to provide the best experience possible.

Advisors as Mentors

Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobos (1989) defined mentoring as "a communication relationship in which a senior person supports, tutors, guides, and facilitates a junior person's career development" (p. 15). Monsour and Corman (1991) posited that when the communication "between the advisor and advisee has matured properly, it evolves into a mentor-mentee relationship. In this type of relationship, the advisor not only imparts organized knowledge, but also closely supervises the attainment and performance of certain intellectual skills" (p. 180). In other words, the ideal advisee-advisor relationship is one that focuses on building a mentoring relationship. Hill et al. (1989) noticed that the mentors have a huge impact on their protégés. In fact, mentored graduate students reported lower levels of communication apprehension, higher levels of perceived support, and moderate levels of perceived information acquisition when compared to unmentored graduate students. In a national study examining mentoring between advisors and advisees in psychology departments, 91% of psychology graduates evaluated their relationship with their graduate advisor as being positive (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000). Additionally, the more an advisee felt mentored by her or his graduate advisor, the more satisfied the advisee was with her or his doctoral program. As Kelly and Schweitzer (1999) noted, mentoring is an essential part of the graduate school experience.

In a study by T. Coran-Hillix, Gensheimer, W. Coran-Hillix, and Davidson (2000) examining psychology graduate students, "good mentors" were determined by the following characteristics: interested/supportive, positive personality characteristics, knowledgeable/competent, sharing/giving and unexploitative, involved in research/resourceful, and attitudes toward advisees. Conversely, "bad mentors" were determined by the following characteristics: uninterested/unsupportive, personality characteristics, lacks knowledge/incompetent, exploitative, attitudes toward students, and unavailable/inaccessible.

The T. Coran-Hillix et al. (2000) study also analyzed the academic production rates between individuals with mentors and those who did not have a mentor. Graduate students who had mentors in graduate school had more publications, more conference papers, more first-authored papers, and were more productive after graduate school when compared to those graduate students who did not have a mentor during her or his program. Clearly, the role that a mentor plays in graduate school is extremely important. On the same line of thought, Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, and Kearney (1997) found that graduate students who are mentored have a more positive outcome and are more satisfied and encouraged by graduate school when compared to those with little or no mentoring.

Communication Behaviors in Advising

Research examining the instructional process has found a number of interpersonal

communication variables that positively relate to a student's overall classroom and learning experience (Frymier & Houser, 2000). This study will examine several communication related behaviors that have been found to impact the learning environment: credibility, communication competence, and nonverbal immediacy.

Credibility. Wrench and Richmond (2004) found a positive relationship between credibility and perceived learning in the traditional teacher-student classroom relationship. As a construct, credibility has been shown to consist of three primary aspects: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill (McCroskey, 1998). Competence is the extent that an individual truly knows what he or she is discussing. Trustworthiness is the degree to which one individual perceives another person as being honest. A person can be viewed as the most intelligent person on a given subject, but still not be seen as a credible person if he or she is not viewed as a person to be trusted. The final component of credibility, goodwill, is the perceived caring that a receiver sees in a source. McCroskey and Teven (1999) noted that what Aristotle originally identified as "goodwill" is what instructional researchers have labeled "perceived caring." Goodwill may be the most important aspect of credibility (McCroskey, 1998). If a graduate student knows that her or his advisor truly cares about her or his welfare, then that graduate student is going to be more likely to work harder.

Communication Competence. The study of communication competence in the field of communication studies is fairly abstract. Communication competence can be viewed from different perspectives. Wiemann's (1977) initial view of communication competence examines competence primarily as a measure of effectiveness. However, most researchers have viewed communication competence from both a personally effective and socially appropriate standpoint (McCroskey, 1982; Rubin, Martin, Bruning, & Powers, 1993). Other researchers have proposed that communicative competence is a series of specific behaviors. Rubin and Martin (1992) identified in the major interpersonal communication textbooks ten underlying behaviors leading to interpersonal communication competence: self-disclosure, empathy, social relaxation, assertiveness, interaction management, altercentrism, expressiveness, supportiveness, immediacy, and environmental control.

Research has shown communication competence impacts interpersonal communication. Rubin, Martin, Bruning, and Powers (1993) noticed that individuals who did not believe in their own communicative abilities had lower interpersonal communication competence scores, which created lower ratings of satisfaction with interpersonal interactions. As McCroskey (1982) noted, students' communication competence impacts the way they interact with their surroundings. No research has been conducted on the effects of an advisor's communication competence and its relationship to advisee-advisor communication.

Nonverbal Immediacy. Immediacy refers to communication behaviors that enhance closeness to another (Mehrabian, 1967, 1969, 1981). Mehrabian (1969) noted that nonverbal immediacy cues are things such as touch, distance, forward lean, eye contact, and body orientation. Mehrabian (1969) discovered that positive attitudes toward the communicator were related to more immediate behaviors.

When defining interpersonal relationships, Burgoon and Dillman (1995) stated that immediacy is at the core of these kinds of relationships. Moreover, several research studies have shown that nonverbal immediacy behaviors are consistently related to relational meanings (Burgoon, & Koper, 1984; Burgoon, 1991; Burgoon, 1993).

These studies have illustrated the positive effects when immediacy is present in the

communication context.

Immediacy has been studied in a variety of contexts, such as the classroom and interpersonal relationships. Andersen, Andersen, and Jensen (1979) found a relationship between immediacy and relational closeness. McCroskey and Richmond (1992) have illustrated relationships between teacher's nonverbal immediacy and students' positive evaluations for the teacher. Wrench and Richmond (2004) noted that nonverbal immediacy was positively related to a student's degree of both cognitive and affective learning in the classroom. No research has explored the relationship of an advisor's nonverbal immediacy to an advisee's perception of their relationship.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing the research literature related to mentoring relationships and advisee-advisor communication, three primary research questions are posited. As previously stated, since this is an exploratory study, research questions were designed to explore possible similarities between advisee-advisor relationships and traditional teacher-student relationship. For the purpose of this study, the three following research questions will be examined:

- RQ1:** What is the relationship of an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence with an advisee's perception of her or his cognitive learning?
- RQ2:** What is the relationship of an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence with an advisee's perception of the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship?
- RQ3:** What is the relationship of an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence with an advisee's perception of the degree to which her or his advisor has been a mentor?

METHODS

Participants

Participants were graduate students from around the nation gathered through electronic means. Specifically, a number of Internet sites and Listservs that have graduate student participants were targeted (e.g., CRTNET, ICA-Net, etc...). The basic characteristics of the sample design are that of a purposive networking sample. All participants were selected based on a target variable (advisee-advisor relationships), and while we initially used Listservs we asked all readers to forward the message to other possible participants. When students linked to the website, they were given an initial letter discussing the use of human subjects and after reading the letter were prompted to proceed to the actual survey. The subjects were given the option of leaving their e-mail address if they wanted to know the results of the study. Beyond their e-mail address, all responses were anonymous. 95% of those participating in the study did leave their e-mail address.

The sample consisted of 84 (54.9%) females, 66 (43.1 %) males, and 3 (2 %) non-responding for a total of 153 participants. While the sample size was smaller than would have been liked, it is believed it is appropriate in scope for the type of analysis this research study is performing. Ultimately, the sample had a lot of diversity, which al-

lowed for a more general understanding of the processes being examined. To explain this diversity, other demographic variables were also gathered. The mean age of the sample was 32.49. The sample consisted of 9 (5.9%) first year masters students in a two year program, 4 (2.6%) first year masters students in a one year program, 24 (15.7%) second year masters students in a two year program, 21 (13.7%) first year doctoral students, 22 (14.4%) second year doctoral students, 18 (11.8%) third year doctoral students, 6 (3.9%) fourth year doctoral students, 40 (26.1%) all but dissertation. Seven (4.6%) of the participants had completed their degrees within the last year and still were able to recall their relationship with their advisors. Participants from a variety of academic fields participated in this study: 10 (6.5%) arts, 16 (10.5%) business, 37 (24.2%) communication, 4 (2.6%) education, 6 (3.9%) English, 14 (9.2%) engineering, 4 (2.6%) physical sciences, 33 (21.6%) social sciences, and 23 (15%) other academic areas with six participants not responding to the question. Overall, our population was quite diverse, which allowed for a greater understanding of the advisee-advisor communication process.

Measures

Cognitive Learning. Using a method developed by Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, and Plax (1987) for use in the traditional classroom, advisees were asked to assess their perceptions of their own learning. Advisees were asked one question related to their learning with their advisor: "How much have you learned from your advisor?" ("0" means you have learned nothing from your advisor, and "9" means you learned more from this advisor than anyone else you know has). With a possible range from 0 to 9, the study had a mean of 6.04 ($SD = 2.15$).

Effectiveness of the Relationship. Participants were asked to respond to a single question about the perceived effectiveness of their relationship with their advisor. The questions scores ranged from 0 (we cannot work together) to 100 (we have a perfect working relationship). The study had a range of scores from 0 to 100 ($M = 77.03$; $SD = 21.7$).

Mentoring and Communication Support Scale. The Mentoring and Communication Support Scale was originally created by Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, and Rouner (1989) as a means for assessing a superior's ability to mentor a subordinate in a corporate organization. While most of the scale items did apply to the current study, some questions were deleted and others added to make the scale more applicable to the advisee-advisor relationship. While the original scale had four factors (career mentoring, coaching, collegial social, and collegial task), a factor analysis conducted on the revised scale found one strong primary factor (perceived mentoring) with the possibility of a minor secondary factor (non-applicable items). After a varimax rotation, only one item loaded on the second factor and the others loaded .6 or better and below .4 on the secondary factor (Table 1). The revised scale consists of 10 Likert items, yielding a .93 alpha reliability ($M = 34.08$; $SD = 9.57$).

Self Report of Immediacy Behavior. The Self Report of Immediacy Behavior (SRIB) was created by Richmond and McCroskey (1995). The SRIB is a series of 15 Likert items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" designed to measure an individual's level of nonverbal immediacy, which was re-tooled in this study to examine advisor nonverbal immediacy. The SRIB used in this study yielded a .88 alpha reliability ($M = 57.09$; $SD = 9.8$).

Credibility Measurement. To test for credibility, an 18-item scale was created by McCroskey and Teven (1999) that looks at students' feelings and perceptions of a

TABLE 1
Factor Analysis of the Graduate Student Mentoring Scale

	Factor One	Factor Two
1. My advisor has placed me in/on important projects or positions.	.714	-.230
2. My advisor frequently devotes extra time and consideration to me.	.842	-.007
3. My advisor has shown a parental-like interest in me and my career.	.899	-.005
4. I receive special attention from my advisor.	.857	-.150
5. My advisor has taught me the informal rules of my discipline.	.730	.335
6. My advisor has taught me strategies for influencing group or departmental meetings.	.597	.646*
7. My advisor has coached me about the departmental politics.	.652	.342
8. I have recommended other students to work with my advisor.	.787	.007
9. My advisor has praised me to other colleagues in the field.	.758	-.287
10. My advisor thinks highly of my ability.	.682	-.373
11. My advisor inspires me to do better projects	.838	-.498

* Items were kept if they had an initial loading of .6 and a secondary loading not exceeding .4.

teacher's competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill was used. Item measures were bipolar with a range from one to seven. The alpha reliabilities for competence was .84 ($M = 36.3$; $SD = 6.5$); for trustworthiness was .92 ($M = 31.46$; $SD = 8.9$); and for goodwill was .93 ($M = 35.28$; $SD = 8.0$) in this study.

Communicative Competence Scale. The Communicative Competence Scale (CCS) was created by Wiemann (1977) as a way to assess another person's communicative competence, which was re-tooled in this study to examine advisor communication competence. The scale consists of 36 Likert items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The CCS used in this study yielded a .98 alpha reliability ($M = 34.08$; $SD = 9.57$).

RESULTS

The first research question examined the relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill), and communication competence with an advisee's perception of her or his cognitive learning. A multiple regression was conducted to evaluate the prediction of the level of perceived learning from nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, and trustworthiness), and communication competence. The linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence was significantly related to the level of perceived learning, $F(5, 143) = 21.25$, $p < .0001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient (R) was .65, which indicates that approximately 43% ($R^2 = .43$) of the variance in an advisee's perceived cognitive learning in the sample is accounted for by the linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence. Immediacy did not contribute to the prediction equation, $t(148) = .148$, $p > .05$. Competence and caring/goodwill contributed to the overall prediction equation but trustworthiness did not: competence, $t(148) = 3.46$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .30$; caring/goodwill, $t(148) = 3.35$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .40$; trustworthiness, $t(148) = -1.22$, $p > .05$. Lastly, communication competence did not contribute to the prediction equation, $t(148) = 1.83$, $p > .05$.

The second research question examined the relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill), and communication competence with an advisee's perception of the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship. A multiple regres-

sion was conducted to evaluate the prediction of the level of relationship effectiveness from nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, and trustworthiness), and communication competence. The linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence was significantly related to the level of relationship effectiveness, $F(5, 143) = 18.29, p < .0001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient (R) was .63, which indicates that approximately 39% ($R^2 = .39$) of the variance in an advisee's perception of the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship in the sample is accounted for by the linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence. Immediacy did not contribute to the prediction equation, $t(148) = -.05, p > .05$. Caring/goodwill contributed to the overall prediction equation but competence and trustworthiness did not: competence, $t(148) = 1.76, p > .05$; caring/goodwill, $t(148) = 2.82, p < .005, \beta = .35$; trustworthiness, $t(148) = .18, p > .05$. Lastly, communication competence did not contribute to the prediction equation, $t(148) = 1.81, p > .05$.

The third research question examined the relationship between an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill), and communication competence with an advisee's perception of the degree to which her or his advisor has been a mentor. A multiple regression was conducted to evaluate the prediction of the level of mentoring from nonverbal immediacy, credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, and trustworthiness), and communication competence. The linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence was significantly related to the level of mentoring, $F(5, 145) = 36.01, p < .0001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient (R) was .74, which indicates that approximately 55% ($R^2 = .55$) of the variance in an advisee's perception of the degree to which her or his advisor has been a mentor in the sample is accounted for by the linear combination of nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence. Immediacy did not contribute to the prediction equation, $t(150) = -5.4, p > .05$. All three factors of credibility contributed to the prediction equation: competence, $t(150) = 3.19, p < .002, \beta = .24$; caring/goodwill, $t(150) = 4.49, p < .0001, \beta = .47$; and trustworthiness, $t(150) = -2.80, p < .006, \beta = -.29$. Lastly, communication competence contributed to the prediction equation, $t(150) = 4.62, p < .05, \beta = .42$.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to examine how interpersonal communication variables influence the advisee-advisor relationship. To examine the results found in this study, we will examine how the interpersonal communication variables (nonverbal immediacy, credibility, and communication competence) used in this study related to perceived advisee learning, the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship, and perceived mentoring levels.

Perceived Learning. The first important set of findings in this study related to the level of cognitive learning an advisee perceived he or she received from her or his advisor. The first interpersonal variable examined with perceived learning was advisor nonverbal immediacy. While nonverbal immediacy has been shown to relate to learning in teacher-student relationships (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Wrench and Richmond, 2004), nonverbal immediacy was not shown to relate to learning in an advisee-advisor relationship. It is possible that this lack of a relationship exists because of the close proximity of two people through which graduate advising actually occurs. Since

the advisee-advisor relationship is intensely close, it is possible that the traditional forms of nonverbal immediacy that are needed to aid in student cognitive learning are simply not needed in advisee-advisor relationships for learning to occur.

The second finding related to perceived learning was an advisee's perception of her or his advisor's credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, & trustworthiness). This study found that competence and caring/goodwill were positively related to an advisee's perception of cognitive learning, but trustworthiness was not related to learning. The relationship between competence and caring/goodwill mirrors the findings that Wrench and Richmond (2004) found in the teacher-student relationship. However, Wrench and Richmond did find that trustworthiness related to learning as well, which was not seen in this study. While there is not a clear cut reason for this finding, it is possible that in the highly competitive realm of graduate school advisee trust is less meaningful in respect to learning than in teacher-student relationships.

The third finding related to perceived advisee learning was communication competence. While communication competence has been shown to be related to learning in the teacher-student context (McCroskey, 1998), communication competence was not shown to be significantly related in the advisee-advisor communicative relationship. In the traditional educational setting, the basic classroom model is a one-to-many dissemination. In the public context, being a competent communicator is an established necessity for cognitive learning (McCroskey, Wrench, & Richmond, 2003), but with advisee-advisor communication it is all one-on-one. Since the typical advisee purposefully seeks out a graduate advisor, advisees may choose advisors in spite of the advisor's incompetence as a communicator. There are times when we can learn from incompetent communicators just as easily as competent communicators because we have a strong desire for the information those individuals possess, which is probably the case in this study.

Relationship Effectiveness. This study found that advisor nonverbal immediacy, perceived advisor competence and trustworthiness, and advisor communication competence did not account for any of the variance in relationship effectiveness. The only interpersonal variable examined in this study that did account for any of the variance (39%) in relationship effectiveness was caring/goodwill. In essence, a good portion of advisee perceptions of the effectiveness of the relationship with their advisor is dependent upon whether advisees feel that their advisor cares about them as a person. This clearly reiterates the notion that McCroskey (1998) and Teven and McCroskey (1999) made that the most important aspect of credibility is caring/goodwill.

Mentoring. The final set of results in this study examined the relationship between our interpersonal communication predictor variables (nonverbal immediacy, sour credibility, and communication competence) and advisee perceptions of mentoring in graduate advisee-advisor relationships. Once again an advisor's level of nonverbal immediacy did not account for any of the variance in an advisee's perception of the amount of mentoring an advisee received from her or his graduate advisor. With this said, all of the other interpersonal communication variables examined in this study were shown to account for unique portions of the variance in an advisee's perception of the amount of mentoring he or she received from her or his graduate advisor. To examine this finding, we will discuss credibility and communication competence separately.

Advisor credibility related to the amount of mentoring an advisee perceived he or she received from her or his graduate advisor. Both competence and caring/goodwill were shown to positively account for the variance in an advisee's perception of the

amount of mentoring he or she received from her or his graduate advisor. However, trustworthiness negatively accounted for the variance in an advisee's perception of the amount of mentoring he or she received from her or his graduate advisor. While the positive relationship between competence and caring/goodwill with mentoring was expected, the finding for trustworthiness was unexpected. In previous studies examining the concept of credibility, the three variables have been shown to be highly correlated with each other (Teven & McCroskey, 1999; Wrench & Richmond, 2004), which was true in this study as well. However, advisees indicated a negative relationship between their level of trust for their advisors and their perception of the amount of mentoring the advisee received from her or his graduate advisor. It is possible that graduate students want their mentors to care about them and be competent, but are not too concerned with their mentor's trustworthiness. There exists a possibility that the relationships we saw in this study are similar to those which McCroskey (2001) proposed for the relationship between credibility and satisfaction for lawyers and clients. Clients want their lawyers to be competent and care about them and their needs, but when the lawyer enters into the courtroom the client wants a lawyer who will pull all the tricks necessary to get the job done. While the criminality model of credibility has been previously proposed (McCroskey, 2001), this is the first study to actually witness this divergence among the three factors of credibility. In fact, this type of finding is one of the major reasons why Teven and McCroskey (1999) believed that three different factors of credibility should be independently assessed.

The last major interpersonal variable shown to positively account for variance in an advisee's perception of the amount of mentoring he or she received from her or his graduate advisor was communication competence. While communication competence was not shown to effect learning or the effectiveness of the advisee-advisor relationship, communication competence was found to relate to an advisee's perception of advisor mentoring. Since mentoring is a communication based construct, the necessity of competent communication during a mentoring relationship makes sense. If an advisor is incompetent in her or his attempts at communicating with her or his advisee, the advisee would not get as much out of that relationship as he or she could with an advisor who is competent in her or his communication.

LIMITATIONS

It should be recognized that the method used in this study to find research participants is not random and could influence the results. There is a possibility that this study did not yield a representative sample of the entire population of graduate students. While this is possible, the high mean for perceived mentoring is in line with previous research on graduate advisee-advisor mentoring (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000), which demonstrates that these results are at least consistent with previous research in this area. At the same time, since participants were from a variety of academic disciplines, it is likely that the study examined the graduate advisee-advisor mentoring relationship as a general concept instead of within a specific academic field. Since the goal of this project was to examine how interpersonal communication influences graduate advisee-advisor relationships, the broader scope of participants allows for a broader understanding of this interpersonal relationship.

Further, the overall sample size was a possible limiting factor. While the sample only consists of 153 participants, the overall data points per predictor variables examined in this study is within reason. According to Stevens (2001), when using multiple

regression analyses it is best to have at least 15 data points per predictor variable in a regression equation, which this study had. While clearly the results of this study would have been stronger with a larger sample, our sample size is within statistical reason.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the measures used in this study have been used in organizational contexts other than graduate schools. There are differences in the type of mentoring and selection process of mentors in the advisee-advisor relationship when compared to the more "traditional" organizational contexts where mentoring has been previously studied. Advising and graduate student mentoring activities can range from selecting a course of study, preparing a graduate thesis or dissertation, collaborating on research, to preparing graduate students to teach specific specializations. In other words, the graduate mentoring relationship is dynamic and can include or not include a number of characteristics not present in other mentoring relationships.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the role of interpersonal communication variables within the advisee-advisor mentoring relationship is unique. While it was originally suspected that communication in advisee-advisor relationships would be identical to student-teacher relationships, the results from this study show otherwise. The authors of this study believe that the uniqueness of advisee-advisor relationships occurs because graduate students see the potential of these relationships in a very non-altruistic fashion.

While some may see this view as a jaded perspective of the advisee-advisor interpersonal relationship, cases such as Jason Altman, the Harvard University graduate student who committed suicide, should cause people to think twice about these findings. The advisee-advisor relationship is a relationship built purely on accomplishment. In essence, graduate students see graduate advisee-advisor relationships as a way to complete not only their degree but to excel in their chosen field of study. Ultimately, niceness goes out the window and is replaced by the desire to excel.

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